



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

February Program: Reducing Your Household Carbon Impact

By Susan O’Handley

“Climate change is the single greatest threat to North American birds. Solutions are plentiful, but to protect more than 300 species at risk, we must act now.”

National Audubon Society, September 2024.

Join DOAS on Friday, February 21, 2025 at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom for a presentation with DOAS Education Chair Susan O’Handley to look at ways to reduce your household carbon impact and discover why it is important to take action.

Approximately 30% of greenhouse gas emissions come from residential and commercial sectors in the U.S. (The breakdown for the remainder is 30% from industry, 30% from transportation and 10% from agriculture.)

2024 broke records for global temperatures and severe weather events. The 10 warmest years in the historical record have all occurred in the past decade (2014-2023). The

Mark your Calendars...

By Becky Gretton

DOAS will host best-selling author Randi Minetor via Zoom on March 21, 2025 at 7:30 p.m. She will speak on "How Birds Created the World and other stories from *The Complete Language of Birds*." Minetor’s most recent book is an encyclopedia that unites classic illustrations, science, folklore, and mythology about more than 400 bird species around the world.

Registration is required at <https://mobilize.us/s/SONRoX>

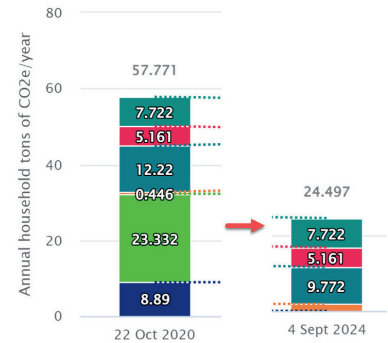
financial costs of climate change are already being seen, with evidence from record-breaking damages from severe weather events over the last year. Repair costs are staggering and insurance claims are being denied.

Susan’s program will focus on seven areas where our households, businesses and community operations have carbon impact and will provide an overview of tools and resources to help you establish baseline data and track your progress.

Susan will also briefly overview her own family’s journey towards a carbon neutral household, along with the financial and quality of life benefits realized through investing in energy retrofits to their 1902 Victorian Farmhouse in Hartwick.

Registration is required:
<https://mobilize.us/s/AVfczt>

Susan O’Handley has been involved with local Audubon chapters for over 30 years and has served on the Board



O’Handley Household Carbon Trend, 2020-2024

of Directors for the DOAS since 2012 (10 years as a Co-President). Susan also works with the Audubon NY/CT Council Board which is composed of 27 Audubon Chapters in NY State and 6 Chapters in CT, and serves on the Advisory Board for Audubon NY/CT Regional Office as the Chapter Representative. She owns and operates a small digital marketing agency in Hartwick, NY.

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Surprise Visitor at Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch

By Co-President *Becky Gretton*

On October 27 an enthusiastic group gathered at FMHW to experience migration, and was treated to something unusual: a short-tailed weasel.

An odd sound came from inside the shelter. When the storage area was opened, a small rodent was attempting to exit an even smaller opening at the end of a plastic tube bird feeder, which was bumping against the wall.

The feeder was moved onto the ground and the rodent with a long tubular body pushed itself through that tiny space onto the grass. A few people researched the animal, which did not remain visible for much time, and identified it.

The short-tailed weasel's tail is approximately one-third the length of its body, as opposed to the long-tailed weasel's being almost half as long. It is brown on top with a light underside. It changes to white in the winter, and is also known as an ermine or stoat. A fierce predator (it must consume more than forty



Short-tailed Weasel

percent of its body weight per day to stay warm), it focuses on mice and voles, but when in need of protein it will attack much larger prey, even a rabbit. The storage area in the shelter is always infested with mice, but it was devoid of any mice that day!

The weasel made a number of brief appearances during the day, and we were confident that it had pushed its way back into the shelter by the time we left. Later in the season, I was informed that the mice were back in the shelter, so our little visitor must have moved on.

Much of this information came from the following article:
<https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2019/12/the-weasel-black-and-white-and-curious-all-over.html>

Eagle Trip *By Andy Mason*

Thirteen participants spotted 22 Bald Eagles on this year's DOAS field trip to view these birds and other raptors and waterfowl on January 18. The trip traversed the East and West Branches of the Delaware River and Cannonsville Reservoir in Delaware County. Waterways were partly frozen, but with enough open water to attract eagles and ducks, including Common Goldeneyes, Mallards, Black Ducks, Common Mergansers and Hooded Mergansers. Also seen were several Red-tailed Hawks and



*Eagle Watchers at Cannonsville Dam
Photo by John Heidecker*

a Cooper's Hawk.

