



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

What is Your Story about Birds?

Introduction by Landa Palmer

I have been helping with our DOAS Facebook page. To make it a more interactive experience, I posted the following questions: "What is your story about birds? Often, we are asked why we love our birds. What do you think? How has birding been a part of your life? Want to share?"

We are grateful that Marilyn Babcock, a bird lover and member of DOAS, responded with the following story. Marilyn states, "It brought to mind something my mother (who inspired my love of birds) asked me to write down for her some years ago when she was in her 80s".

Follow the DOAS Facebook page by looking up Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society (<https://www.facebook.com/DelawareOtsegoAudubon>).

Birds of a Feather: A Retired Universalist Minister and a Black-haired Girl

By Agnes Mereness (1923-2011), as told to Marilyn Babcock as part of a celebration at the Beard's Hollow Church in honor of the memory of Dr. John Van Schaick (1873-1949)

In the mid-1930s there was a lot I didn't know. I didn't know that humans, like birds, come in a variety of forms and shapes, natures and interests. I didn't know the value to a young girl of coming upon an elder who is a bird of a feather - who recognizes the child's nature and interests - who honors the girl's uniqueness and who is genuine, kind, and encouraging. Dr. John Van Schaick was such an elder to me and I thank him.

I was 10 or 11 one hot Sunday in 1934 or 35 when my father, Fenton R. Mereness, stopped the car at a house in Beard's Hollow where an old

gentleman, a retired minister, Daddy said, was sitting alone on his porch. He was a very tall man. Distinguished. Impressive. We three sat on the porch. I assumed my expected role, to be seen and not heard. Dr. John watched the birds and talked to Daddy. I watched Dr. John as though through field glasses. His movements, his speech, his gentleness. The things he knew about birds and his enthusiasm mesmerized me.

My father and Dr. John apparently noticed black-haired little me gawking in fascination because the next thing I knew I was drinking in

Continued on page 2



*Agnes Mereness with her father and little brother in the 1940s
Photo provided by Marilyn Babcock*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Birds of a Feather	1-2
Conservation & Legislation	3
Board of Directors Election	3
Co-President's Column	4
Riddell Park Walk	4
Bird Sightings	5-6
Audubon Camp	6
DOAS Big Day 2024.....	6
Upcoming Activities	7
Woodcock Walk	8

everything Dr. John could tell me — He was talking right to ME! Answering MY questions! I was seen and heard! — He told me about his birdhouses, the birds, their nests, their habits, their songs. It was mid-summer and there were field birds — I'd never seen them! Bobolinks, meadowlarks, bluebirds. And swallows; lots of swallows.

Back home in Cobleskill, in the village, I began to see birds that had always been there but that I had never even noticed — blue jays, chickadees, cardinals. I had uncovered a whole new world of flying creatures and a fascination that fit my nature. It wasn't me trying to force-fit myself into other people's interests. I had struck upon something that interested me in my soul and I had Dr. John to teach me about it.

The old clergyman recognized my enthusiasm. Looking back I suspect that perhaps on some level, he could see that I felt different, like I didn't quite fit the family mold. I of course didn't realize it at the time, but Dr. John helped me begin to see that I was a different kind of bird; that I have my own nature, my individuality; that different isn't wrong; and that it takes all kinds. He never said any of this, of course. The birds said it, and the time and acceptance he gave to me said it, too.

For the next few summers Daddy would make a special effort to take me to sit on the porch with Dr. John. Dr. John was kind, rather formal, and ever willing to talk with me about our mutual interest, the birds.



Dr. John
Van Schaick
Jr.
Photo
provided by
Marilyn
Babcock

He in his way, was a unique bird, and I in mine, and he encouraged me. That such a distinguished man spoke to 10, 11, 12-year-old me; that he respected me and valued my company, made me feel special.

On August 24, 1936, one such Beard's Hollow afternoon, Dr. John Van Schaick autographed a dazzling, brand new 1936 hard-cover full-color boxed edition of *American Land Birds* by Alice E. Ball, illustrated by R. Bruce Hornsfall. He gave it to me. It was a gift. For me. It was a book with box to put it in! I'd never seen a book that came in a box like that. It made me feel very important. The book was a treasure to me — and still is.

