



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

A Brief History of DOAS and Golden Eagles

By *DOAS Director Tom Salo*

Golden Eagles have always been rare in the East. Even though their numbers grew through the 1990s and appear stable now, Golden Eagles remain difficult to find in our region.

In 1976, SUNY Oneonta students under the direction of founding member Dr. John New conducted migration counts on Franklin Mountain. During 288 hours of fall surveys, they documented impressive numbers of raptors, including 7 Golden Eagles. In 1989, DOAS organized annual raptor counts at our current site. Within a few years, it became clear the Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch was one of the best sites in the East to see Golden Eagles.

In the early 2000s wind power development was increasing. Golden Eagles had been killed in large numbers at some western projects. Avoiding such impacts to our small eastern population required learning more about migratory and winter concentration areas, and how eagles use terrain and habitats. We surveyed raptors north of Cherry Valley in 2002 to assess a wind project that was ultimately abandoned. We continued to involve ourselves in environmental assessments for other projects.

In 2007 we connected with researchers who eventually formed

the Eastern Golden Eagle Working Group. We financially supported their early efforts at GPS tracking. Using their mapping data to identify concentration areas, we organized a survey along a 3-site transect in Delaware County in early March 2009. Raptor migrants included 31 Golden Eagles and 66 Bald Eagles. The following spring, we conducted a count along a 3-site transect in Otsego County where 47 goldens and 22 Balds were tallied. We are continuing to count, on a sporadic basis each year, at Betty and Wilbur State Park.

In 2009, Dr. Todd Katzner (now with USGS) asked if we would set up winter camera traps for Golden Eagles. After getting licensed to possess road-killed deer, we baited two sites in Otsego County and one in Delaware. It didn't take long for our target species to show up at two sites. Over the following 10 years DOAS volunteers operated 24 sites locally. Every site in Delaware County, and a majority in Otsego, had Goldens during each



Sisu, Golden Eagle
Photo by Peg DiBenedetto

winter season. During 11 years of camera-trapping we fed over 1000 deer carcasses to eagles, ravens, coyotes and other scavengers. We also organized a statewide effort with two dozen additional sites extending from West Point north to the High Peaks and west to Cattaraugus County. The highest concentrations of Goldens were

"Golden Eagles" Continued to page 3

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

DOAS and Golden Eagles..1 & 3
Conservation & Legislation.....2
Optics Raffle.....2
CBC Wrap-up.....4 & 5
Bird Sightings5
Eagle Trip Report.....5
Program Notes.....6
Upcoming Activites7
Great Backyard Bird Count.....8

Conservation and Legislation

By Andy Mason

New York State Environmental Priorities for 2023—The New York State Legislature is back in session and Governor Kathy Hochul has delivered her State of the State message so it is time to consider what can be achieved in Albany this year.

Near the top of every environmental wish list is continued and expanded action on addressing climate change. The state has an ambitious plan in place to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% from 1990 levels by 2030—a mere 7 years away. The same date is the target for 50% of electricity to come from renewable sources.

To help achieve this, a dedicated Climate and Community Protection Fund of at least \$10 billion annually from public and private sectors has been proposed. Not yet existing as legislation, this would provide a sustained source of funding to fully implement the mandates of the climate law.

Governor Hochul did not endorse this proposal in her State of the State speech but did call for a new “Cap and Invest” program that would set an annually declining cap on greenhouse gas



*Air pollution; Photo by Janak Bhatta
Wikimedia Commons*

emissions in the state. Sources of emissions would pay a fee based on the quantity of their pollution, and so would have an incentive to reduce this. Funds generated by the fee—estimated at \$1 billion per year—would go into a statewide consumer rebate fund to support energy efficiency and other energy reduction efforts.

What you can do—Contact the Governor and your state representatives and urge them to push ahead toward New York’s climate goals. Emphasize that this issue touches all aspects of society—extreme weather conditions, public health, the economy, wildlife and habitat, and much more.

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



Get your tickets now for the 2023 Optics Raffle! Help DOAS and enter to win one of three prizes!

