



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

January Zoom Program: "Puffins and Bird Adventure"

Join us on Friday, January 20, 2023 at 7:30 p.m. when we host DOAS Director Landa Palmer via Zoom for her presentation "Puffins and Bird Adventure," featuring photos from her recent trip to Grimsey Island, Iceland.

Have you ever set a goal to go somewhere out of the ordinary? Well, Landa Palmer did when she headed to a remote island for a birding adventure. Her quest to get above the arctic circle brought her to Grimsey Island, which is as north as you can go in Iceland.

In mid-July, after a rough ferry ride (and lots of mints, ginger tabs and Dramamine), Landa arrived via the Arctic Sea in Grimsey for

a weeklong adventure with other bird watchers. Within a 5-minute walk from the guest house where she stayed, there were Puffins and Snow Buntings in full plumage.

Although her goal was to view and photograph Puffins, what she accomplished, in addition, was making new friends and learning about the birdlife and environment in a part of the world she had only dreamed about.

Landa has recently retired from her position as Professor in the School of Nursing at SUNY Delhi. She has been a member of the DOAS Board of Directors since 2019. Her exquisitely timed bird photos and the evocative seasonal landscape images of the farm



Atlantic Puffin; Photo by Landa Palmer

where she lives are familiar to the readers of the DOAS Facebook page and this newsletter. Landa brings her abundant joy for birds, nature and photography to create captivating images that stay with you long after viewing them.

Through her photos and stories, Landa will take you along for this once-in-a-lifetime journey. Registration required; click on January 20 at: <https://doas.us/calendar/>.



*Debbie taking Notes;
Contributed Photo*

February Program: Save the Date

On February 17, 2023 at 7:30 p.m., Debra Corbett will present "Symbolic Meaning of Birds to the Unangan Aleut People" via Zoom. Registration required; click on the date at <https://doas.us/calendar/>. Debbie is a retired archaeologist who operates Nanutset Heritage, a cultural resources firm in Anchorage, Alaska.

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2023 Optics Raffle, Coming Soon

The popular **OPTICS RAFFLE** returns in February 2023! Watch for details in the next *Kingfisher* and on DOAS social media.

The Excitement of Winter Birding

by Co-president Becky Gretton

As things slow down with winter's onset, a good reminder about the real fun to be had while winter birding may be in order.

I had the good fortune to spend a long, full day in the Adirondacks with a super birding buddy recently. He had researched recent sightings of Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, and Bohemian Waxwings. Off we went at 6 a.m., watching for deer of course, reveling in a beautiful sunrise, and grateful for good road conditions. When we reached a target road, it had been sanded. We crept along, enjoying Black-capped Chickadees when my friend spotted birds gritting in the road: Pine Grosbeaks! We spent lots of time after creeping quietly towards them and stopping. They flew to trees, picked at leaf buds, and returned to the road again and again.

We continued past them very slowly, and reached a place where Chickadees were active. I opened the window, reached my hand out and was delighted to feel one fly onto my palm and pick at my fingers for seeds. I am now resolved to bring sunflower seeds next time! Further on, we observed two Ruffed Grouse, one of which froze in place while the other foraged close by. We had done proper research to identify Spruce Grouse just in case, but no, they were Ruffed. We were treated to a brief look at a Golden Eagle flyover in that area.



Black-capped Chickadee
Photo by Peter Fenner

Many miles and many attempts later, we were frustrated from trying to spot reported Bohemian Waxwings, having gotten to know certain neighborhoods quite well. Flocks of European Starlings were in those areas, and we suspected that they were flushing the Waxwings from their common food sources. As we departed, there was a huge flock of Bohemian Waxwings flying high and perching in trees in a different location! We had serious looks at these amazing birds (life bird for me!) and once again excitement reigned.

Winter birding success depends on luck, patience, watching plowed roadsides for gritting birds (especially where grassy soil has been exposed), identifying food sources, and getting good tips from reliable human sources.

As always, we must respect the birds by allowing them to successfully feed, keeping our distance as we peek at them with admiration.

