



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

COMING ACTIVITIES

February

February 2 – Virtual Program,
“Birding for Bald Eagles”

February 12-15 – Great Back-
yard Bird Count

February 19 – Virtual Program,
“Great Gray Owls”

March

March 2 – DOAS Board Mtg

March 19 – Virtual Program,
“Highlights from Down Under”

April

April 16 – Virtual Program, TBA

April 20 – DOAS Board Mtg

More information on page 7

Below are four online programs,
recently scheduled as follow up to
Climate Action Panel discussion
in January. More information and
register at <https://doas.us/events/>.

February 16 @ 7:00 p.m. Solid

Waste, Recycling & Composting

February 24 @ 6:30 p.m. Environ-
mental Action at Home

March 3 @ 7:00 p.m. The Ins and
Outs of Electric Vehicles

March 9 @ 7:00 p.m. Green Heat-
ing & Cooling

IN SEARCH OF THE GREAT GRAY OWL February Virtual Program with Kyle Dudgeon

Of all the birds and wildlife that call the forests and mountains of Montana home, one species in particular leaves an impression on its observer like nothing else can. This species is the great gray owl. After months of searching unsuccessfully for a breeding territory where one had to have existed, Kyle finally made his dream come true, and spent several weeks studying, photographing and advocating for a family of owls in the Bridger Mountains near Bozeman, MT. Join us as Kyle takes us through his experiences with dozens of great gray owls over two years in Montana, as well as the story of protecting a nest from the interests of logging.

Kyle Dudgeon is a 23-year-old nature photographer and writer based in Bozeman, Montana. A New York native, photography has led Kyle’s journeys across North America, capturing wild moments in incredible places. With his photographs and written word, Kyle strives to share with his following the power and emotion that the natural world possesses, in hopes



Great Gray Owls
Photo by Kyle Dudgeon

of encouraging conservation of species and environments at risk. In 2019, Kyle Dudgeon Creative was founded on an idea to translate a passion for wild things and wild places into a means of visual storytelling. A project involving Great Gray Owls in the Bridger Mountains of Montana was Kyle’s first true introduction into what he hopes will be a long career in the conservation realm.

Join us on Zoom,
February 19th at 7:30 p.m.
Pre-Registration is required.

REGISTER AT
<https://doas.us/events/>

SAVE THE DATE: MARCH 19, 2021

“Highlights From Down Under” with Dr. Pamela Lea, retired local veterinarian, describing and showing photos of her last big trip to Tasmania, Australia and New Zealand in the fall of 2019.

2020 HAWKWATCH SEASON WRAP-UP By ANDY MASON

The 32nd consecutive season of monitoring migrating raptors at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch wrapped up on New Year's Day. As with every other aspect of our lives, 2020 was a year like no other. We found it necessary to institute changes in response to the Covid 19 virus, despite the lookout's rather remote and certainly open-air location. Signs were posted asking visitors to respect mask and distancing recommendations, and a separate area was cordoned off for counters. In addition, we avoided publicizing the hawk watch this year in an effort to limit crowds. Although good numbers of visitors did show up, particularly during the peak of the Golden Eagle flight, people by and large followed the rules, and we thank all for this.

Regarding the birds themselves, most species were below the 20-year average since full-time counting began at the site. Notable drops included -46% for Osprey, -23% for Cooper's Hawk, and in a now disturbingly consistent trend, -57% for Red-tailed Hawks. Red-tails have traditionally been a strong suit for Franklin Mountain, but the season total of 698 is the lowest since the first year of the count in 1989 when only weekends were covered. (For a deeper look at this situation, see Tom Salo and Pam Peter's article on page 4.)

As if to counterbalance the Red-tailed Hawk decline, Broad-winged Hawk numbers continue to climb. This season's total of 2951 is a re-



Golden Eagle
Audubon Photo by Scott MacDiarmid

cord for Franklin Mountain, with the big day coming on September 11, when Steve Hall, Marilyn Leahy and Pam Peters tallied 912. The season total represents an 84% jump over average. Broad-wings are a hit-and-miss species, but have favored us with good flights in recent years. They are largely responsible for the year's total raptor count of 5438, slightly above average.

The only other bright spot was a 44% rise in Bald Eagles at 248, a new seasonal high. This extends these birds' long-term winning streak, no doubt a result of the highly successful reintroduction programs that have made the American symbol a nearly commonplace bird.

