



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

March Program: What can Wolf Spiders tell us about the Ecosystem, Evolution and Animal Communication?

By Becky Gretton

Dr. Alex Sweger will speak to the question: "What can Wolf Spiders tell us about the Ecosystem, Evolution and Animal Communication?" at the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society's Public Program via Zoom on Friday, March 15, 2024 at 7:30 p.m.

Registration is required at <https://doas.us/events/wolf-spiders/>

Spiders are a diverse group of animals which occupy a central location in the food webs of nearly every terrestrial ecosystem on Earth. In forest, field, and agricultural systems, wolf spiders are a major predator of small insects, as well as food for larger vertebrate animals, and their sensory and communication systems have adapted to the intricacies of these interactions. Not only do they play an important role as

both predators and prey, they also exhibit complex behaviors and mating systems, which raises interesting questions about how both their physical and social environments have shaped their evolution. This talk will provide an overview of spider biology and ecology, with a focus on a series of different projects, all involving undergraduate student researchers. These studies serve as examples of how wolf spiders can be used to answer questions about how the environment can shape the evolution of animal communication signals, and how synthetic pesticides can have unintended effects on an ecosystem.

Dr. Alex Sweger is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Hartwick College and specializes in behavioral ecology and arachnology. His work



Wolf Spider
Photo by Dr. Alex Sweger

investigates issues in sensory ecology and behavior, using primarily wolf spiders as model organisms. His research questions include the evolution of sexual communication, predator-prey interactions, bioacoustics, and ecosystem-level interactions between spiders and their surrounding communities. He joined the Hartwick College faculty in the Fall of 2023, and has worked with students previously at the University of Cincinnati, Susquehanna University, and Union College.

Mark your Calendars for the April Program

By Becky Gretton

Join us on April 19, 2024 for an in-person evening with Rick Bunting! **PLEASE NOTE that for this program we will gather at 7 p.m at Foothills Performing Arts Center**, 24 Market St. in Oneonta. You will enter Foothills through the door of the brick building; follow the signage to the nearby elevator and upstairs. There is lots of seating, so spread the word!



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Conservation and Legislation

by Andy Mason

Legislature back in Session

The New York State legislature has reconvened for its 2024 session with a number of positive environmental bills on tap. This is an election year, with all legislators facing the voters this fall. This generally brings a tendency to avoid doing anything that might upset a segment of the public, such as passing meaningful legislation. But it also provides an opportunity to demonstrate to office holders that they are being watched and will be held accountable.

Some of the positive bills that have been introduced:

Fracking 2.0 - Several years ago, New York State banned the practice of hydrofracking for production of natural gas. This followed a concerted effort by the environmental community, and particularly those concerned about climate change, to keep this technique from harming ground and surface waters and from increasing the supply of methane, a dangerous greenhouse gas.

Since then, the drilling industry has proposed fracking with CO₂, claiming it would reduce the underground risks. However, the geologic changes of cracking bedrock remain, as does the impact of leaking and burning a fossil fuel on an already precariously warming planet. This is also in direct conflict with the state's commitment to reduce reliance on these fuels.

A.8866/S.8357 would extend the

existing ban on fracking to include the use of CO₂ in gas and oil extraction.

Shifting the recycling burden -

Legislation has been put forth to shift the financial burden of managing packaging waste from taxpayers to the producers that put it on the market. This would have financial benefits as well as significantly reducing packaging and plastic waste produced in the state. A.5322-B/S.4246-B would promote post-consumer materials in packaging, support reusable packaging alternatives, and ban toxic chemicals in packaging.

NY HEAT Act - Present state regulations encourage continued use and even expansion of the use of natural gas in NY. This conflicts with state law and policy to reduce fossil fuel use dramatically in coming years. A.4592-B/S.2016-B would amend Public Service Law to remove the legal basis and subsidies driving expanded gas systems and requires the Public Service Commission to adopt rules and develop a transition plan consistent with decreasing gas reliance.

What You Can Do - Information on these bills and other environmental legislation is available from Environmental Advocates, the best conservation organization monitoring and influencing Albany officials. They can be found at www.eany.org.

