



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

January Program: Stories from Greater Yellowstone: A Deep Dive into the Heart of the Rockies--and How to Defend this Threatened Wilderness

By **Becky Gretton**

Join us via Zoom on January 16 at 7:30 p.m. as wildlife photographer, storyteller and award-winning filmmaker Kyle Dudgeon shares with us some of his encounters with animals that have left lasting impressions, and inspired a fight to protect the future of this special place.

Yellowstone is more than a national park—it's one of the last strongholds of truly wild America. From the howls of grey wolves to the powerful presence of grizzly bears, the park's iconic wildlife tells a story of resilience, recovery, and the



Gray Wolf and Grizzly Bear
Photos by Kyle Dudgeon



delicate balance that keeps those ecosystems thriving.

Kyle Dudgeon is an award-winning filmmaker and nature photographer based in Bozeman, Montana. After earning a degree in the environmental sciences in his home state of New York, at SUNY Oneonta, Kyle's dream of exploring conservation stories through photography and film landed him in the Intermountain West in 2019. He is particularly drawn to the relationship between humans and birds, and how each works to navigate a changing world. Registration for this Zoom program is required at www.doas.us

February 2026 Program

By **Becky Gretton**

Mark your calendars for our February 20th, 2026 program at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom, *Bird Architecture: Nest Beauty and Diversity*. Explore the amazing variety of bird nests with this multimedia presentation from presenter Anne Swaim, Executive Director of Saw Mill River Audubon. From the massive nests of eagles to walnut-sized hummingbird nests, from cavity-nesters inside trees to ground-nesters, to birds that weave intricately woven baskets that hang from branches, birds are master builders! Find out why birds sing, what a bird box does and how to make any property more bird-friendly—as well as the best strategy should you find a nest or young birds in need of help.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Co-Presidents' Column	2
Conservation & Legislation	3
March 2026 Program	3
Thanks to Landa	4
Director's Column	4-5
Mindful Birding	5
Statewide Waterfowl Count	5
Bird Sightings	6-7
Upcoming Activities	7
Great Backyard Bird Count	8

A Winter Favorite: Dark-eyed Junco

By Co-president Becky Gretton

Many birds are year-round residents. I find the presence of the Dark-eyed Junco to be a source of peace and happiness throughout the winter months.

Juncos nest in deeper woods on or near the ground, and are challenging to locate during nesting season. Winter feeders attract many, even more so because Juncos migrate to our region from the north, and many go even further south. There's no such thing as too many Juncos!

I find that they typically feed on the ground or my platform feeder, but during hard winter weather they cling to the suet and nyjer seed feeders as well. I scatter sunflower seeds under low shrubbery to deter Blue Jays, and delight in seeing Juncos arrive on my steps with one sunflower seed after another, littering them with shells. The squirrels and chipmunks are also grateful for the seed buffet.

My decision to stop mowing part of my lawn for the pollinators proved to be even more beneficial as I observed birds eating seeds from the weeds poking out of the snow.



Dark-eyed Junco
Photograph by Jocelyn Anderson
Audubon Photography Awards

Their energetic, sweet summer songs have transitioned into subtle "tsk, tsk"s and an occasional gentle twitter, another source of contentment. It's a privilege to experience these quiet communications.

I often see a group of birds seeking grit beside the road in the winter and guess that they're probably Juncos. As they depart, their presence is quickly confirmed by the bright white feathers on either side of the gray tail: time to slow down, await their appearance further down the road, and look for other species in the flock while enjoying the comfort of my car.

The "plain" Dark-eyed Junco is a bright light in the wintertime!

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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

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



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Conservation and Legislation

By *Andy Mason*

The New and Growing Environmental Threat—Artificial Intelligence Data Centers—

Significant progress has been made in converting electrical supply from fossil-fueled generation to alternative energy sources such as wind and solar. In fact, solar has been the leading source of new generating capacity in recent years.

This trend has unfortunately been slowed in the US by the Trump administration's policies to largely kill renewable energy and promote fossil fuels. However, the rest of the world is accelerating the switch to renewables, leaving America behind.

There is yet another threat to cutting back on coal, natural gas and oil for electricity generation here. The advent of artificial intelligence programs has brought about rapid growth of electricity-hungry data centers needed to train and operate the AI programs that are now ubiquitous in the digital world.

According to Smithsonian magazine, "The demand for data centers

is growing faster than our ability to mitigate their skyrocketing economic and environmental costs". The centers can cover 30,000 to a million square feet in size. In 2024, more than half of the largest data centers were owned by tech giants Amazon, Microsoft and Google.

