



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

COMING ACTIVITIES

February

February 14 - 17 –
Great Backyard Bird Count
February 21 – Program,
“HeatSmart Otsego”

March

March 3 – DOAS Board Mtg
March 20 – Program,
“NYS Breeding Bird Atlas III:
Learn With Us!”

April

April 17 – Program, “Slogs
Through Bogs”
April 18 – Earth Festival
April 18 – Optics Raffle Drawing
April 21 – DOAS Board Mtg

May

May 15 – Program,
“DuBois Photography”
May 19 – DOAS Board Mtg

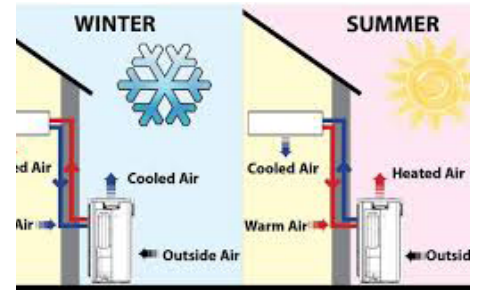
More information on page 7

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

FEBRUARY PROGRAM: “HEATSMART OTSEGO”

Join us on Friday, February 21 at Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta, NY at 7:30 PM for a presentation about HeatSmart Otsego. The Heat Smart Otsego Campaign is designed to educate homeowners and business owners about renewable, clean heating and cooling technologies like air and ground source heat pumps and to connect these building owners with pre-vetted, local installers.

Speaker Bennett Sandler will address the myriad benefits of heat pumps and modern wood burning appliances, how these systems work, how much they save, how much safer they are and how much better they are for the environment. Interested building owners are encouraged to sign up to have one of the installer partners come to their home for a free site visit to determine costs for conversion to clean thermal. Sandler is not vested in any way in the sale of systems, nor are homeowners obliged to buy or install anything. He is funded by the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority to help promote these



technologies in an effort to achieve drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and resulting global warming.

In graduate school Bennett Sandler studied remote sensing and geographic information system applications for ecological research which landed him a job in Paul Ehrlich's Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford for three years. When his wife got a job working at Bassett in Oneonta, Bennett became a stay-at-home Dad. About 11 years ago, Bennett started a local business with two others doing residential energy audits and energy upgrades, including air and ground source heat pump installations. He is no longer installing these technologies but loves talking with folks about how they work, how they save energy, and how they will save the world.

March 20, 2020 Program—Save the Date: “Come Learn With Us” about the *New York State Breeding Bird Atlas* from Project Coordinator Julie Hart; at Elm Park Church, 401 Chestnut St., Oneonta, NY at 7:30 PM. There are many ways to train, participate, enjoy and provide important data.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE THOUGHTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

by Co-president Susan O'Handley

I was speaking with a colleague recently and it came up that our children have all stated that they are not interested in having kids. The motivations behind their decision are not necessarily to minimize climate change, but for a variety of reasons that speak volumes about our world today. Of course, as adults we can say "never say never"—but it makes me wonder how many other young people are feeling the same way.

Without a doubt, Climate Change is the most important environmental issue that we face globally today. It is an issue that young people are immensely aware of—along with a plethora of other problems that face our society. Certainly, a life decision to not have children has an impact on Climate Change, especially if it takes place on a large scale, by lessening demand on natural resources. But, it's not a solution. The importance of having a habitat that can sustain people and wildlife is at the crux of our existence. It boils down to food, water, shelter, and space—all of which are imperiled due to many factors. Although many of these are out of our control, there are ways to influence them.

Since most of us have no individual influence over policy decisions, the main thing we can do is constantly voice to elected officials (on all levels) that Climate Change is real and support taking action now. Since global temperature is primarily impacted by carbon, we need to look at ways to reduce our carbon output—something that we can all do. Below are some ideas for places to start.

Go Zero Waste (or try to get close



Polar Bear Cub, AP Photo

to it)—Use the 5 Rs as a guide:

- Refuse (to use single use plastics or paper products—go with reusables)
- Reduce (be mindful of what you really need—buy in bulk without packaging)
- Reuse (find ways to keep things out of the landfill - repair, upcycle)
- Recycle (paper, plastic, metal, glass, etc. as per your County's recycling capabilities)
- Rot (compost your food scraps and use the dirt).