Happy winter birding!

The mission of Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society is to protect our natural environment and connect people with nature to benefit birds and other wildlife through conservation, education, research and advocacy.

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To contribute notes or articles for
The Belted Kingfisher, email:
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Conservation and Legislation

By Andy Mason

Expanded Bottle Deposits up for Consideration in Albany—Legislation to expand New York's bottle return law has been introduced in the Assembly and Senate. This measure would increase the container deposit from 5c to 10c and add more categories of beverage container to be redeemed.

The bill would expand the kind of containers New Yorkers can redeem to include some wine and liquor bottles as well as dairy products, iced teas and sports drinks. The proposal is supported by a coalition of over 300 organizations and businesses in order to boost and encourage recycling.

The bill is sponsored in the Assembly by Kevin Cahill of the Hudson Valley. He stated, "The Bottle Law is the most successful waste diversion and recycling program offered by New York State. Increasing the deposit and adding

containers for wine, iced tea and sports drinks will further incentivize returning these materials and remove litter from our roads and waterways."

The present bottle law has been very successful, decreasing litter by up to 70% in the state. Originally enacted in 1982 to cover carbonated beverages, it was changed in 2009 to include water bottles. In 2020 the law helped to recycle 5.5 billion plastic, glass and aluminum beverage containers. A higher deposit will further increase recycling rates and reduce the growing amount of plastic that is floating in our oceans.

Expansion of the bottle law would also benefit local recycling centers which are frequently plagued with broken glass presenting a hazard and damaging equipment and contaminating other recyclables.



Empty Recyclable Beverage Containers
Photo from Wikimedia Commons

What you can do—An effort is underway to have Gov. Kathy Hochul include expansion of the bottle bill in her 2023 budget proposal. Contact the Governor and let her know that after 40 years, this law needs updating to continue and increase its success. Also, contact your state legislators and ask them to co-sponsor and support A.8668A/S.8651.

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

Winter Field Trips

By Andy Mason

Eagle Trip—January 14

This winter's DOAS field trip to view wintering Bald Eagles in Delaware County is scheduled for Saturday, January 14 (Please note correct date). The trip explores area rivers and reservoirs where eagles concentrate around open water to feed. Past trips have turned up 20+ birds. Other raptors and waterfowl are also usually sighted. We will stop at a local restaurant for lunch for interested participants.

This trip is open to DOAS members only. We will leave the Dietz Street parking lot across from the

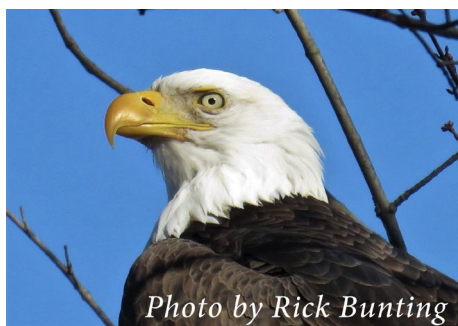


Photo by Rick Bunting

YMCA in Oneonta at 8:00 a.m. Participants can be picked up en-route in Delhi and Walton. Return to Oneonta will be mid-afternoon.

For further information, contact Andy Mason, (607) 267-8491, AndyMason@earthling.net.

Statewide Waterfowl Count—January 15

The NY State Ornithological

Association's annual statewide waterfowl count is scheduled for Sunday, January 15 (Please note correct date). DOAS covers Otsego Lake and the Susquehanna River above Unadilla, the Unadilla River, and Cannonsville Reservoir and the West Branch of the Delaware River. This effort involves surveying waterways where waterfowl can be seen, identifying and counting ducks and geese. The totals are used by the Department of Environmental Conservation in managing these species over the upcoming year.

Anyone interested in helping should contact Andy Mason at (607) 267-8491 or by email at AndyMason@earthling.net.

The Northern Cardinal

By *DOAS Director Dorian Huneke*

Northern Cardinals are not just familiar and easily identified guests at your feeders and bird-baths, they are associated with folklore, legends, and spiritual beliefs across many different cultures.