\$15 Donation per ticket. Only 300 tickets available. Three winners choose from one Canon SX70 Camera (super-zoom bridge camera with 20 Megapixel resolution) and two pairs of Nikon Monarch binoculars. Drawing will be held on April 21 during our monthly program meeting. Proceeds will benefit the DOAS Sanctuary and Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch. Purchase tickets and more information at <https://doas.us/optics-raffle-2023/>.

**DELAWARE - OTSEGO
AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.**
FOUNDED 1968

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Janet Potter

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Co-Presidents Becky Gretton
Andrew Mason
Treasurer Charlie Scheim
Secretary Dorian Huneke

Directors

Jane Bachman
Nathan Cutting
Kathryn Davino
David Diaz
Susan O’Handley
Landa Palmer
Pamela Peters
Janet Potter
Tom Salo

COMMITTEE CHAIRS* AND ASSIGNMENTS

Conservation*: Andy Mason
Education*: Susan O’Handley
Fundraising*: Dorian Huneke
Hawkwatch*: Andrew Mason
Tom Salo
Hospitality*: Kathryn Davino
Membership*: Janet Potter
Programs*: Becky Gretton
Publicity*: Susan O’Handley
Sanctuary*: Andrew Mason
Bird Counts: Sandy Bright
Charter Dinner: Kathryn Davino
Finance: Gray Mason
Historian: vacant
Sales*: Jane Bachman

ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Delaware Otsego Audubon Society
P.O. Box 544
Oneonta, NY 13820
Email: info@doas.us

ON THE WEB: <https://doas.us/> and
[https://www.facebook.com/
DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety](https://www.facebook.com/DelawareOtsegoAudubonSociety)

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

“Golden Eagles” Continued from page 1
found in Delaware County and the Taconic Mountains.

The regular presence of Golden Eagles at our camera traps made it possible, with support from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, to trap and tag local birds with lightweight solar-powered GPS tracking devices. We trapped 8 Golden Eagles from 2014-2017.

Even though we were well aware of the dangers lead ammunition posed to raptors, we were unprepared for what happened to the first bird we tracked. Within days we stopped getting data. The device manufacturer said we should search her last known location near Hancock. At that place we found the remains of wild boar that had been killed with lead ammunition by hired sharpshooters. A week earlier, one mile away, a Bald Eagle was found dying of lead poisoning. We never located our bird. Our response to this tragedy was an intense effort to educate hunters on the impacts of lead ammunition.

Our tracked birds added a wealth of data to the 90 or 100 others that have been tracked. One bird continues to send data from a 7-year-old device. Our tracking data suggests that concentrations are likely in the more wild parts of the Catskills, and maybe the southern Adirondacks. In these



*Otsego County Golden Eagle
Camera Trap Photo*

forested areas, birders can't see well and no camera traps were operated.

In 2015, using location data from birds we had tagged, DOAS volunteers gathered data for research on Golden Eagle roost habits.

We knew from our camera traps that there were a good number of Golden Eagles wintering in Delaware County. To determine how many could be found in an organized search, we put multiple teams in the field in February 2015 and 2016. We confirmed that it is very hard to find these birds in winter, even when we know they are present because of GPS tracking devices. During two counts, 22 teams found 4 Golden Eagles during 106 team-hours – one for every 26.6 team-hours and 437 miles driven.

This mostly negative data became quite valuable last December when we commented on a new U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service eagle take rule. USFWS proposes to use birder reports to eBird as the sole source of data for mapping Golden Eagles density. These maps reflect the level of risk and determine what will be required of wind developers to obtain a federal take permit. Our winter surveys show that even experienced observers targeting this species have trouble finding Golden Eagles in forested habitat. When eBird data is compared to GPS tracking data, there are huge eBird gaps where this species is concentrated in the Appalachians.

During 2017 and 2018, we conducted independent eagle studies within the proposed Bluestone Wind Project near Deposit. We found an astounding numbers of both species of eagle during our late winter/early spring surveys. The number of birds



*Tom Salo holding a Golden Eagle being
outfitted with a GPS device*

Photo by Walter Putrycz

was so high we sued to stop the project. Our lawsuit failed, though we did manage to force some improvements. Three turbine sites we identified as especially high-risk will be monitored by observers for several years during peak seasons.