For years and years I have cherished the gifts Dr. John gave me: the beautiful book, *American Land Birds*, and the life-long hobby, bird watching. Now that I am older I have come to recognize an even higher gift. He was able to see my delight, he recognized me as a bird-of-a-feather, and he helped me know that I, like all persons and all birds, have a unique spark, my own individuality, and it deserves companionship and honoring. Dr. John gave me that richest of all gifts, and I thank him.

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Founded 1968

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

Conservation and Legislation

By **Andy Mason**

Plastics—Can't Live with Them; Can't Live without Them

Plastics and birds are not a good combination. Birds—particularly at sea—are killed by ingesting plastics, often mistaking it for food, and by entanglement in plastic debris. An estimated 17.6 billion pounds of plastic enters the oceans annually. And this is cumulative—it is virtually indestructible, so the quantity builds up year after year.

If plastic does degrade it doesn't go away. It just becomes smaller particles, even down to nano-size that can penetrate cell membranes. There is a scary statistic that humans ingest the equivalent of five plastic dice each month. We inhale it, drink it and eat it—and the same for birds.

All of the world's major oceans now contain a plastics gyre—a large swirling mass of floating plastic. The most extensive of these is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, estimated to cover 620,000 square miles. Much of this material is microplastics, while 92% of the mass of the patch consists of larger objects which have not yet fragmented into these smaller pieces. Some of the plastic in the patch is over 50 years old.

Ingestion of plastic is a serious threat to marine birds such as albatrosses, shearwaters, petrels and others.



Gannets with plastic nets
Photo by Andi Tyros
Wikimedia

Plastic can block digestive systems and compromise endocrine function, leading to death. Ingesting plastic also distracts birds from real food with resulting health decline. Some sea birds regurgitate plastic to feed their young.

Plastics in string form such as fishing line and nets wrap around birds and restrict movement, often preventing flight. Fishing monofilament, designed for transparency and long life, is a threat to both fresh and salt water birds. Many species see thread-like plastics as potential nesting material. Once at the nest, this tangled line endangers both adult birds and nestlings.

What you can do—Eliminating all plastic is an impossibility—it is used in nearly every aspect of human society, and can serve good purposes. The main culprit is packaging—particularly single-use items such as water and soda bottles, film wrap such as in bags, containers, squeeze

packets, etc. Plastics recycling eliminates only a tiny fraction of the waste, despite ads and PR to the contrary from the industry. There has been some progress in reducing plastic packaging, such as New York State's ban on plastic shopping bags, but plastic use—and waste—is expected to increase in coming years.

Legislation has been introduced at both the state and federal level to require manufacturers to take back and responsibly handle their packaging. In New York, a bill to allow diners to bring their own containers to restaurants for leftovers—somehow inexplicably illegal—is before the legislature.

And of course we can make our own efforts to reduce plastics by avoiding plastic packaging in the first place when possible, by using bulk foods, by choosing paper or cardboard packaging, by using refillable bottles, etc.

Let your lawmakers in Albany and Washington know that plastic waste is a threat to birds and humans alike and to make plastic producers and manufacturers responsible for the material and packaging they create.

The Oneonta Reuse Center recycles styrofoam and plastic film, among other items; see details at <https://www.arcotsego.org/otsego-reuse-center/>

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

DOAS Election Results

By **Landa Palmer**

The DOAS Nominating Committee presented a slate of seven candidates for election to the Board of Directors at the May 17th annual meeting. Included were incumbents Becky Gretton, Andy Mason, Charlie Scheim, Tom Salo, and Jane Bachman, as well as new candidates Nancy New and Shirley Salton. The entire slate of nominees was elected.

We welcome our new directors to the Board; at the same time, we offer our heartfelt thanks to departing director Dorian Huneke for her service to the Board.

Co-President's Column

By Andy Mason

As always, our Audubon Chapter is a busy organization, with lots going on that doesn't always get reported in the newsletter or otherwise become apparent to the membership. Here are a few ongoing activities that you may or may not know about:

- We regularly respond to inquiries from the public on a variety of subjects. These include questions about field guides, binoculars, bird identification—and at this time of year—abandoned or injured birds and other wildlife. We provide information as best we can—directing callers to wildlife rehabilitators, assuring them their hummingbirds will likely come back—just be patient, etc.
- We are assisting the Otsego Land Trust in planning for bird houses on one of their properties, for which they received a generous grant. In addition, DOAS board members led two field trips for OLT this spring.
- Board member Susan O'Handley is also serving on the board of the Audubon Council of New York State, the umbrella group for all of New York's Audubon Chapters.
- Data from the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch is being used as part of the Raptor Population Index, a long-term analysis of raptor population trends across North America.
- We are working on a packet of information for new board members to help get them up to speed with our procedures and practices.
- We will be installing bird houses with students at Valley View School in Oneonta along a nature

trail created and maintained for a number of years by earlier classes.

