



# THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

## COMING ACTIVITIES

### February

February 15 – Program,  
“Conservation Begins with a  
Revolution of One”

February 15-18 – Great Backyard  
Bird Count

### March

March 12 – DOAS Board Mtg

March 15 – Program, “Turtle Talk”

March 30 –Lake Otsego Waterfowl  
Trip

### April

April 13 – Earth Festival and Bird  
Walk

April 16– DOAS Board Mtg

April 19– Program, “What Montana  
Taught Me”

### May

May 17 – Program, “Costa Rica  
Photos”

May 21 – DOAS Board Mtg

**More information on page 7**

**DOAS PROGRAMS  
ARE FREE & OPEN TO  
THE PUBLIC**

## Christmas Bird Counts

### 119th Oneonta Christmas Bird Count 2018, by Sandy Bright

This year’s count took place on a relatively warm, overcast day. Though this made for more pleasant conditions for human participants, the birds played hard-to-get, and we finished the count with the fewest birds in at least a decade, 3,396 total. This result is even lower than the 2016 count, when coverage was incomplete due to heavy snows and unplowed roads.

Some common species were notable for their low numbers. Juncos, found in surprisingly high numbers last year (558), made up less than 1% of our total birds this year with only 24 individuals seen. Though we generally find a few dozen American Tree Sparrows, only one was spotted this year. One large farm in the count circle usually teems with hundreds of Rock Pigeons and European Starlings, sitting atop barns, swooping overhead, and milling around on the ground. This year

that farm was eerily quiet, with nary a bird in sight.

Despite the paucity of individual birds, the 48 species seen was average. A few species even tied previous high records, such as the twelve Red-bellied Wood-peckers. Evening Grosbeaks were one of the highlights for many field teams, with several flocks seen. A group of seven Hooded Mergansers, startled off a creek, provided a thrill to one of our newcomers. A few species usually found in very low numbers if at all made an appearance: several Robins, Brown Creepers, and Carolina Wrens, as well as a Ring-necked Pheasant and a Northern Shrike.



Many thanks to our hard-working and reliable feeder watchers and field teams, who brave all kinds of weather to gather data, and a hearty welcome to our new participants.

2018 Oneonta CBC Team:

Charlie Scheim, Sandy Bright, Lynn Wassel, Bob Donnelly, Gerianne Carillo, Bob Ciganek, Julie Smith, Jennifer Hyypio, John Davis, Bob Dewell, Jeff Murray, Peter Fauth,

**“CBC” Continued on page 5**

## President's Column

by Co-president Susan O'Handley

### DOAS to Integrate 'Plants for Birds' theme at Earth Festival on April 13 in Milford

**SAVE THE DATE!**

This year's upcoming Earth Festival event will take place at Milford Central School from 11AM-3PM on Saturday, April 13. DOAS



*Black-throated Blue Warbler with American Beautyberry*  
Photo by Will Stuart

has been working with the event planning committee to replicate presentations and vendor offerings from this past Fall's 'Native Plant Summit' (October 2018 at SUNY Oneonta) in order to reach a larger audience. We anticipate vendors and information focused on native plants to be exhibited nearby to the DOAS exhibit area as well as topical presentations (Plants for Birds, Garden Culture vs. Lawns, Invasive vs. Non-Native) that will be held in

one of the classroom areas throughout the day. These programs will be interspersed between other energy-related programs that will be taking place in the auditorium as part of

traditional Earth Festival learning opportunities.

If you know someone from our region that should be invited to participate (as a vendor, exhibitor, or presenter), please contact Susan O'Handley at [info@doas.us](mailto:info@doas.us) or leave a message at 607-397-3815. Earth Festival is our most extensive exhibit each year and extra help is always welcomed. If you would like to sign up to help with a work shift, please let us know.