Our efforts also resulted in a better Net Conservation Benefit plan. There is no approved mitigation that effectively compensates for Golden Eagles kills in the east. (In the open west, power poles are retrofitted to prevent electrocution.) Because reducing the use of lead ammunition reduces eagle poisonings, we pushed for lead abatement as an experimental alternative. Bluestone Wind is funding both a PhD candidate at Cornell University to conduct a study and a non-lead ammunition distribution program. Starting this year, deer hunters in New York will be given 100,000 rounds of non-lead ammunition over a 5-year period. Data from these hunters will quantify to what degree the distribution of non-lead ammunition compensates for eagle kills from wind projects.

We will continue to advocate for eagles through lobbying, education and data gathering. Our efforts are possible because of our dedicated volunteers and generous members and organizations that support us with time and money.

Christmas Bird Count Wrap-up

Oneonta Christmas Bird Count (CBC) by Sandy Bright

A perfect storm of extenuating circumstances - family commitments, illness and an accident striking at inopportune times, a farm emergency, and a snowstorm that kept some participants snow-bound until afternoon - conspired to wreak havoc on the Oneonta Christmas Bird Count this year. The resulting 2,168 birds counted were less than half the average of about 4,600. Only 39 species were found, nine fewer than average and equal to those in 2013, another year in which weather conditions thwarted survey efforts.

Those who did manage to get out in the morning were greeted by stunning scenery accented by occasional sunshine sparkling off new snow. Unsurprisingly, no records were set. Non-avian finds included a fisher and an otter. A large group of Evening Grosbeaks foraged at one location, and an unkindness of 19 Common Ravens at another. Streams and rivers were open, and, although most still water was frozen, a Great Blue Heron prowled an inlet of Goodyear Lake, four Belted Kingfishers were seen, one at the only open swamp in the CBC area, and a number of waterfowl were present, including several American Black Ducks and a couple of Hooded Mergansers. Those birds likely had better luck finding food than the four American Robins huddled high in a tree above the snow-covered terrain.

Delaware County CBC by Pamela Peters

New Year's Day turned out to be one of the best weather days in the short history of our Delaware County CBC. The warm weather certainly impacted the abundance of certain birds. In a good year we have over 300 Wild Turkey, spread across all the sectors. This year we had 99 found in only 3 sectors. On the other hand, we saw a good number of waterfowl, many at the edges of partially frozen ponds, including two Black Ducks at Ross Gray Pond in Bear Spring Mountain, 37 more were dabbling in the high waters of the Cannonsville at Chase Brook Bridge. Two teams had Hooded Mergansers feeding in small ponds, one accompanied by a Muskrat. The number of both Hooded (28) and Common Mergansers (74) are much higher than previous years. Mallards also had a decent showing with 157. We had a couple of firsts in waterfowl: Ruddy Duck and Gadwall were picked up at the Pepacton. Lance Verderame spotted a Green-winged Teal in Downsville during Count Week, another first for our CBC. A Common Loon was found there as well, the second time for our Count.

Unusual sightings include a Gray Catbird and two Brown-headed Cowbirds. Four Kingfishers were seen in 3 sectors - the highest number for our Count. Landa Palmer and Linda Burkhart spotted a dead mink on the road, and not long after that, a Bald Eagle was perched in a tree clutching that mink.

Early birds Lance Verderame and Renee Davis added an Eastern Screech Owl and Barred Owl before dawn. Kate Yard and Matt



Bald Eagle eating a dead mink
Photo by Landa Palmer

Walter scouted in the Hamden Cemetery and found a Great Horned Owl and a Barred Owl.

A record 41 Tufted Titmice were observed, in part due to some well-stocked bird feeders. Robins are usually rare this time of year, but this year we had four, along with 16 Bluebirds. 17 Ravens, a good number for our group, were seen in nearly every sector. All in all 3,302 total birds and 46 unique species are on par with previous years.

There were some disappointments: a very low number of Goldfinches and few Sparrows were seen, including Juncos. Purple Finches were found by only one team. The elusive Ruffed Grouse was spotted the day after the count, though fresh Grouse scat observed on Count Day told us we had been close.

Fort Plain CBC by Charlie Scheim

The Fort Plain CBC was held on Saturday December 31 with temperatures in the high 30s, generally cloudy skies, 4" of snow on the ground, and occasional light precipitation. Although many counters remarked on the seeming absence of avian life, the group did find over 13,000 birds.