In more visible activities, it is great to read the extensive lineup of field trips scheduled this spring and summer. Charlie Scheim made a concerted and successful effort to recruit trip leaders and organize the outings.

Also, it is heartening to see the return of the Summer Day Camp at the Audubon Sanctuary. Among this year's campers are children of some of the campers from the early days of the camp named for John New. The generations keep coming along! Kudos to Susan O'Handley and Chris DeCesare for their efforts.

We appreciate the support of our members that makes these initiatives possible.

May 15 Walk at Riddell Park

By Sarah Root with Suzanne Gaynor

Despite the constant light rain, four people showed up for the birdwalk at Lower Riddell State Park. The short rail trail, followed by a grassy path through a thicket along Schenevus Creek, kept us busy with a variety of songbirds.

The top sighting was a Veery at very close range in the open for a full minute or two; it may have been a curious first year bird, since this species is typically more elusive. It

flew off with a second Veery.

We also watched a Spotted Sandpiper that seemed to be establishing its territory along a sandbar and small log, passing back and forth many times. Then it flew directly toward the group and continued upstream.

Many Chestnut-sided Warblers were readily visible as we enjoyed the calls of Black and White Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher and Eastern



Veery

*Photo by Sandra Rothenberg
Audubon Photography Awards*

Kingbirds from different nearby habitats. Only about 20 species total, but that seemed pretty good for a rainy day!

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.

April-May Bird Sightings

By Sandy Bright

Love was in the air in mid-April. As we watched, one Blue Jay fed another and a handsome male cardinal twice fed our resident white-headed female in preparation for her 4th breeding season here. 6-year-old granddaughter Taylor exclaimed, "It looks like they're kissing!"

A Merlin demanded my attention from its perch in Oneonta's west end, and in our center-city neighborhood a pair of these falcons disappeared into a spruce tree, perhaps checking out an old crow's nest? Sarah Root has front row seats to a breeding pair of Pileated Woodpeckers, their nest hole in a dead birch tree visible from her living room.

Early migrant arrivals began to pick up: Eastern Towhee (Pam Peters, Franklin, 4/14); Louisiana Water-thrush and Savannah Sparrow (Suzanne Gaynor, East Meredith 4/15); Broad-winged Hawk (4/16) and Swamp Sparrow (Pam Peters, Franklin 4/17); Brown Thrasher and drumming Ruffed Grouse (Suzanne Gaynor, East Meredith 4/21), Black-throated Green and Yellow-rumped Warblers (Sarah Root, Portlandville, 4/21); and Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Nancy New, Oneonta, 4/24).

Prudence Danforth reported that the Osprey pair had returned to Unadilla in late April and were building a nest by the town hall parking lot on a new platform, provided by NYSEG and affording a safer location for the pair than their previous site.

April 28th, Sarah Root found Ovenbird in Portlandville; House



Black-throated Green Warbler
Photo by Landa Palmer

Wren arrived in Oneonta (Andy Mason). At Oneonta's Silas Lane Greenway trail, Yellow Warbler and Spotted Sandpiper were vocalizing.

April 29th: Blackburnian Warbler and Warbling Vireo (Pam Peters, Franklin); Scarlet Tanager (Sarah Root, Portlandville); Common Yellowthroat (Suzanne Gaynor, East Meredith); Baltimore Oriole (Nancy New, Oneonta); and Chimney Swifts in Oneonta.

The last day in April brought the first Ruby-throated Hummingbird to Portlandville (Sarah Root) and two White-crowned Sparrows passing through (Eileen Kline, Meredith).

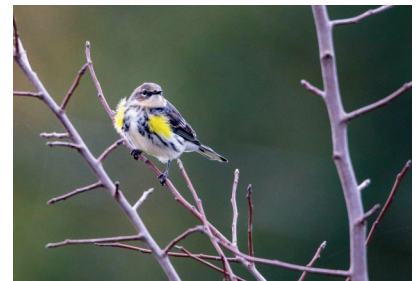
May 1st : Great Crested Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, Nashville Warbler (Sarah Root, Portlandville) and Prairie Warbler (Pam Peters, Franklin). The next day at the Silas Lane Greenway trail Yellow-throated



Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Photo by Landa Palmer

Vireo and Blue-winged Warbler were vocalizing, and Ellen Blaisdell spotted Cape May Warbler.