### Plan Now for the 2019 DOAS Summer DAY Camp Program

At DOAS Sanctuary at Franklin Mountain, Monday - Thursday, 9:30AM to 3 PM

- July 15-18 for children entering 3rd and 4th grades
- July 29-August 1 for children entering 5th and 6th grades



At Oneonta World of Learning in Fortin Park, Monday - Thursday, 9:30AM to Noon

- August 19-23 for children entering 1st and 2nd grades

Registration and full details expected to be online late February/early March. For more information, contact Susan O'Handley, Education Chair, at 607-643-5680 or at [sjohandley@gmail.com](mailto:sjohandley@gmail.com).

#### THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO

#### AUDUBON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1968

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Janet Potter

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#### ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Delaware Otsego Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 544  
Oneonta, NY 13820  
Email: [info@doas.us](mailto:info@doas.us)

#### ON THE WEB:

[www.doas.us](http://www.doas.us)  
[www.facebook.com/DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety](http://www.facebook.com/DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety)

To contribute notes or articles for The Belted Kingfisher, email: [editor@doas.us](mailto:editor@doas.us)

## Conservation and Legislation

**Brighter news**—With so many anti-environmental actions coming out of the Trump administration, we need to grasp at anything positive in Washington to maintain our sanity! One recent happening in that regard was recent passage of the 2018 Farm Bill with wide bipartisan support. The \$867 billion, ten-year plan passed the U.S. Senate by a vote of 87 to 13, and the House by a decisive vote of 369 to 47, after which it was signed into law by President Trump.

The Farm Bill included some important conservation initiatives:

- Conservation Compliance and Sodsaver—this provision continues eligibility for most federal farm programs linked to standard soil and wetlands conservation practices. It denies farm program benefits for planting on former wetlands or draining a wetland to enable crop production. It can be crucial for waterfowl, shorebirds, and grassland birds.
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)—CRP pays farmers to remove some acres from production over multi-year periods to create wildlife habitat. The enrollment cap was raised from 24 million to 27 million acres, and a new revision would also direct benefits to more critical grassland acres in strategic regions. Many species, as varied as Northern Shoveler, Northern Bobwhite, and Henslow's Sparrow should benefit.
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)—Increases total funding by \$2 billion over 10 years and allows for greater participation. There has developed

a high demand for ACEP dollars to create wetland and agricultural easements. This portion also provides flexibility for grazing and wetland restoration on Wetland Reserve Easements to maximize wetland and wildlife benefits.



*Industrial Hemp-Photo from AgriFutures Australia*

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP)—RCP is substantially increased in annual funding from \$100 million to \$300 million along with making improvements. This will allow for the creation and expansion of successful projects that target species with the greatest need. These include Golden-winged Warbler and Bobolink.
- Hemp—Also in the Farm Bill was a provision to allow industrial hemp for oil and fiber use in particular - to be produced and marketed in the United States. This has a bird connection as experiments have shown hemp seed to be desirable and high-energy food for birds that can be grown without pesticides and insecticides. So far, House Sparrows and squirrels have shown little interest in hemp!

*(Contact information for elected officials is available on the conservation page of the DOAS web site, [www.doas.us](http://www.doas.us).)*

Andy Mason



*Bald Eagle, taken at last year's trip by Rod Sutton*

## Successful Eagle Trip

This year's Bald Eagle field trip to reservoirs and rivers in Delaware County on January 12th turned up 25 eagles for the 20 participants—a pretty good per person average! Birds were sighted on the edge of ice around open water areas, perched along waterways, and a group of eight circled over the Village of Deposit.

Other sightings of interest included Red-tailed Hawks, a Cooper's Hawk, Common Mergansers and Black Ducks, and a mink along the river bank.

Andy Mason

**Bird-Friendly Coffee:** Coffee pre-orders for pickup at our February meeting are due by 5 PM, February 5. Email your order to [sjohandley@gmail.com](mailto:sjohandley@gmail.com) or call 607-643-5680. More information at our web site: <http://doas.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CoffeeInformation2018b-final.pdf>.