Other actions: Drive less—consolidate your trips, carpool, take public transportation when you can. Reduce your water consumption and be careful of what you flush (try all natural soaps). Eat seasonal foods from local sources with more plants. Switch to clean, renewable energy sources when and if you can. Write letters to businesses to encourage better packaging.

There are also some great web resources available—here are just a few:
Audubon's Guide to Climate Action <https://www.audubon.org/climate-action-guide>

Columbia University's Earth Institute: blogs.ei.columbia.edu
Cornell Institute for Climate Smart

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THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY FOUNDED 1968

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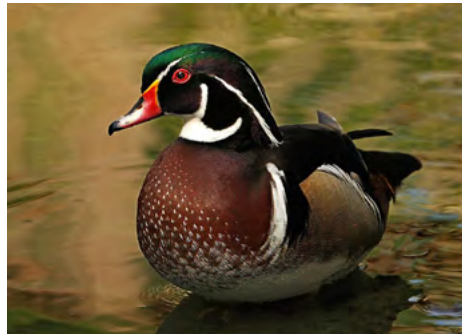
To contribute notes or articles for The Belted Kingfisher, email: editor@doas.us

CONSERVATION AND LEGISLATION by Andy Mason

Migratory Bird Protection

Act—As noted here previously, the Trump administration has weakened enforcement of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), the nation's most important law protecting birds. The Act, ratified in 1918, has long made killing or harming birds unlawful, except for game species and non-native birds. However, a reinterpretation of the law by the administration now allows developers, government agencies, oil and gas producers, and individuals to kill birds during their activities, provided the deaths were not intentional. This means, for example, that oil company BP would not be responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of birds from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, because they did not intend to kill the birds.

To correct this egregious action, legislation has been introduced in Congress that would restore and strengthen migratory bird protection. The Migratory Bird Protection Act (MBPA) would explicitly cover incidental take and regulate



Wood Duck, one of the species saved by the MBTA Audubon Photo by Dee Langevin

industrial sources of bird mortality. With recent news that we have lost 3 billion birds in North America over the past 50 years, it is clear they need more protection, not less.

What you can do—The MBPA, (H.R. 5552) has been introduced with 19 co-sponsors. We need to convince our Representatives of the importance of this legislation. Please contact Antonio Delgado or Anthony Brindisi (see Advocacy page at www.doas.us for information and addresses) and ask them to sign on as co-sponsor of this bill. Let them know it is necessary to counter President Trump's assault on the environment and on birds in particular, and that the

MBPA is critical to this effort. The American Bird Conservancy has a sign-on letter that can be sent directly or edited at abcbirds.org/action/petition-mbta.

Bluestone Wind—As anticipated, the NY State Public Service Commission Siting Board has voted to grant a license to build and operate the Bluestone Wind facility in Broome County. DOAS has been deeply involved in review of this projects and has opposed it due to its location in the Golden Eagle migratory corridor, and the high risk to eagles that we documented during three seasons of onsite observations.

In January we filed a petition for rehearing of the case, a step based on flaws in the Siting Board decision. This is also necessary to preserve the option of a legal challenge to the project, which we, along with other parties to the case, are considering.

We are still seeking contributions to defray legal expenses. These can be made at the DOAS website, www.doas.us or by sending a check payable to DOAS with the notation "Eagle Conservation Fund", to DOAS, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820.

Bird Friendly Coffee

The pre-order deadline for coffee delivery at our February 21 meeting is Tuesday, February 11, 5 PM. If you would like to order coffee, please email your order to bachmanj@hartwick.edu or call 607-431-9509. Payment is due at the time of delivery. Cash, checks and credit cards are accepted. More information at <http://doas.us/bird-friendly-coffee/>

If you forget to pre-order, we will have bags available for sale at the meeting—while supplies last!