They came about their name because early European settlers related the birds to the red vestments of Roman Catholic leading bishops, and the bird's crest reminded them of the church official's headgear.

Common folklore tells us that a visit from a Cardinal is a sign from a loved one who has passed. Birds have often symbolized a visit from a heavenly figure, a messenger of the gods, or even the gods themselves in feathered form. This belief has been part of the lore and legends of Native American tribes, including the Ojibwe, Lakota, Odawa, Sioux, Algonquin, and Menomini. It has also been part

of ancient Egyptian, Celtic, Maori, Irish, and Hindu spiritualism.

Cardinals are largely monogamous birds, and remain dedicated pairs throughout the year, thus reinforcing their role in folklore and legend as birds of romance.

The male Cardinal will fiercely defend his territory with angry cries and attacks. He may even attack his own reflection in a mirror or window. During nesting season, he will bring food to the female as she sits on the eggs for two weeks. The male Cardinal's instinct to feed young birds is so strong that he may even feed the nestlings of other species. Song and Garden Birds of North America, (1964), a volume in the National Science Library prepared by National Geographic Book Service, includes a photo on page 324 of a male Cardinal repeatedly feeding goldfish in a

backyard pond. It is noted that this strange routine went on for days. Perhaps this bird lost its mate or brood during a time when feeding another was critically important.

When out of the nest the fledglings wear plumage even more brown and drab than that of the female. Soon their underparts turn lighter and the crests of the young males become reddish. Young Cardinals have been noted to sing at three to four weeks of age - a quiet warbling very unlike their adult species. At about two months old they begin to introduce adult phrases into their warbling. By fall they have molted and their first winter plumage looks like that of their parents.

Cardinals are non-migratory, but often wander quite a bit during the winter, sometimes in small flocks. They are welcomed visitors at backyard feeders, cracking their favorite sunflower seeds with their strong bills. Broad, open feeders are where they feel most comfortable eating. Hanging tube feeders invite them as well. Their favorite foods are sunflower seed, safflower seed, peanut hearts, berries, and suet. A Cardinal's preferred shelter includes dense vines and shrubs, layered thicket-like areas, evergreen pine and spruce trees, and tall brush piles.

Cardinals have more than their share of enemies. Snakes, owls, and cats raid the nests. House Wrens puncture the eggs. Catbirds and Mockingbirds compete for nesting sites. Cowbirds will deposit their eggs in the Cardinal's nest, and Blue Jays are always ready to attack the young. Yet the Cardinal endures, and we are privileged to observe their beautiful colors and intimate behavior.



Northern Cardinal
Audubon Photo by Carol Stafford

October—December Bird Sightings

By Sandy Bright

Autumn can be a windy time of year, which at times helps migrating birds, but at others can make for tricky navigation. In mid-October, Becky Gretton watched a kestrel land awkwardly on a wire, clutching a mouse, fighting a strong wind.

Jennifer Hyypio was watching Blue Jays cache peanuts when a Northern Goshawk soared overhead up Franklin Mountain. At the nearby Hawkwatch, Pam Peters observed many large flocks of Eastern Bluebirds migrating; several others checked out nest boxes at her place in Treadwell.

Meanwhile at Landa and Ron Palmer's little hollow in Meredith there was some owl activity taking place. One early morning before sunrise, Ron observed just how silent is the flight of a Great Horned Owl when one sailed right over his head, landing on a nearby branch. It of course disappeared before Landa could get out with her camera. For a couple of weeks, a pair of Barred Owls were caterwauling just outside their bedroom window around 2:00 AM, which they felt was really cool but didn't really appreciate the timing.

Dorian Huneke observed a pair of Killdeer at her newly sanded riding arena, perhaps scouting out nesting sites for next spring. She was greeted by the song of a Carolina Wren outside her front door one morning and spotted an adult Bald Eagle flying downstream over the Susquehanna River Valley.

Gray Catbirds and American Robins hung around Barb Palmer's yard in Jefferson, and she spotted a Ruby-crowned Kinglet passing through.