One Black Vulture was spotted, continuing the mysterious status of the species at Franklin Mountain. Only two were recorded in the first 25 years of the watch, but in 2017 six were counted and 15 in 2018. Then last season was back to zero. Black Vultures are increasingly resident in NY State and are regularly counted in numbers at other migration sites. We had thought they finally reached Franklin Mountain, but who knows?

The Golden Eagle flight for

"Hawkwatch" Continued to page 3

THE DELAWARE - OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY FOUNDED 1968

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

Alaska oil and gas leasing— On the same day the US Capitol came under attack by a disgruntled mob of Trump supporters, another significant event took place in Washington, understandably buried by the news coverage and focus of the nation on the violence aimed at our free elections.

On that day the Interior Department opened bids on leases for oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). This culminated a four-decade campaign by Alaskan politicians and Republicans in Congress to develop the sanctuary's wildlife-rich coastal plain, home to caribou, polar bears, and millions of migratory birds.

The Trump administration pushed through approval for drilling as part of a 2017 tax bill, claiming that nearly a billion dollars would flow from the leases, offsetting tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. It was argued at the time that this figure was vastly overblown, as was the amount of oil available, and the need for more fossil fuels.

With the opening of the bids, this proved true. Major oil companies

sat out the sale, and there were only three bidders for leases. One of these—the largest—was the state of Alaska itself, in a desperate move to grab leases no one else wanted. The sale netted only \$14.4 million, with half going to the federal government. Clearly it was a flop.



AP Photo

What You Can Do—President Biden has promised to halt oil exploration and production in ANWR. Also, legal challenges continue, including from Audubon, over environmental reviews. Contact President-elect Biden and urge him to do all he can to roll back this attack on America's greatest wilderness.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act— Also in the last days of his presidency, Donald Trump's Interior Department released its final decision in its

revision of guidance for the nation's most important bird statute. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) has provided protection against incidental take—killing or injuring birds—since its passage in 1918. This holds energy companies, mining industry, construction companies, agri-business and others, responsible for harming birds even if unintentional. Without such protection, Exxon and BP could have walked away from major oil spills with no consequences. The newly announced rule provides carte blanche for this 'incidental' take.

What You Can Do—The new rule does not take effect until February. It is hoped that President Biden will announce a moratorium on all new regulatory changes. He should be asked to be sure the MBTA changes are included until they can be reversed by the new administration. Also, National Audubon has a letter to federal officials that can be sent via the 'Take Action' link at <https://www.audubon.org/>.

Contact information can be found in the Advocacy section of our website, <https://doas.us/>.

OPTICS RAFFLE

WIN NIKON BINOCULARS! GET YOUR TICKETS!

\$10 Donation per ticket. Only 250 tickets available. Tickets and more information available online at <https://doas.us/2021-optics-raffle/> Drawing Date: Friday, April 16, 2021, 7:30 p.m., during the online monthly program.

Proceeds to benefit the DOAS Sanctuary and Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch.

"Hawkwatch" Continued from page 2

which Franklin Mountain is best known was a respectable 187 this season, just about at the 20-year average. The high count was 29 on November 18, with counts in the 20s also on November 3, 12, and 24.

All Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch data is available at <http://hawkcount.org/>.

Thanks for their dedicated service goes to counters Peter Fauth, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Steve Hall, Marilyn Leahy, Carol and Randy Lynch, Pam Peters and Tom Salo, and also to the spotters and visitors who helped out this year.

WHERE ARE ALL OUR RED-TAILED HAWKS?

by DOAS Directors Pamela Peters and Tom Salo



Red-tailed Hawk over Franklin Mountain
Photo by Landa Palmer

Fall 2020 saw among the lowest numbers and rates of Red-tailed Hawks ever recorded at Franklin Mountain. Precipitous drops in any species numbers are cause for concern. In this case, we may need to be concerned about more than just a population drop.

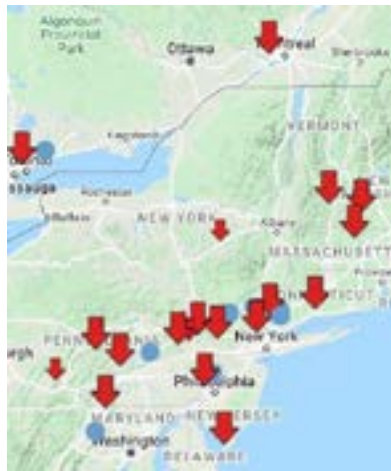
The Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch (FMHW) has surveyed migrating raptors every fall since 1989, and full time since 2000. During fall 2020 counters tallied 698 Red-tails over 578 hours. That is 40 more birds than was recorded during the 56 hours surveyed in 1989, and 40% of the site's seasonal average. According to the Raptor Population Index, FMHW counts declined 2.76% per year between 2000 and 2019 and 5% a year in the last 10 years of that period. During the 1990s, FMHW had a passage rate of about 10 Red-tailed Hawks per hour during the mid-September to late-November migration period. That decade also had some single day counts that surpassed this season's total. During our most recent decade, the passage rate dropped to 3 birds per hour.