"President's" Continued from page 2

Solutions climatechange.cornell.edu

New York Times Guide - How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint - <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/year-of-living-better/how-to-reduce-your-carbon-footprint>

Stay positive and don't give up! We can all make a difference.

HAWKWATCH SEASON WRAPUP

By Andy Mason

January 5 brought the end of the 39th consecutive season of monitoring migrating raptors at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch on the DOAS Sanctuary.

Whereas the 2018 season was notable for a large concentrated movement of Golden Eagles in the second half of October, this year was the exact opposite. Only one Golden was counted in October 2019, a great aberration from the norm. This is even stranger considering the record-shattering 254 counted in October 2018. A typical October at Franklin Mountain would produce 50 or so Golden Eagles, so this represents two extremes in succeeding years.

Over half of last year's October tally came on one incredible date, October 25, when counters and visitors spotted 128 GE's—a single day record for eastern North America. **Note:** Robert Bensen has written about that day. Read and enjoy his poem at [doas](#).

[us/poem-from-a-hawkwatcher/](#) Our thanks to Bob for sharing it.

Even setting aside this huge day, October 2018 far surpassed any other October in site history. The drop to one bird this year is inexplicable. Will the species return to form next season?

Golden Eagles did recover in November though, with a good count of 157, including double-digit days of 39 on the 8th, 43 on the 12th, 23 on the 13th, and 14 on the 20th. For the season, the GE total stood at 166, somewhat below the 19-year average of 183, since full time counting began at the site.

Red-tail Hawks totaled 922, only half of the average of 1727, continuing a downward trend for this stalwart of Franklin Mountain numbers. All accipiters were notably down, as were Osprey and Kestrels. Record season highs were set for Turkey Vulture and Broad-winged Hawk. No



Immature Bald Eagle at Franklin Mountain October, 2019; Photo by Curt Morgan

Black Vultures were spotted, throwing cold water on a hoped for regular appearance following last season's count of 15 and 2017's six. Only two Black Vultures had been recorded in the previous 28 years.

Total raptors were 5237, largely due to the excellent Broad-winged Hawk count in September. This makes two seasons in a row above average for total birds.

Thanks for their dedicated service goes to counters 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.

EAGLE FIELD TRIP REPORT

Thirteen participants enjoyed a balmy day of birding around the Delaware County reservoirs on January 11 for the annual DOAS Bald Eagle field trip. Thirteen or fourteen eagles were spotted—depending on repeat birds—with good views of both perched and in flight adults and immatures.

Other species of interest included Red-tailed Hawks, Mallards, Black Ducks, and Hooded and Common Mergansers. The day wrapped up with a pleasant lunch in Downsview.



Photos by Barb Palmer



OPTICS RAFFLE

WIN NIKON BINOCULARS!
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\$10 Donation per ticket. Only 250 tickets available. Tickets and more information available online www.doas.us

Drawing Date: Saturday, April 18, 2020, 3:00 PM at the Earth Festival at Milford Central School
Proceeds to benefit the DOAS Sanctuary and Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch.

Our property has numerous seeps and springs. When we arrived, these wet spots in a hay field were poor wildlife habitat. Over the years we turned these areas into five small ponds that now support a variety of wildlife.

The largest covers a quarter acre. It is deep enough for an occasional swim on a hot day. Two small ponds of 12-15' across are sheep watering holes. Most of these ponds have small fish in them. All serve as breeding places for herps. Since fish are incompatible with some herp species, we recently created a vernal pool that will be kept fish-free.

My favorite pond is only 75' from the house. Though small (20' X 120'), it is a wildlife magnet. Natural and planted vegetation provide great shelter and food. It regularly attracts herons, kingfishers and five species of waterfowl. They feed on vegetation, thousands of fathead minnows and large numbers of green frog tadpoles.

The shy ducks remain comfortable near the house due to a screen of willows surrounding much of the perimeter. When we go outdoors, Great-blue Herons may continue to hunt the edge of the pond. Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers will quietly



enter the edge cover. Mallards and Canada Geese generally leave. Hooded Mergansers nest in the duck box in the center of this pond.