Looks like it'll be a good irruptive year for some species. Randy Lynch started the reports of Evening Grosbeaks with a dozen in Harpersfield on October 29th, followed by reports from the Hawkwatch, Jefferson (Barb Palmer, Carolyn and Chuck Melszer), Delhi (Kathryn Davino), West Burlington (Tom and Jo Salo), and Walton (Kay Crane). Pine Siskins were spotted in Springfield (Becky Gretton) and DeLancey (Shirley Salton).

The Fenimore Bird Walk on November 12th turned up great views of some Buffleheads, two bobbing and diving on the lake, one showing off its starkly contrasting plumage as it flew off over the water. A hapless Redtail crouched in a tree in Wilber Park, Oneonta, suffering the scoldings of several Crows. An altercation between two immature Bald Eagles caught Bill Vining's eye at his home near Morris. Kay Crane was pleased to find a Red-breasted Nuthatch at her feeder in Walton.

A Cape May Warbler tapped at Landa Palmer's window in East Meredith, seeming to peer in at the bird sculpture on the inside. Tree Sparrows were spotted on the 20th by Jo Salo (West Burlington) and Becky Gretton (Springfield). A few days later a Chickadee at the



Northern Shrike
Photo by Randy Lynch

Hawkwatch checked out Becky's scope hoping for food. Kathryn Davino had a Fox Sparrow in her yard, along with a Purple Finch and Ruffed Grouse, both of which hadn't visited in quite some time.

Susan Brunswick found a late Great Blue Heron at the Mill Race in Oneonta November 20th. A Brown-headed Cowbird foraged beneath Barb Palmer's feeders in Jefferson (11/27). A dark-morph Rough-legged Hawk passed over Tom and Jo Salo's yard in West Burlington. Early December brought a light-morph Rough-legged kiting over a field on Meridale Mountain (Pam Peters).

Randy and Carol Lynch had some great finds in Harpersfield: a Peregrine Falcon finishing its lunch, and a Northern Shrike in their yard. A thin skin of ice on Neawha Park's pond created the illusion of geese walking on water, but judging by the awkward, tentative steps they were taking, they knew they were skating on thin ice.

Get ready for the Great Backyard Bird Count scheduled this year for February 17-20, 2023, when people from around the world come together to watch, learn about, count, and celebrate birds. More information at www.birdcount.org/. Watch for an article in the February Belted Kingfisher.

Hawkwatch News

By Tom Salo, Pam Peters, and Andy Mason

The 34th consecutive season of monitoring migrating raptors at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch was drawing to a close as this issue went to print. Our team of dedicated volunteers provided excellent coverage from late summer well into December. Visitors came in good numbers and for the most part followed the Covid social distancing rules. Actually, more visitors were tallied than Red-tailed Hawks this season. This is part of a continuing trend of Red-tailed Hawks remaining in more northern areas during winter (see February 2021 issue of the *Belted Kingfisher*).

If anything defined this season, it was warmth and the dearth of ideal winds. Birds concentrate at Franklin Mountain because the orientation of our ridges creates excellent lift when moderate winds blow out of the northwest. This allows birds moving southwest in the fall to glide for miles without spending much energy. Tom Salo sends out alerts when these good conditions are expected. There was a 35 day period from late September into October without a weather forecast justifying an alert. A single alert went out in late October and one more in November. This lack of



Northern Harrier at the Sanctuary
Photo by John Heidecker

good winds is reflected in the numbers of Golden Eagles, and likely affected the numbers of Red-tailed Hawks as well.

Golden Eagle numbers were low for Franklin Mountain but similar to 2021, with 123 counted as of the third week of December. The other big Golden Eagle sites in the northeast—Waggoner's Gap and Allegheny Front—each had a good year with just over 200 at Waggoner's Gap and over 300 Golden Eagles seen at Allegheny Front. It seems clear the birds were moving, but many just went around us.