Government contact information may be found in the Advocacy section of our website, doas.us.

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

Accessibility Update

By the Accessibility Committee

The Accessibility Committee has been busy developing ideas and prioritizing plans that meet our accessibility goals. Integrating accessibility into the design and management of natural spaces ensures that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can enjoy and benefit from the therapeutic and recreational aspects of nature. We have made strides in meeting this overall goal and we are now ready to take on a new project.

The portable toilet at the Sanctuary now has a nice level entrance, and is large enough to support a wheeled device. We plan to enclose the structure with a three-sided barrier to make it less obtrusive. A number of resting benches have been added in the area of the Hawkwatch, and our new interpretive signs have a QR code for anyone who may need to have the information read or translated. We have also incorporated more descriptions into DOAS announcements of activities and programs so everyone knows what to expect. The date, time, and place of the event may not be enough to support those with mobility or other issues. Announcements now include information about the physical accessibility of the location, what the site will be like, how hard it is to navigate, and whether there are bathroom facilities available.

This year we are planning a new



*Wetland at the Audubon Sanctuary
Photo by Andy Mason*

project at the Sanctuary on Grange Hall Road to improve access to the wetland. We want to create a space for all to engage with and enjoy at the Sanctuary. This plan includes creating an accessible parking space and a new entrance path. The path will provide access to a viewing platform, as well as to the portable toilet. The viewing platform will be wheelchair accessible and will include seating benches. It will overlook the wetland, and offer views up the hill towards the Hawkwatch, and into the surrounding woods. We hope to complete the project by Fall 2024 in time for the Open House.

This is a large project and we will need the help of our members and friends! Please let us know if you can offer financial assistance or help with clearing, construction, or whatever else your skill set may offer. If you want to learn more about this project, please be in touch with Landa Palmer, landavpalmer@gmail.com

If you would like to contribute funds towards this project, you can donate through the DOAS website (<https://doas.us/donate/>) and write "Sanctuary Improvement" in the designation.

Bird-friendly Coffee and more!

By Jane Bachman

Even though our in-person programs are limited to a few each year, you can still support DOAS - and purchase great coffees, DOAS mugs and FMHW hats - by contacting Jane Bachman (jbachwim60@gmail.com) regarding purchase and pick up from her porch in Oneonta.

Visit the website for details at <https://doas.us/shop/>



*Photo by
Jane
Bachman*

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.

Audubon's New Strategic Plan

By Susan O'Handley, DOAS Director

In 2022, I stepped down from the Executive Committee at DOAS in order to take a board position on the Audubon NY/CT Council Board to support chapters and their work across NY and CT. Then, in the Fall of 2023, I was invited to join the National Audubon NY/CT Regional Advisory Board as the Chapter Representative for NY, which I accepted. Being a new board member at the state/regional level has meant trying to get up to speed on all the things going on and become acquainted with the many people who are working behind the scenes to make things happen. In November, I met with Senior Communications Manager Sharon Bruce to talk about their processes and challenges. In January, I attended a sub-committee meeting for the Forest Program, led by Suzanne Treyger, and another for Community Conservation, overseen by Jillian Bell. The work being done is inspiring and proactive, peppered in with some very ambitious goals for measurable impacts over the next 4 years as part of the new strategic plan from National Audubon. 'Flight Plan' (2023-2028) is gearing up towards the implementation phase, which is expected to begin later this year.

In February, I attended my first in-person Board Meeting in Albany where I was able to meet a number of NY/CT Program Staff, Audubon Center Staff from throughout the region, and other Advisory Board members from both CT and NY. Mike Burger, Executive Director of Audubon Connecticut and New York, shared details about 'Flight Plan' and the work which is scheduled to be undertaken over the next few years. This is the nutshell version.