Data centers use huge amounts of electricity. A typical facility consumes as much electricity as 100,000 households annually. Put another way, a search on popular AI program ChatGPT uses ten times more electricity than a Google search. Current and future data center growth and energy use will primarily come from burning fossil fuels. This will further set back New York's goal of a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Another environmental impact of these facilities is water use. The large computers in the data centers run hot and so require cooling. In 2023 data centers used about 66 billion liters of water. Compared again to one ChatGPT conversation, the approximate equivalent of one

twelve-ounce bottle of water is required for cooling.

What you can do—Data centers may well be headed for our area—these companies seem to prefer rural areas. In fact, one is currently proposed in the Town of Oneonta, seeking a zoning change to industrial use. Be aware, and participate in reviews of these projects if they appear.

Legislation (A9086/S6394A) has been introduced in Albany to regulate data centers. This would require efficiency, set a schedule for use of renewable energy, and establish a surcharge to be used to offset the higher electricity costs for consumers brought on by increased electric demand by these facilities. Let your state legislators know these provisions are needed to lessen the environmental and economic effects of data centers.

Contact information can be found in the Advocacy section of our website, DOAS.us

March 2026 Program

By *Becky Gretton*

You'll want to watch for Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society's March 26 program: *Birds, Climate, and Conservation: Stories from Montezuma*. Abby Kress from the Montezuma Audubon Center will offer an engaging presentation exploring the fascinating lives of birds and the challenges they face in a changing world. Via Zoom at 7:30 p.m.; registration required at www.doas.us

Join us for our spring field trip to Montezuma on March 21, 2026 - register at <https://tinyurl.com/montezuma-mar21>



Montezuma NWR
Photo by Laurie Rankin

Thanks to Landa

By *Andy Mason*

Landa Palmer, author of the fine piece on winter raptor surveys below, has served as a DOAS director since 2019. She recently stepped down from the board—and will be missed. Landa had a particular focus on improving accessibility for our organization and was an integral part of construction of a wheelchair accessible trail at the DOAS Sanctuary and planning and fundraising for the accessible viewing platform planned for this spring.

In addition, Landa served on the nominating committee, and assisted with maintenance of the DOAS Facebook page. A talented wildlife photographer, she contributed numerous images to the Kingfisher and to our web site and Facebook page. Thank you, Landa, for all your efforts on behalf of DOAS!

Winter Raptor Study

By *Landa Palmer*

Winter typically brings a quieter season for birding, as most song-birds have migrated; however, some raptors maintain a prominent presence in the region. In Delaware County, residents Pam Peters, Landa Palmer, and Linda Burkhart document the presence of wintering raptors through the Hawk Migration Association's (HMA) Winter Raptor Survey (WRS).

Initiated in 2007, the Winter Raptor Survey plays a vital role in advancing research on wintering raptor populations. By gathering data from across the country, the survey evaluates the status and distribution of these birds during the colder months. The findings are essential for informing researchers,

land management professionals, planning agencies, and regional birding organizations, supporting evidence-based conservation and planning decisions.

Treadwell Creek is the name for the local Winter Raptor Survey (WRS) in Delaware County. Now in its third year, the survey team collects data one day each during December, January, and February. Adhering closely to the Hawk Migration Association's protocols, the team carefully identifies raptors observed from the roadside. Notably, this group is one of only seven participating WRS teams in New York State, and the sole team representing upstate New York. Other surveys are conducted in New York by the DEC, who monitor Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls. Over the past three years along the Treadwell Creek survey route, a total of 180 raptors have been counted, averaging 20 raptors per study day, with a peak count of 30 individuals. Seven species have been documented, with Red-tailed Hawks and Bald Eagles being the most frequently observed.



Rough-legged Hawk
Photo by Landa Palmer

The weather often poses a challenge; while cold temperatures do not dissuade the raptors or this dedicated group of citizen scientists, heavy snowfall significantly influences the presence of both raptors and observers during survey days.

If you are interested in learning more about the HMA Winter Raptor Survey, take a look at the website: <https://www.hawkmigration.org/winter-raptor-survey/>

Birders are invited to participate in this citizen science effort by downloading directions and field data sheets in the WRS Forms section of the HMA website. To be recognized as a participant in a study involving HMA, you must first



Red-Tailed Hawk
Photo by Landa Palmer

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

create and maintain an HMA account, which gives you access to the necessary tools and resources for managing your participation and data entry tasks. These are the main steps for recognition as an official participant: account creation, route definition, and a documented plan for compliant data collection and entry. This structure helps standardize study participation and ensures data is gathered systematically. The Winter Raptor Survey committee may be contacted by email at wrs@hawkmigration.org.