**February Program—  
“Conservation Begins  
with a Revolution of  
One!”** Conservation of our  
natural world may seem like an  
enormous task best undertaken

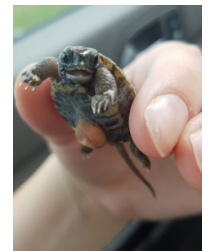
by large organizations, but conservation really begins with a revolution of one person – individuals embarking on their own personal revolution to make a difference for the planet. One person decides to join the Audubon Society and become active in their local chapter. One person decides to install a solar system to power their home with clean, renewable energy. Mary Jo Cronin and Jim Doherty’s passion for conservation inspired them to found Revolution Solar – a local solar installation company whose mission is to help anyone in our community join the conservation movement via clean, renewable energy projects. Mary Jo and Jim will give a presentation about Residential and Small Commercial Solar Photovoltaic Systems on February 15th at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church,

401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Please join us to learn about what options are available for solar projects, whether you have a good site for solar, what financial incentives are available, and to answer any questions you may have about solar power. Refreshments will be available before and after the program.

About the presenters: Jim Doherty has been an avid bird enthusiast for many years as evidenced by his well-worn Bird Guide filled with annotations of where and when he checked a “new” bird off his list. Jim brings over 25 years of electrical contractor experience and 10 years of solar system design and installation experience to the drawing board for every customized project. Mary Jo Cronin has enjoyed exploring the outdoors on horseback, bicycle and foot for many years, instilling in her a deep appreciation for nature and an acknowledgement of the many impacts climate change is creating. Mary Jo’s call to action – her Revolution of One – was deciding to start a solar business. Ever the optimist, she believes that clean energy is a unifying and hopeful path towards conservation that everyone can agree on.

**Save the Date for the March 15th Program—“ Turtle Talk: Wood Turtles”**

Alexandra Vlk, a Graduate Student at SUNY Oneonta, will describe her research on Wood Turtles (including photos of the species). She is studying the reproductive ecology of wood turtles in a disturbed site. She is also looking at the home range and habitat use of the Wood Turtle to better aid in conservation of this species. This program will take place at Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta, NY, on Friday, March 15, 2019 at 7:30 PM.



**2018 Hawkwatch Wrap-up**

The curtain came down on Dec. 30 for the 2018 season at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch. This year was notable for the large concentrated movement of Golden Eagles in the second half of October reported in last month’s *Belted Kingfisher*. The Golden Eagle total for the year was 323, smashing the previous high of 252 in 2005, and topped in the East only by Allegheny Front, Pennsylvania’s 386 in 2015.

In addition to the Golden Eagle show, a season record was set for Merlins, with 53 of this expanding species passing the lookout. Others above the 18-year average since full time counting began include Turkey Vulture, Broad-winged Hawk, American Kestrel and



*Golden Eagle*  
Photo by Curt Morgan

Peregrine Falcon. Red-tailed Hawks were well below average but did show a significant rebound from last year’s dismal figures. Fifteen Black Vultures were counted, indicating a slow increase in this species that is new to Franklin Mountain. The season total for all raptors was 5172, just slightly above the long-term average. Thanks for their dedicated service goes to counters Kyle Dudgeon, Peter Fauth, Becky Gretton, Steve Hall, Carol and Randy Lynch, Pam Peters and Tom Salo, and also to the spotters and visitors who helped out this year. All Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch data is available at [www.hawkcount.org](http://www.hawkcount.org).

**“Bird Sightings” Cont. from page 8**

affording many birdwatchers peeks at this very wayward bird.

A week into the new year, Tom Salo reported unusual feeding behavior: a Brown Creeper eating suet. A few days later, I watched a White-throated Sparrow do the same, flapping continuously while it clung to the suet cage, three comrades sitting patiently on my windowsill awaiting their turns. Warren Ryther and his son observed a Snowy Owl near Laurens. While trying to locate this owl, Charlie Scheim found a Northern Harrier hunting the fields.