Based on the frightening data of the

3 *Billion Birds* report by Ken Rosenberg (a fellow new advisory board member), et. al. in 2019, 'Flight Plan' broadens the focus of Audubon bird conservation to a hemispheric approach, recognizing that in order to significantly improve the chance for our birds to survive and thrive, conservation needs to happen throughout the Americas. Priority geographies and species (a combination of both resident and migratory birds) have been identified for habitat protection and restoration work with a goal of conserving "300 million acres of quality, connected and climate-resilient bird habitat". This is where the bulk of our regional activities will occur over the next four years through the following four program initiatives:

- Coastal and Marine Resilience (habitat restoration, protection, stewardship and management, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging partnerships and hemispheric science strategies)
- Urban Conservation (career pathways, native plant partnerships, environmental justice policy, education, green spaces and urban forest strategies)
- Water for Birds and People (connecting science, policy and advocacy to ensure clean and abundant water in rivers, lakes, streams, wetlands and marshes that are critical to survival)
- Wings Over Working Lands (restoration and enhancements, building local capacity, forestry market-based programs, bird-friendly best management practices and bird-friendly forest management)

These programs will integrate with goals for natural climate solutions and



work towards proper siting for renewable energy. Also supporting regional goals is the work being done for the 'Healthy Birds, Healthy Planet Policy Agenda'. Erin McGrath, Policy Manager (NY) is a dynamo. She understands both the science and the politics and is able to clearly articulate at both levels extremely well (I tip my hat). Work on the policy agenda includes support for core level bird protection policies (like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and others), as well as ensuring that financing for bird conservation through the Environmental Protection Fund and the Bond Act and Clean Water infrastructure is fully supported and funded. In addition to this there is work surrounding healthy forest initiatives, the 25 million trees program and landowner incentives; freshwater wetlands reform, Great Lakes initiatives, coastal resiliency; dark skies, bird-friendly buildings and green roofs programs; and of course responsible energy siting and support for natural climate solutions.

This work represents a significant effort (and I've left a lot out here): work that is enhanced through collaborations with partners, and that achieves success through support from chapters and each of our respective networks throughout the US.

If anyone has questions, please reach out to me at s.ohandley@doas.us. If there are many who are interested in learning more, I will happily set up a Zoom program for a group.

Wintry Woodpecker Drumming: Hopeful Sounds of Spring

By Becky Gretton, Co-President

On the morning of February 11 I heard repeated woodpecker drumming as I sat inside my house and realized that this had been happening for at least a week. It originated from across a nearby field, so the sound was strong. I researched this behavior and learned a lot about drumming and the messages it may send.

A woodpecker pecks sporadically to excavate trees for carpenter ants, beetle larvae or other forms of protein. Drumming is a woodpecker's version of singing, sending messages to other individuals, including male-to-female communication for mating purposes and male-to-male for territoriality. Both male and female woodpeckers drum, mainly in the springtime. Some sources suggest that males drum more frequently than females.

My research led to many facts about woodpeckers, such as how they anatomically avoid brain



*Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Photo by Landa Palmer*

damage, included in a Cornell Lab Bird Academy series of video lessons:
<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/built-to-peck-how-woodpeckers-avoid-brain-injury/> .

Identifying woodpecker drumming can be a challenging way to identify species. Some are unique, such as the Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers' rhythmic signaling, typically broadcast from a resonating surface such as a gutter, metal road sign, or hollow tree, with

only slight variations. Downy Woodpeckers drum more slowly than Hairy Woodpeckers. Other woodpecker drumming can be difficult to identify without a sighting. Enjoy this quick podcast from National Audubon to compare Downy, Sapsucker, and Pileated woodpeckers:

<https://www.audubon.org/news/hearer-differing-drumbeats-woodpeckers>

We are encouraged to protect woodpecker habitat. Resist the urge to remove dead trees from your woods, for they are a valuable food source and nesting site. If you have a structure being drilled upon, please look into the many solutions that will keep the birds safe:

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/why-do-woodpeckers-like-to-hammer-on-houses-and-what-can-i-do-about-it/> .

Spring behaviors are well under way in the world of woodpeckers. I hope you all have the opportunity to witness some of them around your homes in the vernal weeks ahead.