Examinations of fall migration counts, Christmas Bird Counts, Winter Raptor Surveys, Breeding Bird Surveys and banding data suggest that our lower numbers do not mean a large-scale population decline. The trend is more birds remain at northern latitudes in winter and fewer are making it to the southern regions.^{1 and 2}

An analysis by Neil Paprocki

and others determined “an increasing number of Red-tailed Hawks do not migrate or migrate shorter distances than they did in the past.” They also “found strong negative count trends at the northernmost migration sites on the eastern flyway, suggesting possible breeding-population declines in the central and eastern Canadian provinces.”

Nick Bolgiano's article came to similar conclusions. Published in 2013, Bolgiano considers data mostly from mid 1990's through



2016 Raptor Population Index analysis of Red-tailed Hawk fall migration for eastern sites with more than 10 years of data.

The red arrows represent declines of 5 to 10% per year.

2010. Bolgiano points to three trends: 1) significant decline of Red-tailed Hawk migrants counted at most, but not all of the hawk watch sites in the eastern and central flyways (e.g. Hawk Mountain, Waggoner's Gap); 2) definite

increase over 40 years of Red-tails in Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) in the mid-Atlantic, upstate New York and New England along with a decline in CBC numbers for Red-tails in the south; 3) substantial increases in Red-tailed Hawk populations in most eastern states since 1966 documented in Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) and Atlases.

Bolgiano suggests a few causes for the shift in Red-tail numbers. A warming climate is at the top of the list.³ Warmer winters are easier to survive. Food is more available and weather less severe. Changes in land cover have created better habitat in many areas. Some northern Red-tailed Hawks are now sedentary (do not migrate). With those birds protecting their breeding territories year-round, they can prevent migrants from occupying those areas in winter. This may further discourage migration by discouraging more northerly birds.

Given what we know, what do we need to be concerned about? The big picture indicates the breeding eastern population is doing quite well, at least that part breeding where surveys are conducted. And northern wintering has increased.

“Red-tails” Continued on page 5

At this cold and often dreary time of year, I am always cheered by the sight of winter birds, whether they be visitors from the colder north, like Horned Larks found gritting on a road near Fort Plain, or reminders of warmer weather such as the Cedar Waxwings we watched foraging in treetops in Maryland.

In mid-December, a Song Sparrow visited Barb Palmer's yard in Jefferson, along with five Red-winged Blackbirds, Tree Sparrows, a female Purple Finch, a White-throated Sparrow, and a pair of Red-breasted Nuthatches. Nearby, she found a Brown Creeper, watched a pair of Bald Eagles interacting along North Harpersfield Road, and observed two large flocks of geese flying overhead, one of which was honking above the clouds, out of sight. In New Lisbon, Warren Ryther's feeders were visited by a Rusty Blackbird one day, a Common Redpoll another, and as many as 2 ½ dozen Evening Grosbeaks daily. Lisa Gorn reported Red Crossbills hanging around Maple Grove for at least a week. Kathryn Davino reported 23 Mourning Doves in her yard, a number that climbed to 43 the next day. Two Common Redpolls added some variety to her visitors. Shortly before the big storm hit, Dorian Huneke



Belted Kingfisher
Audubon Photo by Brian Kushner

heard a Belted Kingfisher by a creek in Treadwell, then, while shoveling some of that snow, heard a Pileated Woodpecker calling nearby.

In the last week of December, Evening Grosbeaks continued near Walton, with Kay Crane reporting around a dozen, and West Burlington, with Tom Salo reporting a few. A nice variety of birds indulged in Tom's homemade suet mix, including woodpeckers, jays, chickadees, nuthatches, a Brown Creeper, and, most unusual, a female Northern Cardinal. A Northern Goshawk made several passes over Kathryn Davino's yard in gusty winds, then disappeared, as all of the feeder birds had wisely gone into hiding. At dusk on New Year's Eve, Sarah Root watched a Barred Owl with an unusual white band on its tail swoop in and perch near her bird feeder.