Of particular interest were three nests occupied by eagles apparently incubating eggs. Bald Eagle breeding season is well underway.

After the conclusion of the trip at the Pepacton Reservoir dam, ten of the eagle watchers enjoyed a well-earned lunch at a local restaurant.

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

Conservation and Legislation

By *Andy Mason*

Albany Gears up for New Year—New York’s legislative session has opened up with Governor Kathy Hochul’s State of the State address. The environment was not a major topic, but there was some focus by the governor on energy issues.

Most of her mentions were generic and lacking specifics—always a bad sign. For example, Hocu addressed the state’s forthcoming cap and trade program for greenhouse gas emissions. This program would establish a cap on greenhouse emissions for the state, which would decline each year. Large producers of these emissions would either have to meet annual caps or acquire ‘allowances’ to cover some or all of their emissions. Allowance would be sold at state auctions and could be traded between companies. Proceeds from the auctions would be used for

climate-friendly initiatives like electrification of buildings and transportation. As the cap drops and the cost of allowances goes up, it will provide incentive for companies to emit less greenhouse gas pollution. Cap and trade was first proposed in 2023, but enacting rules have not been established, and the governor said that they would be enacted by the end of the year, with no details. This pushes back even further a program that should already be in place.

The governor also included the NY HEAT Act in her comments. This legislation would authorize and direct the state Public Service Commission to align planning by the state’s gas utilities with New York’s goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030. The HEAT Act would also end subsidies and rules that encourage expansion of

gas use in the state. It has twice passed the State Senate but failed in the Assembly. The governor missed an opportunity to press the Assembly to enact this important law.

What You Can Do—If New York is to reach its ambitious climate goals which set a national standard, Governor Hochul must prioritize these sorts of measures in order to change the fossil fuel approach that has long been the status quo. Remind Kathy Hochul that 2024 was the hottest year on record and that action is needed now.

*Governor Kathy Hochul
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224*

518-474-8390

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>

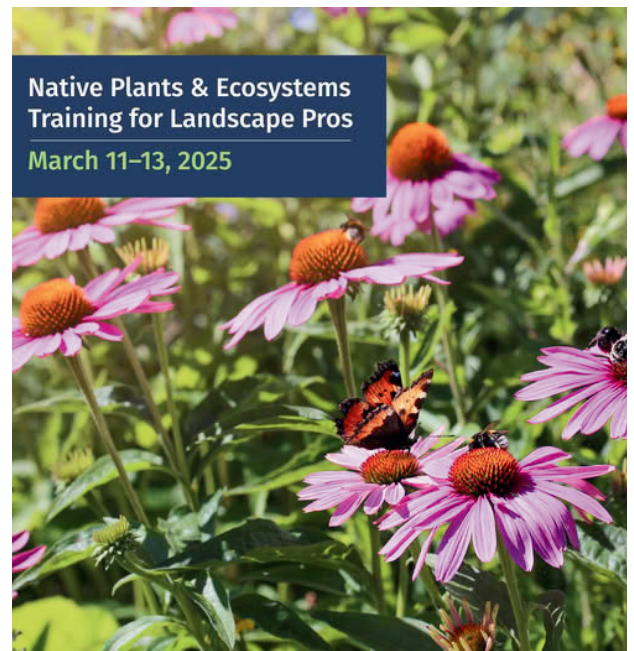
Habitat and Ecosystems Land Pro (HELP) Program: A 3-Day Program for Landscape Professionals, March 11–13, 2025

By *Susan O’Handley*

DOAS will host a special 3-day training and endorsement program for landscaping professionals, March 11-13, 2025. Participants will learn to use native plants and support natural habitats. This training is for:

- Landscape professionals
- Landscape architects
- Municipalities or parks agencies
- Upstate NY and the surrounding regions
- Students in a landscape professional program are also welcome to attend.

The HELP program will take place at Hartwick College’s Pine Lake Environmental Campus, Davenport NY. Remote options are available for Days 1 and 2; Day 3 must be attended in person. To learn more and register, visit <https://doas.us/help/>



The 56th Oneonta Christmas Bird Count

By *Sandy Bright*

Frigid weather with sunshine glittering off a snow- and frost-covered landscape greeted this year's Oneonta Christmas Bird Count participants. Our first sighting of the day appeared as a dark lump in the snow by the road, which swiveled its head to assess our approaching car before spreading its wings and taking flight: a magnificent Barred Owl.