Canoeing on Weaver Lake, Tom Salo and Pam Peters observed Virginia Rail, Sora, Common Gallinule, American and Least Bitterns, Swamp Sparrow, Marsh Wren, Common Loon, Blue-winged Teal, and more (5/3). Two days later Barb Palmer found Wood Thrush, Eastern



Yellow-rumped Warbler
Photo by Landa Palmer

Kingbird, and Field Sparrow. On the 6th, Indigo Buntings were singing in Fleischmanns.

An unusual visitor turned up at Glimmerglass State Park on the 7th: a Red-throated Loon, observed by Pete Fenner and Becky Gretton. Tom and Jo Salo found a pair of Green-winged Teal at Oaks Creek. Bobolinks arrived in Fly Creek (Deb Miller), Spotted Sandpipers in Jefferson (Barb Palmer), and Least Flycatchers at Fortin Park, Oneonta. The 8th brought Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, and Tennessee and Magnolia Warblers (Barb Palmer, Clapper Hollow).

On the 9th, Ruth Pederson photographed a Virginia Rail walking along the edge of a beaver dam near Bovina Center. Tom Salo remarked on the exceptionally early arrival of Mourning Warblers. May 12th, Andy



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Bird Sightings, continued

Mason found Black-billed Cuckoo at the Audubon Sanctuary, and Jane Bachman discovered Bay-breasted Warbler at the Silas Lane Greenway trail, Oneonta.

Traditionally we have set our first bird walk of the season for a week into May, to ensure a good variety of

returning birds. The earlier arrival of so many had eBird flagging even abundant species like Red-eyed Vireo as “rare”. This makes one wonder... is this the beginning of a trend or just an anomaly this year?

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



Bay-breasted Warbler
Photo by John Heidecker
<http://johnheidecker.smugmug.com/>

Audubon Camp 2024

By Susan O’Handley

The John G. New Audubon Summer Day Camp provides fun, hands-on experiences in natural science and environmental education through field investigations, crafts and games for children entering grades 1-6 in the Fall of 2024. Campers explore a variety of habitats and learn about creatures that live there. There is limited space in these special sessions, and registrations are accepted on a first

come, first served basis.

Full and partial scholarships to offset the per-child registration fee are distributed each year on a needs basis. Donations towards this dedicated fund are accepted throughout the year and are greatly appreciated.

Visit <https://doas.us/camp2024> for full details and online registration.

DOAS Big Day 2024

By Charlie Scheim

The DOAS Big Day was held on Saturday May 18, 2024. Fourteen teams totaling twenty-one individuals ranged over our DOAS region, with reports coming in from Otsego, Delaware, Herkimer, and Schoharie counties. Some teams traveled over extensive areas by car, some hiked our meadows, forests, and wetlands, and some folks simply observed their backyard and neighborhood birds. As is usually the case, there were some species that were found by just a single team, including Ring-necked Pheasant, Black-billed Cuckoo, Osprey, Greater Yellowlegs, Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Marsh Wren, Northern Rough-winged Swallow,

Golden-crowned Kinglet, Vesper Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, Northern Parula, and Wilson’s Warbler. This highlights the importance to our effort of having multiple teams scouting our area. Birding is to some degree a matter of being in the right place at the right time. The more teams, the more likely it is that someone will be around when seldom-seen species show up!

In total, we found 114 different species. Four were new to our Big Day listings from recent years: Greater Yellowlegs, Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Vesper Sparrow, and Wilson’s Warbler. Among our many finds were four wrens (House, Winter, Carolina,

and Marsh), six woodpecker-type species (Downy, Hairy, Pileated, Red-bellied, Northern Flicker, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker), seven flycatchers (Least, Great Crested, Alder, Willow, Phoebe, Kingbird, Pewee), four swallows (Barn, Tree, Bank, Rough-winged), eight sparrow species (Chipping, Field, Savannah, Song, Swamp, White-Crowned, White-throated, Vesper) and twenty species of warblers (see the list!). A complete listing of all this year’s sightings will be posted on OSBirds and (eventually) on the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society website, www.doas.us.