A wildlife camera placed on the shore gets hundreds of photos of male duck aggression in spring. The females watch the show. We also get photos of herons, raccoons, muskrats, mink and the occasional snapping turtle.

Spotted salamanders, newts, toads and several frog species breed here. One year we found many dead tadpoles stranded several inches from the water. The prevailing theory is a snake hunting in the water caused fleeing tadpoles to leap on the shore.

When the granddaughters visit, they keep a rotating collection of frogs, tadpoles, newts and minnows in a kiddie pool. Last summer, they caught a most interesting leech. It had beautiful patterns and stretched out to about 4". Even better were the more than 2

dozen baby leeches attached to its underside.

Other invertebrates are common. Dragonflies and damselflies are regular. Occasionally we will spot a giant water bug. When we built the vernal pool a few years ago, as soon as the water warmed fairy shrimp appeared. Their dormant eggs blowing in the wind landed in this new pool.

Open water in winter is widely recommended for attracting birds to your yard. The pond near our house is spring fed. The open water and the dense cover around its edge makes our bird feeders even more attractive to passerines.

Enhancing the wildlife qualities of your property doesn't take a large water body. A small plastic water garden can do wonders. My parents have such a pond with a few specimen plants. It is a frog magnet. A small pond or water garden in your yard will attract wildlife and enhance your quality of life.





Feeder Birds

Audubon Photograph by Michele Black

Several people have mentioned a dearth of birds at their feeders, and it certainly is true in our backyard. I tell myself that's good, as the birds likely are finding plenty of natural food, but I miss the flurry of activity we had last winter. Still, there are birds out there and birdwatchers to spot them.

Over in the Jefferson area in December, Randy Lynch found two Rough-legged Hawks, small flocks of Horned Larks, a Northern Shrike, Bald Eagles, and American Tree Sparrows. Barb Palmer discovered a Red Crossbill, a species that hasn't been reported in our area in at least the four years I've been writing these articles.

Pam Peters watched a lone American Tree Sparrow drinking from a spit of open water on an otherwise frozen pond near Treadwell. As I walked in Catella Park in Oneonta, a Great Blue Heron suddenly rose up over the bank of the frozen Mill Race. What could it have been doing down there with no open water in sight? A Belted Kingfisher was present there and

DECEMBER AND JANUARY BIRD SIGHTINGS

BY SANDY BRIGHT

at Wilber Park for the next several days.

As the new year dawned, Dorian Huneke heard Great Horned Owls calling, and watched a flock of Dark-eyed Juncos feeding on Black-eyed Susans in Treadwell. Two of the Juncos bounced on and scratched at the heads, then hopped down and fed on the seeds they had shaken loose into the snow. Kathryn Davino had the thrill of observing nine Bald Eagles and a few Ravens feeding on something in a field at the crest of Irish Hill in Meredith.

Near Schenevus, Eva Davy was visited by a huge group of Cedar Waxwings, gathering crabapple fruits from her trees and swarming over the cedar mulch she had spread; something in the wood chips must have interested them. A Red-bellied Woodpecker feasted at her suet. In Jefferson, Barb Palmer had a big woodpecker day: Pileated, Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied, along with a plethora of Juncos. A Sharp-shinned Hawk attempted an attack at one of her feeders. Despite the hawk crashing into her window, there were no fatalities that day.

A week into the new year, Becky Gretton and Cindy Staley saw and heard a Carolina Wren at

the docks in Cooperstown. Noisy crows alerted me to the presence of a Red-tailed Hawk perched in a Sycamore in Neawha Park.

Randy Lynch is keeping track of the leucistic Red-tailed Hawk that continues to reside near Jefferson. On Otsego Lake he found large rafts of Common and Hooded Mergansers and Common Goldeneye, an immature Bald Eagle, and three Red-tailed Hawks; by the East Springfield boat launch he discovered an Eastern Bluebird.

On a balmy weekend in January, Pam Peters reported, "It was a treat to see five Bluebirds feeding along the Andes Rail Trail on this mild January day." Charlie Scheim and I took advantage of the weather to hike at Riddell Park, and came across Kinglets showing off their golden crowns on a sunny day.