Dorian Huneke was encouraged to find lots of bird manure on the ground near a tree that has hosted the nests of first Red-tailed Hawks, then Eagles, until a storm took down a big chunk of the nest two years ago. She is hopeful that Red-tails are returning to reclaim the area.

In mid-January, a Sharp-shinned Hawk appeared in the road ahead of me as I drove near Price Chopper in Oneonta. It rose, crossed the road just over traffic, then dropped out of sight on the other side of the road. Nearby, three Cedar



Carolina Wren  
Photo by Rick Bunting

Waxwings flitted past some evergreens. Five American Robins visited Leslie Preston’s yard in Oneonta, joining Juncos, Carolina Wrens, and several other species. Evening Grosbeaks continued to frequent Pam Peters’ feeders in Franklin, swelling in numbers to 32 then dropping to a single bird one day, which fed among some American Tree Sparrows and Mourning Doves. That lone individual was quite feisty though, confronting and driving off a Blue Jay attempting to join the group.

At the Mill Race in Oneonta, Charlie Scheim and I observed a Cooper’s Hawk in hot pursuit of a frantically rattling Kingfisher, which hit the water, causing the hawk to pull up and allowing the Kingfisher to escape. A bit later the Kingfisher was calmly hunting again, hanging out near sixteen foraging Mallards, no hawk in sight. We were very glad the Kingfisher was safe but wished the hawk success elsewhere.

Sandy Bright

**“CBC” Continued from page 1** Becky Gretton, Abby Rodd, Dave and Ann Kiehm and Maggie, Carol and Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Chris DeCesare and Feeder watchers Cheryl Boise, Margo Graham, and Linda Pearce.

**Delaware County Christmas Bird Count, by Pamela Peters**

Higher number of individual birds, fewer unique species, and a light rain marked the 2nd official Delaware County Christmas Bird Count (NYDE) on January 5th. In contrast with last year’s sub-zero temperatures, there was no snow cover, water was open, and teams put in more walking miles. 42 unique species and 3,016 individual birds were counted by 13 dedicated participants and one feeder watcher. A new sector was created this year to allow better coverage of the village of Walton. Many thanks to Andy Mason for leading the new section. We welcomed three newcomers to the NYDE: Kathryn Davino, Jean Petterson and Leslie Preston. We are fortunate having veteran birders like Andy Mason, Kay Crane, Lance Verderame and Renee Davis on this count, especially in these first few years as we discover ways to cover what is often remote and wild territory. Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright have been terrific with the CBC, not only in helping create the circle and leading a section, but also offering tricks of the trade,

for example, how to walk and drive at the same time. Hint: it involves 2 sets of car keys.

A highlight of this year’s count was the Golden-crowned Sparrow. A native of the Alaskan Tundra, this mega-rarity for the east coast was first observed by Lance Verderame in Downsville on December 30.



Golden-crowned Sparrow  
Photo by Mike Thompson

Other highlights of the CBC include 312 Wild Turkey, 16 Bald Eagles, an immature Golden Eagle, a Belted Kingfisher, five Brown Creepers, and a lone Chipping Sparrow. In addition to Turkeys, several species had higher numbers than previous years: Ring-billed Gull, Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch and European Starling. Species with lower numbers include Mallard, Cooper’s Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Blue Jay, Tree Sparrow, Junco, Purple Finch, and House Sparrow. Notable absences are Bufflehead, owls of any species, Pileated Woodpecker (though evidence of their work was widely observed), Snow Bunting and Pine Siskin. Bald Eagles were reported in each sector. View data from past Christmas Bird Counts at <http://doas.us/bird-counts/>.

## Christmas Trees and Wildlife

### By Board Member Tom Salo

Back in the 1980s I found myself land-rich and cash-poor. Looking for a way to help my children pay for college, I planted Christmas trees. It worked but became a project that lasted much longer than my kids' undergraduate years. Over the decades, I've seen many interesting things in those trees. Some - like a fish a customer found - were downright weird.