Mindful Birding

By Susan O'Handley

Mindful Birding is a practice of birdwatching that falls at the periphery of the traditional perception of what it is to be a birder. It is an immersive experience in the natural world that occurs at a very personal level and is different for each individual. If you turn to nature to find inner peace or solace or inspiration, or even to learn and develop curiosity, you likely already have experience with mindful birding.

The beauty of Mindful Birding lies in its accessibility and simplicity: anyone can do it and it requires little to no specialized equipment. It's a great activity for all ages and



abilities. Embracing mindful birding isn't about identifying species; it's much more about reconnecting with yourself, your senses and the vibrant world around you. It's a reminder that even in our busiest lives, peace and perspective can be found just outside our door, one quiet moment at a time. A Mindful Birding program typically includes reflective



*Bald Eagle
Photo by Landa Palmer*

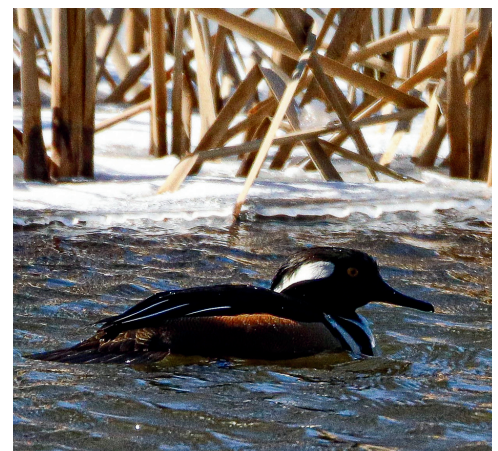
exercises and discussing what everyone is experiencing.

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society is looking to develop programming around mindful birding in 2026. We are looking for a volunteer who would be interested in overseeing these programs and a group of volunteers at various locations in our chapter region that can help lead programs in their communities. Training will be provided this spring. If you are interested in helping or want to learn more, please complete and submit the form at <https://doas.us/mindful-birding-programs/>

Statewide Waterfowl Count on January 18

By Andy Mason

The New York State Ornithological Association's annual statewide waterfowl count is scheduled for Sunday, January 18. DOAS covers Otsego Lake and the Susquehanna River above Unadilla, the Unadilla River, and Cannonsville Reservoir and the West Branch of the Delaware River. This effort involves surveying waterways where they can be seen, and identifying and counting ducks and geese. The totals are used by the Department of Environmental Conservation in managing these species over the upcoming year. Anyone interested in helping with the census, please contact Andy Mason: (607) 267-8491, AndyMason@earthling.net.



*Hooded Merganser
Photo by Landa Palmer*

October - December 2025 Bird Sightings

By *Sandy Bright*

As this reporting period began, Rick Bunting was at a swamp enjoying a “quintessential October morning with a bright blue, sunny sky” and crisp air, camera at the ready, Great Blue Heron in his sights. Patience and persistence paid off, and he captured a series of excellent photos of the heron successfully snagging a meal.

At Glimmerglass State Park, Suzanne Summers encountered both a Common Loon and a Peregrine Falcon. Near Milford, she spotted a Ring-necked Pheasant. Out on New Island, a Ruffed Grouse flushed unexpectedly from the brush—startling fellow hiker Laura and me as much as it was likely startled itself.

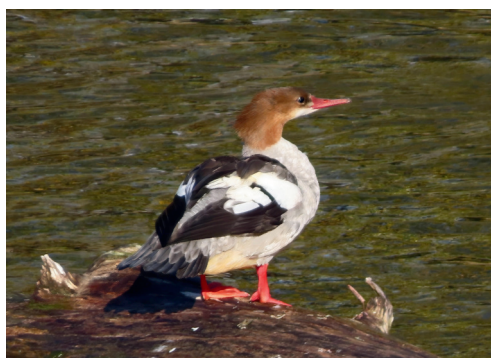
Rick Bunting found a young male Common Merganser, early in its transition to adult plumage. In Fly Creek, Deborah Miller reported a Rusty Blackbird, a noteworthy migrant due to its declining population. Halloween delivered a surge of waterfowl at the Cannonsville Reservoir, where Lance Verderame recorded large numbers of American Black and Ring-necked Ducks plus eight Greater Scaup. A month later he also found American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, White-winged Scoter, Bufflehead, and Common Goldeneye.