"CBC Wrap-up" Continued to page 5

“CBC Wrap-up ” Continued from page 4

While still waters were generally frozen, streams and the Mohawk River yielded over 3000 Canada Geese and almost 1500 mallards, including a gathering of over 1000 mallards feeding in a recently mown cornfield. Barred, Snowy,

and Eastern Screech Owls were found, and the over 100 raptors seen included a Rough-legged Hawk, a Peregrine Falcon, and 2 Northern Harriers. Besides the predictable crows, chickadees, and blue jays, there were 70 Eastern Bluebirds, 39 American Robins, and a Brown-

headed Cowbird, reminding everyone that birds often do what humans don't expect.

Complete results, current and past, for both Oneonta and Delaware County CBCs are on our web site at <https://doas.us/bird-counts/>.

Many thanks to all the CBC counters: Elliott Adams, Jane Bachman, Sandy Bright, Linda Burkhart, Cindy Campbell, Kay Crane, Kathryn, Renee Davis, Bob Donnelly, Janice Downie, Mark Fitzsimmons, Marianne Frier, Margot Graham, Becky Gretton, Judy Heintz, Maryanne Kehoe, Ann Kiehm, Dave Kiehm, Carol and Randy Lynch, Kevin McGann, Kathy Mario, Andy and Gray Mason, Matt Montgomery, Paul Novak, Jim Otto, Landa Palmer, Linda Pearce, Pam Peters, Jean Petterson, Meg Preston, Bill Purcell, Tom and Laurie Rankin, Steph and Danielle Restuccia, Tom and Jo Salo, Charlie Scheim, Cindy Staley, Suzanne Summers, Kevin Toomey, Kelly Toomey, Lance Verderame, Matt Walter, Katherine Walters, Kate Yard, Hannelore Young.

December—January Bird Sightings

By Sandy Bright

In center city, Oneonta, it's rare to encounter owls, but in mid-December a pair of Great Horned Owls were singing their courtship duet one evening. Barb Palmer photographed two Bald Eagles interacting on the ground, seeming to consider whether a large stick was right for their nest. Evening Grosbeaks continue, with Lyle Morrison reporting over 30 visiting his feeders in Westford over a period of a couple of weeks.

In early January, Randy and Carol Lynch spotted 42 Black Vul-

tures in Canajoharie and a nearly all-white leucistic hawk, probably a Red-tail, outside of Sharon Springs. Eileen Kline watched four Eastern Bluebirds dropping in and out of trees in her yard. In Oneonta, Charlie Scheim captured some photos of a Northern Mockingbird perched on a cable, which then dropped down to forage in our berry-laden holly bush.

Canadarago Lake is a magnet for some species in winter. On the 7th, Tom and Jo Salo found hundreds of Common, Hooded, and



Two Bald Eagles with Stick
Photo by Barb Palmer

a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers; 14 Bald Eagles; a handful of Ring-necked Ducks; 60 Common Goldeneye; and a light Rough-legged Hawk. Bounty like that is worth the trip in mid-winter.



Barred Owl Seen on DOAS Eagle Trip
Photo by Jennifer Hyypio

Sucessful January 14 Eagle Trip

By Andy Mason

Seventeen Bald Eagles made appearance for the eight participants on the field trip to Delaware County rivers and reservoirs. Waters were open all along the route from Delhi to Deposit to Downsville, with birds scattered throughout. Best views were a close eye-level adult bird between Delhi and Walton, and a pair of adults sitting shoulder to shoulder in Deposit.

The group also spotted a Barred Owl near the Delaware County landfill, several Red-tailed Hawks, and a variety of waterfowl including Canada Geese, Mallards, Gadwalls, Common Mergansers, Black Ducks and Ring-necked Ducks.

The trip concluded with a tasty lunch and good camaraderie.

February 17 Zoom Program: Symbolic Meaning of Birds to the Unangan Inuit People

On February 17, 2023 at 7:30 p.m., Debra Corbett will present “Symbolic Meaning of Birds to the Unangan Inuit People” via Zoom. Debbie is a retired archaeologist from Anchorage, Alaska.