In the early morning hours, before sunshine warmed the heart if not the air, Bob Donnelly's team counted four Screech, three Great-horned, and a Barred Owl, then later heard another Barred hooting in daytime. The Geminid meteor shower was a bonus for those braving the cold pre-dawn hours. A fourth Barred Owl was found perched at the edge of a field in mid-afternoon by Becky Gretton's team, which also saw a Rough-legged Hawk soaring and circling overhead and a crow mobbing a Red-tailed Hawk.

Jennifer Hyypio and Yolanda Bush watched as a female Northern Harrier hunted prey down; then a Bald Eagle approached, flying low, circling the hunt before flying away. Pete Fauth spotted a Sharp-shinned Hawk as it captured and devoured a Black-capped Chickadee "that might have



Winter Landscape
Photo by *Janice Downie*

been counted just seconds before."

Over the 56 years of the Oneonta CBC's history, the number of individual birds initially increased from a rough average of 3,500 to 6,000, then dropped back down to 3,500. This year's 2,608 birds was significantly lower than that. Record low numbers were recorded for some species: in the 177 square miles of coverage, 24 participants could scrape up only 17 American Goldfinches (average is over 100) and 16 House Sparrows (average is over 200).

A few record highs were set, though these were rather insignificant. The two Northern Harriers broke a long-standing record of one, single birds having been found in 10 previous counts. The four Barred Owls broke the record of three set in 2012.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers, first recorded in 1999, continue to increase in number with 13 spotted this year. Fox Sparrows have only been found once before, so this year's lone bird tied the record of one set in 1997.

Interestingly, the average number of species recorded has crept up from around 35 a half century ago to the recent average of 46, which is exactly the number of species found this year.

Avian sights aren't the only draw to participating in CBCs. Suzanne Summers and Maryanne Kehoe enjoyed "listening to the ice rumble and roar at Crumhorn fishing access," and the quiet solitude of the day, seeing only "a total of four humans, two dogs, and one cat."

A big thanks to all Oneonta CBC participants: Yolanda Bush, Bob Donnelly, Janice Downie, Peter Fauth, Margo Graham, Becky Gretton, Jennifer Hyypio, Maryann Kehoe, Ann and Dave Kiehm, Pam Lea, Carol and Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Bruce Milavec, Deb Miller, Linda Pearce, Charlie Scheim, Tracy Sheldon, Cindy Staley, Suzanne Summers, Honey and Phil Young.

Complete results can be viewed at DOAS.us/bird-counts.

A Cold and Windy but Outstanding Christmas Count in Delaware County (NYDE)

By *Pam Peters*

Blustery northwest winds, snow showers, and temperatures in the 20s that felt like 5 made for a challenging count day. Rivers were high and fast, and you had to look carefully to pick out a merganser

among the ice chunks. Many ponds were totally frozen, or had only a small opening.

Observers reported how fluffed up birds appeared: Downy Woodpeckers, Kestrels, Juncos, even Red-tailed

Hawks looked bigger than usual. Home feeders provided shelter and food, and boosted numbers of the small birds.

Turkeys stuck to the woods and

Continued on page 5

edges, a contrast to the large flocks out on the manured fields a week after Christmas. A Ruffed Grouse was seen two days before the count, but none on count day.

Winter raptors are always a treat to find, and this year we had a Golden Eagle in Downsville (thanks to Team Verderame-Davis), which is the third Golden seen over the years in that sector. A Rough-legged Hawk spotted by Team Palmer-Burkhart in Hamden is a first for NYDE. Kestrels are rare for our territory, usually one on count day, but this year four were seen across three different sectors. Three Cooper's Hawks is a good number. Red-tailed Hawks (20) and Bald Eagles (24) had a nice showing, with Bald Eagles concentrated along the rivers and reservoirs and Red-tails scattered along the hills and fields. My team watched a pair of adult Bald Eagles sitting close in a tree along South River Road, when one took off along the river and quickly came back with an unidentified meal. All the while several Black Ducks, Mallards and Canada Geese huddled in the icy river below.

Nancy New discovered a flock of 14 Pine Siskins in Delancey; another five were spotted in Downsville. This is only the second time we had Pine Siskins on Count Day; the last time



Wild Turkeys
Photo by Pam Peters

was another cold day in 2017 with sub-zero temperatures. That year was also the highest number of Juncos observed (684), double this year's still healthy count of 302. Team Rankin-Peters found the only Bluebirds, a flock of eight on Bob's Brook Road. Two teams found Robins. A huge kettle of 200+ swirling Gulls and an equally large flock of Crows gathered in the fields near a cattle farm along the river south of Walton. The following day, over 300 Starlings had joined the Crows. These birds feed on the slurry from the cattle farm, manure mixed with whey from the nearby Breakstone plant.