Waterfowl Count Results

By Andy Mason

The Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society section of the statewide waterfowl count was held the weekend of January 13-14, 2024. Areas covered include: Otsego Lake and tributaries; upper Cherry Valley Creek; West Branch Delaware River, Walton to Deposit; Cannonsville Reservoir; Canadarago Lake watershed; Unadilla River and tributaries, Leonardsville to Sidney; Susquehanna River, Goodyear Lake dam to lower Unadilla bridge; Ouleout Creek to East Sidney Lake; West Branch Delaware River, Delhi to Walton; and Susquehanna River, Otsego Lake to Goodyear Lake dam. The count was notable for almost completely open waterways, including small ponds. As usual, highest numbers and variety were found on Otsego and Canadarago Lakes and the Cannonsville Reservoir and river below.

Other species of interest include: Bald Eagles, Great-blue Herons, Belted Kingfisher, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls, Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawks, American Robin, Rough-legged Hawk, Eastern Bluebirds, Northern Shrike, Peregrine Falcon.

Continued on page 7

December-February Bird Sightings

By Sandy Bright

In late December Rick Bunting found a small flock of Red Crossbills near Unadilla. His photo of a female illustrates how well their bills are adapted for prying open conifer cones to reach the seeds.

Conducting a winter raptor survey in the Treadwell-Meredith area, Pam Peters and Linda Burkhart observed 20 raptors, including Red-tailed Hawks, Bald Eagles, Kestrels, and a Northern Harrier, with a bonus of two Belted Kingfishers and a Carolina Wren. In January, Pam spotted two Rough-legged Hawks hunting on farms near Treadwell.

Robins seemed more numerous this winter, with quite a few reports coming in from various locations. Two dozen Brown-headed Cowbirds visited Gerianne Carillo's feeder in Milford. A few days later Andy Mason noted "I guess the cowbird invasion has reached Oneonta" as he counted 40-50 that morning.

Winter often brings a variety of waterfowl that spend their breeding season elsewhere. Bob Ciganek found a juvenile Common Loon on Pine Lake; checking out that report Charlie Scheim and I found the loon with a Bald Eagle perched nearby. This was likely the same loon found on the Christmas Bird Count by Bob Donnelly. Tom Salo discovered some Common Goldeneyes and a large group of scaup on Canadarago Lake on January 6th. Pete Fenner later confirmed a mix of Greater and Lesser Scaup, plus two



*Female Red Crossbill
Photo by Rick Bunting*

Common Loons, many Common Mergansers, and other waterfowl.

Randy Lynch photographed a group of Horned Larks gritting on the roadside in Harpersfield, and days later saw a Peregrine Falcon on Cannonsville Reservoir.

Gerianne Carillo observed nature at its most exciting when a Cooper's Hawk, a squirrel, and a crow found themselves in an awkward situation near her feeders. The squirrel was frozen in place, about a yard from the hawk. "Turning its back would be a deadly move... the squirrel did the only thing it could: it went for the hawk, which retreated to another tree, scaring a nearby crow. The Cooper attacked the crow, and there was a scuffle," reported Gerianne. The hawk flew away; no feeder snacks for it that day.

Barb Palmer spotted a tiny bird and managed to get a good enough photo to identify a Winter Wren (Jefferson). In late January, Gerianne Carillo reported Pine Siskins in droves at her feeders. Randy Lynch started seeing Red-winged Blackbirds every day in the

second week of February.

While it's hard for us humans to imagine, with a chill in the air and snow on the ground, mid-winter is the time for some birds to prepare for breeding season and for a few to actually begin procreation. Toward that end, they can be quite aggressive when defending breeding territories. Tom Salo's neighbor called him to report seeing eagles fighting; upon investigation he found a small dead adult Bald Eagle about a mile from the local pair's nest. After examining the "crime scene" he theorized that the local female killed an interloping male.

Rick Bunting reported Eastern Bluebirds already checking out potential breeding accommodations and a Common Raven carrying nesting material. Barb Palmer heard a Great Horned Owl pair calling back and forth. The spring songs of Tufted Titmice and Dark-eyed Juncos and the drumming of woodpeckers are a welcome reminder that spring is not far off.