Unangan Aleut people of the Aleutian Islands relied on birds for food, clothing, and tools. Beyond these every day needs birds, especially seabirds, were sentient beings interacting with humans in meaningful ways, potent sources of power, and imbued with spiritual meanings. Debra Corbett will briefly introduce the Unangan Aleut and their homeland, show some ways birds were used in daily life, then explore some aspects of this relationship between birds and the Unangan people.

Debra Corbett has worked as an archaeologist with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and eventually

became the Regional Historic Preservation Officer responsible for cultural resources on all the wildlife refuges in Alaska. She retired in December 2013 and has been working as a heritage consultant through her company, Nanutset Heritage.

Her obsession with the Aleutian Islands began in High School when she read Hector Chevigny’s *Russian America*. His image of islands “greenly beautiful, with grass that grows so long it overhangs the cliffs into the surf,” electrified her. During graduate school at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, her advisor gave her a phone number and said “This crazy bird biologist in Kansas wants to find an Aleutian Archaeologist. Call him.” That bird biologist was Dr. Douglas Causey, who presented our February 2022 program, “Bering Seabirds and Environmental Change.” From



*Debra Corbett Taking Photos on Rat Island
Contributed Photo*

1991 to 2003 she worked with Dr. Causey and Dr. Christine Lefevre. Along the way she and the crew experienced the best and the worst the Aleutians have to offer, shipwreck, injury, laughter, frustration, fear, transcendent joy, and unbelievable archaeology.

Registration required; click on event at: <https://doas.us/calendar/>.

Mark Your Calendars for the March Program: Young Forest Birds and Young Forest Management

On March 17, 2023 at 7:30 p.m., “Young Forest Birds and Young Forest Management in NY and the Northeast,” presented by Roger Masse via Zoom at 7:30 p.m. Dr. Masse currently works as an associate professor of wildlife management at SUNY Cobleskill. He is particularly interested in bird ecology and management with an emphasis on American woodcock and other young forest



*Roger Masse
Photo from SUNY Cobleskill*

birds. During this presentation, Dr. Masse will discuss aspects of the ecology and management of young forest birds, gearing his presentation so that landowners, birdwatchers, and other nature enthusiasts can better understand the need for active management of these species and their habitat. Registration required; click on event at <https://doas.us/calendar/>.

Upcoming Activities

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 15 – Earth Festival at the Milford School.

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. at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta. Optics Raffle drawing after the program.

May

May 16 – DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

May 19 – DOAS Public Program: “Trip to Antarctica” presented by Pam Lea at 7:30 p.m. at the Elm Park United Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta.

May Field Trips to the Greenway in Oneonta and to the DOAS Sanctuary on Franklin Mountain are being scheduled now. Watch this space for more details next month and plan to join us for in-person birding.

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

We're Hiring!

Camp Co-Directors
(2 positions)
for DOAS
Summer 2023



APPLICATION DEADLINE FEBRUARY 17, 2023
DETAILS AT WWW.DOAS.US

ROD SPANGLE ANTIQUES
Unadilla, NY

ANTIQUE CLOCK REPAIR
SINCE 1984

NAWCC 8617

BY APPOINTMENT (607) 369-7619



**Support Rod Spangle,
Antique Clock Repair in
Unadilla,** a business sponsor
who supports our Chapter's
Programs and Activities.

**SUPPORT THOSE WHO
SUPPORT DOAS!**

Bird-Friendly Coffee

Want to order coffee? Email your order to jbachwim60@gmail.com or call 607-431-9509. Payment is due at the time of delivery. Cash, checks and credit cards are accepted. More at <http://doas.us/bird-friendly-coffee/>

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.



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.
PO BOX 544, ONEONTA, NY 13820
<https://doas.us/>



For four days each February, the world comes together for the love of birds. To celebrate birds, participants watch, learn about, and count birds during the Great Backyard Bird Count, organized by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada. Over the four days from February 17th to the 20th,

2023 Great Backyard Bird Count

people are invited to spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them. These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before the spring migration.

Participants are asked to count birds they see or hear for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event. The count should be reported online with participants choosing eBird or another

tool at www.birdcount.org. 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.

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. Learn more at: <https://www.birdcount.org/>.

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!