This year's count total of 3510 is the third highest. Some new highs for individual birds: Northern Cardinal 52 (previous high 41), Golden-crowned Kinglet 19 (15), American Crow 637 (620), Pileated Woodpecker 4 (2), Hooded Merganser 41 (28). Not the highest, but 42 Common Ravens is the second highest count (65). A Northern Mockingbird found by Lance and Renee in Downsville is a first for the NYDE. Lance also spotted a Brown-headed Cowbird, the 3rd record for this count.

Usually more plentiful, only 70 Blue Jays turned up; our previous low was 57 in 2018. It was not a good day for

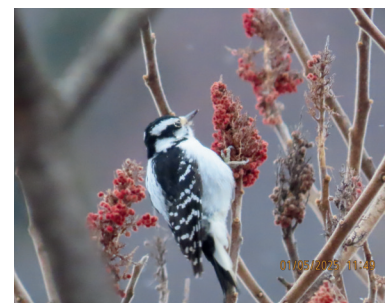
owling, but Jean Petterson and Pam Peters each found a Barred Owl. 77 Canada Geese is a new low for this count circle; they were also hard to find in the days leading up to the count. The number of Mallards fluctuates; this year's 117 is low, but 17 in 2018 is the record (also January 5 but a warm day in the 30s). Three uncommon waterfowl species observed this year in Downsville include Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, and Common Goldeneye.

Some birds were seen in every sector: Wild Turkey, American Crow, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Dark-eyed Junco, and American Goldfinch.

Shout out to Jean Petterson and Nancy New for stepping in to cover when regular counters were unavailable. Welcome newcomer Mark Decristoforo who drove up from New Jersey to participate and is looking forward to more DOAS field trips. Many thanks to our veteran teams who show up every year: Lance Verderame, Renee Davis, Eileen Kline, Chris DeCesare, Landa Palmer, Kathryn Davino, Linda Burkhart, Tom & Laurie Rankin, Pam Peters. The full count record for NYDE is available online at <https://doas.us/bird-counts/>



Pileated Woodpecker
Photo by Landa Palmer



Downy Woodpecker on Sumac
Photo by Laurie Rankin

Fort Plain 2024 CBC Summary

By *Charlie Scheim*

The Fort Plain CBC was first organized in 1918 by Douglas Ayres. Ayres was the only recorded counter that year, and for many years after, he, or he and a friend, were the only counters. It was not until the 1970s that larger groups were recruited for the count.

This year, the Fort Plain CBC was conducted on Saturday December 28 with 22 counters covering the 13 territories of the circle. Skies were cloudy (as has been the case for all but three years since 2000) with temperatures in the high 20s and low 30s. Still waters and smaller streams were frozen, but the larger rivers were open, yielding 4889 waterfowl. These were mostly Canada Geese, although one Double-Crested Cormorant was found by Tom and Jo Salo, the first ever for this count.

Overall, 62 species with 12,540 birds were recorded. Excluding the 7807 geese, pigeons, and starlings, there were many other more “interesting” finds. The expected common winter species, such as chickadees, nut-hatches, juncos, blue jays, crows and cardinals were found in varying numbers. The count of 127 Northern Cardinals was among the highest ever recorded on the FPCBC. The 540 Dark-Eyed Juncos, which only started appearing in 2006 on this count, were at about the average for the last 20 years. But the 361 American Crows were just over a tenth of the 3267 maximum found in 2015.

Though American Robins have the



Eastern Screech-Owl
Photo by Michael Cassella
Audubon Photography Awards



Snow Bunting
Photo by John Heidecker
<https://johnheidecker.smugmug.com/>

reputation for heralding spring, 595 were found this year, one of the highest totals ever found on this count. 362 were found in the Seebers Lane and Ames territories, where Steph and Danielle Restuccia reported finding flock after flock of robins, some with 50+ birds. Sandy Bright and I also encountered several good-sized flocks in trees or flying overhead. Other “summer species” reported were two Northern Mockingbirds, one found by the Restuccias and another by Pam Lea and Cindy Staley; two Red-winged Blackbirds, located by the Salos; four Brown-headed Cowbirds, found by Kevin and Kelly Toomey; and a total of 29 Eastern Bluebirds.

Raptors frequently occur in this circle; well over 200 were recorded this year, including 81 redtails, 42

Black Vultures, and 40 Turkey Vultures. Elliot Adams located five owls: three Eastern Screech and two Great-Horned. Falcons found included 11 Kestrels, two Merlins, and three Peregrines. Though in the 2000s and 2010s, 10 or more Rough-legged Hawks were often recorded, only four have been reported since 2020, with none located this year and last year.