In early January, Suzanne Gaynor

found a flock of Snow Buntings feeding in a cut corn field in East Meredith, flying off and landing again as a group, some scrapping over food. Pam Peters found Buntings near a flock of Wild Turkeys in Delancey, and observed a bobcat prowling along the shore of the Delaware River. Stan Salthe noted that the Hairy Woodpeckers feeding at his suet in winter never come in warmer months; we exchanged thoughts about birds' habitats in different seasons. Dorian Huneke watched an immature Bald Eagle flying lazily over her barn in Treadwell. A few days later she realized that one of the white globs of snow in a tree was actually an eagle head when it started traveling downstream. Barb Palmer got some nice pictures of a pair of Bald Eagles near Stamford.

Mid-January brought a nice variety to Barb Palmer's yard in Jefferson, including a group of Evening Grosbeaks, some Pine Siskins, and Tree Sparrows. Bald Eagles are always a treat to observe, and several were hanging around East Meredith. Suzanne Gaynor photographed a couple of them, then enjoyed watching an immature and an adult fly in beautiful synchronization.

If you have bird sightings to report, contact Sandy Bright, brights@hartwick.edu or 607 287-4465.

“Red-tails” Continued from page 4

There may be some decline in breeding in Canada but that appears to be a minor factor. Over a 42-year period, the counts per hour in CBC circles in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania have

actually tripled. It is most likely that climate change is the most significant reason we have seen a dramatic drop in numbers at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch.

¹Bolgiano, *Evidence of Changed Migration of Red-tailed Hawks in Eastern North America*.

2013.

²Paprocki et. al., *Combining migration and wintering counts to enhance understanding of population change in a generalist raptor species, the North American Red-tailed Hawk*. 2017.

³According to NOAA, the global annual temperature has increased at an average rate of 0.07°C (0.13°F) per decade since 1880 and over twice that rate (+0.18°C / +0.32°F) since 1981.

ONEONTA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT: HIGHLIGHTS AND A LOOK BACK

BY SANDY BRIGHT

The 52nd Oneonta Christmas Bird Count took place on December 19th this season. As our CBC has been run for over a half century now, I thought it would be interesting to include some historical information and highlights along with the current summary.

I've been asked why this count is called the Oneonta CBC when most of Oneonta isn't even included in the count circle. While I haven't been able to find an answer for that, in the course of research I did learn that the original planning committee, with the help of Dr. John New and Jo Koenig, chose to center the 15-mile diameter circle near Milford in order to incorporate as much open water as possible while including terrain familiar to the birders who were active at the time.

While an average number of individual birds were spotted this year (4520), several species records were set or tied, and a higher-than-average number of species (52, with average being around 42) were found. A record high 546 Blue Jays were counted, topping the previous high of 500 in 1972. Carolina Wrens nearly doubled their former high, with seven seen this year. The Fox Sparrow found by Bill Ehman was only the second ever recorded on the count. Peter Fauth discovered Red Crossbills, which had been seen just five times previously. Bob Donnelly tied his own record for finding two Winter Wrens two years running; the only previous record was one wren in 2012. Bob also

deserves much credit for getting out in the very early morning to find owls; he reported fourteen birds of four species this year.

Another species that tied its own previous record was Tufted Titmouse (93). This is a species that was so frequently absent from the early counts that the 1980 Belted Kingfisher noted that "Elma Holway... shared honors with Irene, Gerald & Wayne Wright for finding one each of the uncommon titmouse." It wasn't until the mid-90s that double-digit numbers became the norm for this species.

Canada Geese also became more common at that time. Previously, they averaged only fourteen per year and were often absent. In the last quarter-century they have become downright abundant, averaging 450 per year. This year, with only fourteen found, they were noticeably scarce, likely kept away by deep snow cover.

The contributions of feeder watchers may cover only a small area of the count circle, but often have a significant impact on the results. They can provide the numbers that topple a previous species record, such as the 33 Dark-eyed Juncos they reported this year, nudging the total up to a new high of 569 (previously 558 in 2017). Some years a species might be missed without their efforts, as in this year's lone Evening Grosbeak contributed by Linda Pearce. This species was a much more frequent visitor in the early years, and on average over 450



Tufted Titmouse
Photo by Rick Bunting

were seen every year until 1992. In 1971 and 1972, 30% of all birds found were Evening Grosbeaks!