*Horned Larks
Photo by Randy Lynch*

"Waterfowl Count Results' continued

Thanks to the participants: Bob Donnelly, Becky Gretton, Laura Kilty, Pam Lea, Deb Miller, Kay Crane, Carol Lynch, Randy Lynch, Tom Salo, Jo Ann Salo, Joe Branco, Susan Brunswick, Charlie Cummins, Andy Mason, Bill Carbine, Italo Bironi, David Diaz. Complete results are below.

Horned Grebe 1	Scaup sp. 26
Canada Goose 1630	Long-tailed Duck 1
Wood Duck 2	Bufflehead 188
Gadwall 12	Common Goldeneye 229
American Black Duck 26	Hooded Merganser 177
Mallard 212	Common Merganser 1680
Green-winged Teal 10	Red-breasted Merganser 7
Ring-necked Duck 48	Common Loon 1
Greater Scaup 7	Am. Coot 35
Lesser Scaup 81	TOTAL 4373



Ring-necked Duck
Photo by John Heidecker
<http://johnheidecker.smugmug.com/>



Hooded Mergansers
Photo by Landa Palmer

Upcoming Activities

March

March 5 - DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

March 15- DOAS Public Program: 7:30 p.m., via Zoom, "What can Wolf Spiders tell us about the Ecosystem, Evolution and Animal Communication?" presented by Dr. Alex Sweger (see article, page 1). Registration is required at <https://doas.us/events/wolf-spiders/>

March 23 - Field trip to Montezuma NWR with Chris DeCesare (see article on page 8)

April

April 14 - Parslow Road Woodcock Walk with Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright and the Otsego Land Trust

April 16 - DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m

April 19 - DOAS Public Program: In-person program featuring Rick Bunting. **PLEASE NOTE program will start at 7:00 p.m at Foothills PAC** (see article on page 1)

April 20- Earthfest, Milford NY, including a Bird Walk in Riddell Park with Bob Donnelly

May

May 11 - Oneonta Susquehanna Greenway Walk with Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright

May 15 - Riddell Park Walk with Suzanne Gaynor & Sarah Root

May 17 - DOAS Public Program: 7:30 p.m at Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street; "Bringing the Endangered American Burying Beetle back to New York" presented by Dr. Carmen Greenwood, Professor and Insect Ecologist at SUNY Cobleskill

May 18 - DOAS Big Day- Charlie Scheim, coordinator

May 21 - DOAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m.

May 25 - West Branch Preserve with Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright

May 29 - Pine Lake with Suzanne Gaynor and Sarah Root

June

June 8 - Roxbury location with Jeanne Ellsworth, Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright

Additional trips are in the works, so check this space next month!

In Case You Missed It — Past Webinars Are Available Online at <https://doas.us/webinars/>.

DOAS PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



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Box 544,
Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.

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Montezuma NWR and Wetlands Trip

By Chris DeCesare

Join us on Saturday March 23rd for a birding field trip to Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge and the adjacent Wetlands Complex to view migratory waterfowl and shorebirds on their annual journey north to their breeding grounds. The area is comprised of 50,000 acres of wetlands and upland habitat north of Cayuga Lake and is a globally significant Important Bird Area because of the number of waterfowl that stop there during migration season. Past sightings include a variety of ducks, snow geese, swans, bald eagles, herons, and sandhill cranes.

Participants can plan to meet at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters at 10:00 a.m. Those wishing to carpool can meet at the Dietz Street Parking Lot across from the YMCA in Oneonta at 7:30 a.m.

The trip will begin at the refuge headquarters and then proceed by car to hotspots around the complex. There may be a small amount of walking on level ground; restrooms are available at the refuge headquarters. There is no charge for admission.

This is an all-day trip with an expected return to Oneonta around 5:00 p.m. Participants should plan on bringing a bag lunch, snacks, water, etc. For more details, contact Chris DeCesare at 607-244-5496 or chris.decesare444@gmail.com.