Snow, up to 5 or 6 inches, covered most areas on count day. Though many fields appeared to be snowy wastelands with no signs of life, others yielded hundreds of Wild Turkeys and Horned Larks. Only 18 Snow Buntings were seen this year; ten years ago, they commonly occurred in the hundreds. Happily, one Lapland Longspur was found by the Toomeys. This species has only occurred in eleven counts ever.

Christmas Bird Counts in our area can be difficult to embrace due to the cold, the snow or freezing drizzle, and the almost always present gray cloudiness. But those who choose to do so are often rewarded by their encounters with our avian inhabitants. If you’d like to join, please do contact us, the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society.

Thanks to our 2024 counters: Tom Salo, Jo Salo, Marianne Frier, Bill Purcell, Kristin Harshman, Kevin McGann, Paul Novak, Elliott Adams, Kevin Toomey, Kelly Toomey, Andy Mason, Nancy New, Mark Woythal, Pam Woythal, Cindy Staley, Pam Lea, Steph Restuccia, Danielle Restuccia, Bonnie Dailey, Kevin Berner, Sandy Bright, Charlie Scheim.

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.

Bird Sightings - December and January

By Sandy Bright

Colder winter months means fewer bird sightings reported, but there are rewards for those who brave the elements or offer sustenance to our feathered friends. In late fall a first-year Northern Shrike visited Randy Lynch's feeder. In mid-December Barb Palmer noted quite a few sparrows in her yard, including American Tree, Fox, and White-throated; four species of Woodpeckers in one day: Hairy, Downy, Pileated, and Red-bellied; and an American robin frequenting her crab apple tree.

Angelika Rashkow watched a Bald Eagle land in a white pine in the field across from her house, then noticed a second eagle in the same tree. After a while both birds lifted off, "surfing over my riverwoods and Oaks Creek below".

Becky Gretton found a Barred Owl in Otsego County on the 16th, then Short-eared Owl later that same day

in Herkimer County. A robin serenaded as we worked outside on a warmer December day.

Later in December, Tom and Jo Salo found a Golden Eagle surrounded by ravens at a clearing in Basswood Pond State Forest. The corvids left as the humans walked through, but the eagle remained, watching their progress, low winter sunlight illuminating the gold nape. It was still there 45 minutes later when they looped back through.

Lance Verderame had some great finds as 2024 ended and 2025 began: two Ruddy Ducks at the Pepacton Reservoir, "rare for this county"; a Ruby-crowned Kinglet at the Cannonsville Reservoir, "rare for this time of year", and a Screech-owl and Northern Mockingbird in Downsville. Later in the month he reported Red-breasted Mergansers at the Cannonsville Dam Overlook and a large flock of Snow Buntings in Delancey.



First-year Northern Shrike
Photo by Randy Lynch

Mike DeWispelaere found Wood Duck in Unadilla and Short-eared Owl in Otego.

A small flock of turkeys had been regularly scavenging under Lisa Gorn's crabapple trees, not an uncommon sight. But then a few smart birds went "straight to the source" and began perching in the trees! What a fun and surprising sight to see those bulky birds behaving like songbirds!

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



February

February 14-17 - **Great Backyard Bird Count**. For more information, go to the DOAS website

<https://doas.us/events/great-backyard-bird-count-2025/>, or to the GBBC website www.birdcount.org

February 21 - **DOAS Public Program**: "Reducing Your Household Carbon Impact" via Zoom, 7:30 p.m. (See article on page 1). Registration required: <https://mobilize.us/s/AVfczt>

March

March 4 - **DOAS Board Meeting**, 6:30 p.m.

Upcoming Activities

March 21 - **DOAS Public Program**: "How Birds Created the World and other stories from *The Complete Language of Birds*" via Zoom, 7:30 p.m. Registration required: <https://mobilize.us/s/SONRoX>

April

April 15 - **DOAS Board Meeting**, 6:30 p.m.

April 18 - **DOAS Public Program**: "Preventing Bird-Window Collisions and Why it Makes a Difference" via Zoom, 7:30 p.m. Registration required: <https://mobilize.us/s/4Mcrr7>

DOAS PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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



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P.O. Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820
<https://doas.us/>



The newest Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch hats are now available! Several of the older hats (with reverse hat/bill color) are still available also. Cost for each hat is \$22. The beautiful Kingfisher mugs are \$10. To order, contact Jane Bachman at jbachwim60@gmail.com

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DOAS Membership Chair, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820-0544.

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