Among the most interesting observations are the changes in wildlife habitat. Old hay fields became conifer plantations. Once those spruces and firs were abandoned, they became maturing mixed forests. These habitat changes are a major factor in my significant yard list of birds. At 160 species I think it's impressive for uplands in Otsego County. As trees approached market size, waxwings, thrashers, and Song and Chipping Sparrows moved in. Ground nesting towhees, turkeys, grouse and woodcock became common. The large trees of the older plantations now host Magnolia Warblers, Pine Siskins, Barred Owls, and in migration Saw-whet Owls. Unfortunately, I no longer have the Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks and Savannah Sparrows of the old fields. I no longer flush roosting Short-eared Owls on evening walks.

Conifers are full of life. An arachnophobe might consider them a nightmare. When dew is on the branches, the webs of thousands of spiders become visible. Nesting birds are common, as are mice (in balls of fluff) and hornets. At one time I considered hornets defending their nests just an occupational hazard. Now, after developing an allergy, they are more than just an inconvenience.



Customers searching the plantations for the perfect Christmas tree have found even more interesting stuff—once a desiccated fish.

We guessed a bird put it there, maybe a corvid caching food. Another time a customer reported a dead Red-tailed Hawk next to a tree. Because the bird was clean and dry on top of new snow, we figured it had died recently. I weighed the young bird and found it was less than half the average weight of a healthy bird. Starvation is a major cause of death for young raptors. Maybe this bird never learned how to hunt well.



Spider webs  
on Christmas trees

Another time a customer found a dead deer among the trees, shot and lost by a hunter. I know it wasn't killed by one of my family—they all use non-lead ammunition. I suspect a neighbor. Scavengers had been at it. Because it most likely contained lead fragments and therefore was a threat to eagles and other scavengers, I hauled it to a DOT deer disposal site where it went into the water at the bottom

of the pit. Inaccessible.

Deer are horticultural pests. During the fall, bucks destroy my trees with their antlers. In winter, the herd eats them. Some tree species are near impossible to grow without protection. In response to customer requests for fraser firs, I planted 500 next to a new block of 500 balsam firs. I knew deer liked balsam. They love fraser. I never harvested a single fraser fir. Every one was eaten so severely, after several years all were dead. The balsams grew, even with some browsing damage each winter.

One December weekend in 2017, customers were reporting a porcupine actively eating the bark from the bottom of trees. I had seen the damage but not the culprit. Late in the day I sent Kyle Dudgeon – who was working for me at the time – to seek out the rodent. Late in the day we put it in a plywood box and moved it a couple of miles.

I will be selling trees for a few more years, and observing the changing habitat and wildlife as long as I can live here.

### 2019 Environmental Education Grants

Applications Now Being Accepted. Deadline for applications is 5PM, March 29, 2019.

Educators from Delaware, Otsego, Eastern Chenango, Western Schoharie, Southern Herkimer and Montgomery Counties can download the Grant Guidelines and Application at <http://doas.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2019-EE-Grant-Guidelines-and-Application-Cover-Form.pdf>. For more information contact: Susan O'Handley at (607) 643-5680 or email [info@doas.us](mailto:info@doas.us).

# UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

## February

**February 15 – DOAS Public Program:** “Conservation Begins With a Revolution of One.” Mary Jo Cronin and Jim Doherty of Revolution Solar will speak about their local solar installation company whose mission is to help anyone in our community join the conservation movement via clean, renewable energy products. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

**February 15-18 – Great Backyard Bird Count.** See article below.

## March

**March 12 – DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 PM

**March 15 – DOAS Public Program:** “Turtle Talk: Wood Turtles.” Alexandra Vlk, a Graduate Student at SUNY Oneonta, will describe her research and show photographs of Wood Turtles. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

**March 30 – Annual Lake Otsego Waterfowl Trip:**

Leave from Cooperstown’s Lake Front Docks at the foot of Fair Street at 8 AM sharp. Cars will be pooled and the trip will last until around noon. For more information, contact Bob Donnelly: [rsdonn@yahoo.com](mailto:rsdonn@yahoo.com) or 607-264-8156.