In 1975, feeder watcher Betty McVinney documented an exceptionally rare species for any era: Boreal Chickadees. She described them as "dirty-looking compared to the black-capped, with very rusty-colored sides... Aggressive birds, they chased the black-capped chickadees away... they even cleaned their bills on the clothesline." 1982 turned up several unusual finds, including a Green-winged Teal reported by Doug Kibbe and Cheryl Boise, an immature Red-headed Woodpecker spotted by Elma and Gary Holway, and the first ever Goshawk seen by John and Betty New.

The eleven Eastern Bluebirds observed this year is nowhere near the record of 35 in 2007, but against the backdrop of sparkling fresh snow and blue skies, the sight of our state bird was incomparable. For complete results of the Oneonta CBC, visit <https://doas.us/>.



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Upcoming Activities

To stay up-to-date about events, visit the DOAS website (<https://doas.us/events/>) or Facebook Page and sign up for our ENews at <https://doas.us/sign-up-for-doas-news/>. ENews is a monthly email notification and is different from the *Belted Kingfisher* newsletter.

February

February 2 – “**Birding for Bald Eagles**” as part of Ice Harvest Festival. We join Hanford Mills Museum’s Ice Harvest Festival in a special presentation at 7 p.m. on ZOOM to highlight our region’s Bald Eagle population. DOAS Co-President, Andy Mason will discuss the history of eagle conservation in New York State. Director Tom Salo will overview eagle identification with an emphasis on the differences between Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles. Go to <https://doas.us/event/birding-for-bald-eagles/> for more information and to register.

February 12 – 15 “Great Backyard Bird Count”

For more information and to learn about participating go to <https://birdcount.org/>

February 19 – DOAS Virtual Public Program: “In

Search of the Great Gray Owl” with wildlife photographer Kyle Dudgeon. See article on page 1. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. Register at <https://doas.us/events/>

March

March 2– DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

March 19 – DOAS Virtual Public Program: “**Highlights from Down Under**” with Dr. Pamela Lea, retired local veterinarian, describing and showing photos of her last big trip to Tasmania, Australia and New Zealand in the fall of 2019. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. Register at <https://doas.us/events/>

April

April 16 – DOAS Virtual Public Program. Topic will be announced.

April 20– DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

Bird Friendly Coffee

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/>



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DOAS Membership Application

Membership in the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society includes 9 issues of our newsletter, *The Belted Kingfisher*.

Cost is \$25 annually or \$35 for two years; family memberships \$30 annually or \$40 for two years.

Please make your check payable to “DOAS” and mail payment with this form to:
DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.

Memberships can also be purchased online at <https://doas.us/join-us/>

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5th Delaware County Christmas Bird Count by Pamela Peters

No surprise– the 2020 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) had a few COVID-inspired modifications. Two sections were split into sub-sectors, 2 sectors involved team members traveling in separate cars, and 3 teams brought in a family member to help spot and drive. We made it work.

On count day we had sleet and snow in the morning and snow in the afternoon. Some teams cut their outings short due to dangerous road conditions and poor visibility; others pressed on. This is a hearty bunch!

In spite of the weather, results are impressive. 17 participants tallied 3,218 individual birds and 48 unique species. Some nice finds from the day include 2 Common Loons in Downsview, 3 Robins near the Cannonsville Reservoir, 3

Bluebirds off Marvin Hollow Road in Walton, Carolina Wrens in 2 sectors, a Kestrel in Hamden, and a Belted Kingfisher in 2 sectors. A first-ever Screech Owl was recorded for the Delaware County count, Great Horned Owl in 2 sectors and Barred Owl in the southern sector. 327 Wild Turkey is a new high for Delaware CBC, and 5 Ruffed Grouse were found in 3 different sectors. Our common winter waterfowl were plentiful: Canada Goose (309 is a new high), Common Merganser, Black Duck and Mallard. Crows (517 counted) and Chickadees (482) were the most numerous birds observed. Surprisingly few Juncos were counted this year (57 is second lowest over five years), also fewer Goldfinches and Mourning Doves than usual. The only Golden-crowned Kinglet in

the count was observed by Lance Verderame. No Accipiters were seen. Nine species were recorded in every sector, including Red-tailed Hawk, Downy Woodpecker, Crow, Blue Jay, Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Starling and Junco.

Many thanks to our counters this year: Sandy Bright, Charlie Scheim, Lance Verderame, Renee Davis, Katherine Yard, Matt Walter, Linda Burkhart, Landa Palmer, Kathy Mario, Kay Crane, Kathryn and Al Davino, Jean Petterson, Chris DeCesare, Laurie and Tom Rankin, and yours truly, Pam Peters.



Red-breasted Nuthatch
Photo by Landa Palmer