This reporting period ended with Bald Eagles congregating at Canadarago Lake. Becky Gretton received a tip and checked on the 14th to find twenty birds. Returning a day later, she watched them picking stuff out of some broken up ice on the east side of the lake and counted an astounding thirty-one eagles! That's a sight no one would ever expect to see in these parts!

*If you have bird sightings to report, contact Sandy Bright, 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.*

Support our Sponsors! Thank you to Rod Spangle Antiques in Unadilla for being a sponsor!

Upcoming Activities

February

February 14 -17 – 2020 Great Backyard Bird

Count: See article below.

February 21 – DOAS Public Program: “HeatSmart Otsego.” Speaker Bennett Sandler of Heat Smart Otsego will educate us about renewable, clean heating and cooling technologies like air and ground source heat pumps and modern wood burning appliances, and connect interested building owners with pre-vetted local installers. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

February Date TBD – **“Early Bird Breeding Bird Atlas Training:** “ For those interested in helping gather data for the Breeding Bird Atlas III, watch the web site (DOAS.us) for more information. Learn more about BBIII at doas.us/breeding-bird-atlas-2020-2/

March

March 3 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

March 20 – DOAS Public Program: “NYS Breeding Bird Atlas III: Learn With Us!” Speaker Julie Hart will talk about the history of the atlas, the importance of atlas data, and how you can get involved.

The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

April

April 17 – DOAS Public Program: “Slogs Through Bogs: Beauty, Loss and Preservation.” Donna Vogler, Professor of Biology at SUNY Oneonta, will share her findings from a 2019 plant survey of the relatively pristine Cranberry Bog of the Greenwoods Conservancy. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

April 18 – Earth Festival: Details soon at <http://oc-cainfo.org>.

April 18 – Optics Raffle Drawing: Prizes include Nikon binoculars and harness. More info at doas.us.

April 21– DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

May

May 15 – DOAS Public Program: Nelson and Gail DuBois will show photographs taken during their recent travels. The program begins at 7:30 PM at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

May 19– DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 PM

THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT: HOW MANY BIRDS WILL YOU FIND?

The 23rd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), will be held February 14 through February 17, 2020. 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. 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.



DOAS Membership

Cost is \$25 annually or \$35 for two years; family memberships \$30 annually or \$40 for two years. Memberships can also be purchased online at <http://doas.us> or make your check payable to “DOAS” and mail payment to: DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.

Support DOAS education and conservation programs with an additional donation!



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www.doas.us

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS HIGHLIGHTS by Sandy Bright and Pam Peters

Twenty field observers and six feederwatchers counted 47 species and 4,103 individual birds in the 51st Oneonta Christmas Bird Count. Though it wasn't great weather for bird activity, the temperatures were pleasant, and precipitation held off, for the most part, until later in the day. The number of species found was about average; the number of individual birds fell below the historical average of about 4900. While none of the commonly found birds were absent from the count, many species were found in lower numbers than usual. Two species made first-ever appearances at our annual count: an American Wigeon, found in a swamp near the Otsego County Jail; and

two Winter Wrens, found by Bob Donnelly's team, which also got out early to find four species of owls. Eastern Bluebirds were found in several locations. This species first appeared in the count in 2002 and has been seen in five counts since then. A Red-shouldered Hawk also made an appearance, for the fourth time ever. Full list at doas.us/cbc-oneonta-data-1969-to-present/

On the 4th Delaware County Christmas Bird Count, cold west winds and light snow dominated the day, January 5th. Only a trace of snow was on the ground and most of the water was open due to recent rains and warm temperatures. While some expected species were absent, others hit high numbers and a few new species were ob-



served. 19 observers travelled 367 miles and tallied 42 unique species and 3,095 individual birds.

Species highlights for 2019 include two firsts: Hermit Thrush and Common Redpoll on Count Day, and a Great Blue Heron during Count Week. Seven Bluebirds and two Carolina Wrens were recorded, real winter treats for our area. The most variety of waterfowl was found in Downsville with Canada Goose, Black Duck, Mallard, Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Duck and Common Goldeneye.

DOAS thanks all of the dedicated volunteers for their efforts.