## April

**April 13 – DOAS Earth Festival Bird Walk.**

Carpools leave Milford Central School parking lot at 8AM. For more information, contact trip leader Bob Donnelly: [rsdonn@yahoo.com](mailto:rsdonn@yahoo.com) or 607-264-8156.

**April 13 – Earth Festival:** Milford School, 11 AM -3 PM. Visit the DOAS table! For full details about Earth Festival, visit <http://occainfo.org>.

**April 16 – DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 PM

**April 19 – DOAS Public Program:** “What Montana Taught Me.” SUNY Oneonta senior Kyle Dudgeon will share last summer’s experiences in remote areas of Montana through photographs and stories. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

## May

**May 17 – DOAS Public Program:** “Costa Rica.” Nelson and Gail DuBois will show photographs taken on their recent trip to Costa Rica. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

**May 21 – DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 PM

## Great Backyard Bird Count

The 22nd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), will be held February 15 through February 18, 2019. For more information, contact Bob Donnelly: [rsdonn@yahoo.com](mailto:rsdonn@yahoo.com) or 607-264-8156. This is a free, fun and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report



their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world. Each checklist helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share.

**Is your Membership Current?** Your mailing label will inform you of your membership expiration date (year and month, e.g. ‘1902’ indicates February 2019. DOAS memberships are \$15 per year or \$25 for two years; family memberships are \$20 per year or \$30 for two years. Please make your check payable to “DOAS” and mail payment to: DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544. **View membership benefits and download application from our website: [doas.us/join-us/](http://doas.us/join-us/) OR join online at [doas.us/store](http://doas.us/store).**



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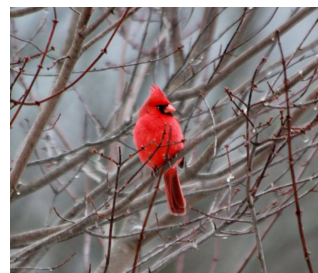
## December - January 2019 Bird Sightings

This reporting period began in mid-December with a Snowy Owl discovered by Elliott Adams at, of all places, the Walmart warehouse in Sharon Springs. It's always a pleasant surprise to find uncommon species near hubs of human activity.

A flock of Pine Siskins visited Marilyn Bailey's feeder one day, while a Red-bellied Woodpecker feeds there on a regular basis (Oneonta). Becky Gretton had the privilege of listening to a pair of Great Horned Owls in Richfield Springs, and sighted two light-morph Rough-legged Hawks in Warren. Gerianne Carillo was thrilled to report a Carolina Wren, a first at her feeders in Milford. Randy Lynch sent pictures of the colorful birds brightening up

***If you have bird sightings to report, contact Sandy Bright, [brights@hartwick.edu](mailto:brights@hartwick.edu), at 40 Fair St., Oneonta, NY 13820, or at 607 287-4465 for the next issue of The Belted Kingfisher. We regret that not every report can be included due to limited space. Additional information may be requested for sightings of rare or unusual birds.***

the landscape at his feeders in Jefferson: a male Cardinal and Evening Grosbeaks. During a warm spell, a Belted Kingfisher vocalized at Gerry Pearlburg's beaver ponds. She also noted many spiders out, and, amazingly, a frog sitting on the ice!



Cardinal  
Photo by Randy Lynch

Nearing the end of December in West Burlington, a noisy Common Raven alerted Tom Salo to the presence of an adult Golden Eagle, which flew low overhead, then landed in a tree and perched while a Bald Eagle flew around for several minutes before flying south. As I drove through Neawha Park, Oneonta, streetlights illuminated a Great Blue Heron stalking at the edge of the pond, just a few feet from the road.

2019 dawned with news of a visitor from the Alaskan Tundra: Lance Verderame discovered an immature Golden-crowned Sparrow in Downsville! The sparrow was very cooperative, sticking around to be tallied on the Christmas Bird Count and **"Bird Sightings" Continued on page 5**