I thank all our participants for contributing to a fun and bird-filled day!



Session 1: July 8, 9, 10, 11 – 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. at DOAS Sanctuary, Oneonta (for children entering grades 3 and 4)

Session 2: July 22, 23, 24, 25 – 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. at DOAS Sanctuary, Oneonta (for children entering grades 5 and 6)

Session 3: August 5, 6, 7, 8 – 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. at OWL, Fortin Park, Oneonta (for children entering grades 1 and 2)

Upcoming Activities

June

June 15 - Hanford Mills Exploration Day Bird Walk: Join Suzanne Gaynor and Kathryn Davino at 8 a.m. in the event parking lot (south side of Rt.12, opposite the museum, at 51 Cty Rd. 12, East Meridith, NY). This walk covers fairly level terrain and will last about 1.5 hours. The trail traverses a variety of surfaces: grass, gravel, and boardwalk, and does include an occasional step up/down and a few gentle slopes. The total distance traveled is about .5 miles. There are no rest areas along the route, but there are benches near the pond, and picnic tables at the parking lot. Accessible bathrooms are available at Hanford Mills.

June 8 - Kirkside Park: Join Charlie Scheim, Sandy Bright, and local birder Jeanne Ellsworth at 8 a.m. for a birding walk in Kirkside Park, Roxbury, NY. We will meet in the Kirkside parking area accessed via Kirkside Driveway. The walk will last about 1.5 hours and will wander along level unpaved pathways, looking for the birds of late spring and early summer. Restrooms are available near the parking area. For more information or for any last-minute weather concerns, contact Charlie Scheim at 607-434-4880.

June 29 - Uplands Center: Join DOAS Director Charlie Scheim, Bird Sightings author Sandy Bright, and the Environmental Director of the Uplands Center Renee Hardenkamp for a morning bird walk at the Uplands Center in Walton, NY (2641 Dunk Hill Road) on Saturday June 29 at 8:00am. Our focus will be on observing birds and their breeding behaviors. The Uplands Center (www.uplandscenter.org) has acres of fields and forests,

great habitat for breeding birds. We will meet just outside the main lodge. The walk will begin on a mostly level grassy path through a large field where we will likely find a number of grassland species. We will then follow a path through a wooded area with some gentle uphill and downhill, seeking woodland inhabitants. There are accessible rest rooms at the walk's beginning and end and some rest spots along the way. The walk will likely last about an hour and a half. This program is free; no pre-registration is required. You may call Charlie Scheim at 607-434-4880 for more information or for any last minute weather concerns.

Late June - Summer Family Program Schedule to be announced! Keep an eye on our ENews for more information. To sign up to receive ENews, visit <https://doas.us/sign-up-for-doas-news/>

July

July 13 - Landis Arboretum: Chris DeCesare will lead a field trip to view butterflies in the fields and gardens of Landis Arboretum, Esperance, NY. Meet in the Visitor Center Parking lot at 11:00 a.m.; the walk will last about 1.5 hours. Bring binoculars, sunscreen and bug spray; waterproof shoes may be helpful. Be prepared for uneven gravel and grass. Program is free, but there is a \$5 suggested donation for non-members of Landis. Register at www.doas.us/calendar/

Fall

Mark your calendars:

October 5 - Open House at the Audubon Sanctuary

October 18 - Annual Charter Dinner

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

DOAS PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Help Needed for a Work Day at the Sanctuary

We are seeking helpers at the Audubon Sanctuary on Thursday June 20, for about 3 hours, starting at 9 a.m. Work will include trail trimming and maintenance and clearing away wood from the old wetland boardwalk. Bring gloves and clipping tools if possible. For more information, contact Andy Mason, (607) 267-8491, AndyMason@earthling.net.



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.
P.O. Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820
<https://doas.us/>

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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!

Parslow Road Woodcock Walk

By Sandy Bright

Heavy rain and thunderstorms delayed the annual Woodcock Walk by a day, but the weather on April 16th was seasonally pleasant with clear skies. Nineteen participants met at Parslow Road for a brief introduction, a short walk, and a pleasant wait for the "peenting" to begin, which it did right around sunset. About 15 minutes later, with just enough light to watch the show, the displays began. Some of us with older eyes were unable to follow the whole performance as the birds moved into and out of darker skies, but younger eyes watched the rise, the circling, and the rapid descent several times before we called it a night.

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.