The feeder maintained by the counters at the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch attracts a mix of migratory and year-round species. Among many species observed were



Hermit Thrush (above) and Horned Lark (below)

Photos by Randy Lynch



Young Male Common Merganser
Photo by Rick Bunting

Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Towhee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Bluebird, Purple Finch, Cedar Waxwing, and Pine Siskin. To the delight of many visitors, Fox Sparrows appeared almost daily for several weeks. Pam Peters described a day with dramatic skies - bands of rain, vivid rainbows,

sudden bursts of sun – when an unknown disturbance sent a massive flock of robins, along with every Chickadee and Mourning Dove, erupting skyward from the bushes near the Hawkwatch feeder. Another day she noted that Common Ravens put on a particularly energetic show. Bob Gramling reported a Pileated Woodpecker feeding on wild grapes. A local Sharp-shinned Hawk raided the feeder. Hundreds of Canada Geese, as well as several Common Loons were seen migrating, and a photograph by Curt Morgan allowed for a precise count of 94 Brant winging past. Peter Fauth reported a late-season Monarch “with dreams of Mexico” (10/28).

Other late lingerers in our local counties included a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker feeding on a dying sugar maple in Pam Peters’ yard (11/3); a Hermit Thrush photographed by Randy Lynch (11/5), a Chipping Sparrow at Susan Carver’s feeders in Cobleskill (11/15), and an especially late Common Nighthawk, flying low over Prudence Danforth’s field, offering excellent views of its distinctive markings and shape (11/27).

Winter visitors have been settling in. In Andes, Ruth Pedersen observed both American Tree and Fox Sparrows. Evening Grosbeaks appeared in Delhi (Kathryn Davino), Laurens (Bill Vining), and Otsego (Suzanne Summers). One unusual sighting was a partial leucistic American Goldfinch, caught on camera by Tom Salo. Most remarkable was the Rufous Hummingbird

Continued on page 9

that hung around a feeder near Bovina Center for weeks until early December.

The December 2nd snowstorm sparked a burst of feeder activity. Linda Pearce had a Song Sparrow hanging around. Randy and Carol Lynch found Horned Lark in Harpersfield. Becky Gretton located five Snow Buntings (12/3). Our neighborhood “white-headed” (partial leucistic) cardinal visited several times.

While most migratory birds communicate with calls during their journey, a few still offer unexpected music. Becky Gretton was thus graced by the quiet song of a Fox Sparrow one day as she sat working the Hawk Watch.

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

Upcoming Activities

January

January 4 - **Delaware County Christmas Bird Count.**

Contact Pam Peters at ovenbirdp@gmail.com or phone 607-829-6545

January 16 - **DOAS Public Program:** “Stories from Greater Yellowstone: A Deep Dive into the Heart of the Rockies and How to Defend this Threatened Wilderness” with SUNY Oneonta grad Kyle Dudgeon. Via Zoom at 7:30 p.m.; registration required at www.doas.us (see article, page 1)

January 18 - **Annual Statewide Waterfowl Count** (see article, page 5)

January 20 - **DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 p.m.

February

February 4 - **HELP (Habitats and Ecosystems for Landscape Professionals) Informational Session for Lawn Service Businesses,** 5:30-7:00 p.m., Clark Sports Center, Cooperstown, NY (Free, includes pizza and refreshments).

February 13-16 - **Great Backyard Bird Count** (see article, page 8)

February 17 - **DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 p.m.

February 20 - **DOAS Public Program:** “Bird Architecture: Nest Beauty and Diversity” presented by Anne Swaim, Executive Director of Saw Mill River Audubon. Via Zoom at 7:30 p.m.; registration required at www.doas.us (see article, page 1)

March

March 10, 11, 12 - **HELP (Habitats and Ecosystems for Landscape Professionals) seminar:** 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center. Details coming soon.

March 17 - **DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 p.m.

March 20- **DOAS Public Program:** “Birds, Climate and Conservation: Stories from Montezuma”, presented by Abby Kress of the Montezuma Audubon Center. Via Zoom at 7:30 p.m.; registration required at www.doas.us

March 21: **Montezuma NWR and Wetlands Trip**

DOAS PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
In Case You Missed It — Past Webinars Are Available Online at
<https://doas.us/webinars/>.

DOAS Membership

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Great Backyard Bird Count 2026

By Charlie Scheim

The world-wide Great Backyard Bird Count occurs on February 13-16, 2026. It is easy to participate: simply plan to watch birds for at least 15 minutes on any or all of these four days, wherever you'd like, and record all birds you see or hear (the Merlin app is a great tool for helping to identify bird sounds!). If you're comfortable with eBird, you can use it to record your observations. Alternatively, if you prefer to enter your observations via your computer, perhaps from a paper list you kept during this time while watching out your window or

hiking through fields and forests, go to the eBird website www.ebird.org and use the Submit option (you will need an eBird account). All checklists entered in this time period will be entered into the GBBC.

For more information, go to the DOAS website <https://doas.us>, or go to the GBBC website www.birdcount.org to learn how to count, how to use eBird and Merlin, and to see a neat video portraying checklists as they are submitted as dots of light flickering on across a world map.



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