Other species showed noteworthy changes. Only 29 Ospreys were recorded—less than a third of the long-term average. Red-shouldered Hawk numbers were also low at 24—about half of average. Readers

shouldn't fear there is a decline in this species. Quaker Ridge in Greenwich, CT had a record number of Red-shouldered Hawks this fall with 1,871. Northern Goshawk numbers continue to be very low. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology published an interesting article by Scott Weidensaul on the reasons for the goshawk decline last August that is worth reading—

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/when-goshawks-ruled-the-autumn-skies/>.

On the positive side, Bald Eagle numbers continue to be high. The many local birds confound the counters who need to make a call about who is migrating and who isn't. The 238 counted by early December was just 20 short of our all-time record. Falcons and small accipiters were stable. We had another good Broad-winged Hawk year with over 2000 tallied.

Thanks for their dedicated service goes to counters Jane Bachman, Peter Fauth, Fred Fries, Becky Gretton, Marilyn Leahy, Andrea Lodovice, Carol and Randy Lynch, Nancy New, Pam Peters, Tom Salo, and also to all the spotters and visitors who helped out this year.

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

Is your Membership Current?

Your mailing label on the back page of this newsletter will inform you of your membership expiration date. This is the only notice you receive to let you know you need to renew your membership. Thanks for rejoining when your membership expires.

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 <https://doas.us/membership/> 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!

Upcoming Activities

January

January 14 – DOAS Eagle Trip: Field trip to view wintering Bald Eagles in Delaware County. This trip is open to DOAS members only. For more information see article on page 3 or contact Andy Mason, 607-652-2162 or AndyMason@earthling.net.

January 15 – NYS Ornithological Association's Annual Statewide Waterfowl Count: This effort involves identifying and counting ducks and geese in our region. See article on page 3. Anyone interested in helping with the census, please contact Andy Mason, phone 607-652-2162, or email AndyMason@earthling.net.

January 17 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

January 20 – DOAS Zoom Program: "Puffins and Bird Adventure." Landa Palmer will share her photos and stories from Grimsey Island, Iceland via Zoom at 7:30 p.m. See article on page 1. Registration required; click on January 20th at <https://doas.us/calendar/>.

February

February 17 – DOAS Public Program: "Symbolic Meaning of Birds to the Unangan Inuit People" presented by Debra Corbett via Zoom at 7:30 p.m.

Registration required; click on February 17th at <https://doas.us/calendar/>.

February 17 through 20 – Join the Annual Great Backyard Bird Count as people from around the world come together to watch, learn about, count, and celebrate birds. More information at www.birdcount.org/.

March

March 7 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

March 17 – DOAS Zoom Program: "Young Forest Birds and Young Forest Management in NY and the Northeast," presented by Roger Masse via Zoom at 7:30 p.m. Registration required; click on March 17th at <https://doas.us/calendar/>.

April

April 18 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

April 21 – DOAS Public Program: "How High Temperatures are Affecting Birds and Their Songs," presented by Casey Coomes at 7:30 p.m. Venue to be determined.

In case you missed it—Past Zoom programs are available online at <https://doas.us/webinars/>.

We're Hiring!

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Caprice

a poem by Robert Bensen

I'd stopped the car
to watch the frilly pine and birch unlimber.
Downrange a storm threw flame from a plaster sky
and rain dropped its scrim behind the hills.
Poking from the thick brush of the woods, a twig
under a canopy of green, a fawn stood
just shy of the road. She looked at me so steadily

I looked away. And she was gone. The trees closed ranks
on sparrow's trim complaint, on ovenbird's blues,
on mockingbird who mimicks what he isn't,
on owl who asks the only thing he knows.

The fawn answered all those rimers on her toes,
and improvised a run that was half flight
from the shifty-eyed thing she'd found, and half fun,
her white tail cutting patterns deeper and deeper
in the crosshatched wood, her way graphed
by flowering shad and bridalwreath the dusk had lit
above her trackless path like chandeliers.



White-tailed Deer Fawn
Photo by Janet Potter

Robert Bensen is a retired Hartwick College professor, an Oneonta resident, and member of DOAS. The poem is from his latest book What Lightning Spoke: New & Selected Poems.