



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

March Program: Birds, Climate, and Conservation: Stories from Montezuma

By *Becky Gretton*

Join us on March 20 at 7:30 p.m. for a Zoom 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. Learn how habitat loss, climate change, and human activity are reshaping migration patterns and bird populations - and discover how conservation efforts and community action are making a



Canada Geese
Photo by Sydney Walsh

difference. This program will highlight stories from Montezuma's wetlands and offer practical ways we can all help birds thrive.

Presenter Abby Kress is the Senior

Associate for Community Conservation Programs at the Montezuma Audubon Center, where she leads educational initiatives and habitat stewardship projects across the Finger Lakes Region. With a background in environmental education and a passion for connecting people to nature, Abby works to inspire conservation action through hands-on experiences and story-telling. Based in Brighton, New York, she enjoys birding, hiking, and exploring the natural world.

Registration for the Zoom program is required at www.doas.us

Mark your Calendars...

By *Becky Gretton*

DOAS's April 17 program will feature Bedford Audubon Board President John Hannan, who will present *Protecting Birds Across Their Whole Migratory Paths: Good News for Linking Habitat Conservation Across the Americas*. Audubon is encouraging chapters to engage in full-lifecycle bird conservation efforts, from their local sanctuaries and Important Bird Areas to the key migratory stopover and wintering grounds our nesting species use. John has worked with multiple bird conservation organizations across the Americas doing just that. Come enjoy his beautiful imagery of birds and landscapes while learning about some of the key hemispheric bird conservation initiatives happening right now across the Americas.

Via Zoom at 7:30 p.m.; registration required at <https://tinyurl.com/2ehh375s>

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Conservation & Legislation ... 2-3
- Waterfowl Count Results 3
- Co-President's Column4
- 2025 Butternuts CBC 4-5
- Director's Column 5
- Bird Sightings 5-6
- Raptor ID Training 7
- Upcoming Activities 7
- Montezuma NWR Field Trip ... 8

Conservation and Legislation

By *Andy Mason*

Constitution Pipeline Redux—DOAS Takes Action

It doesn't take a great memory to recall 2013, when the Constitution Pipeline Company applied to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for permission to build a 30-inch diameter pipeline to transfer fracked natural gas from Pennsylvania 125 miles to a connection in northeast Schoharie County. The pipeline, which would pass through Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego and Schoharie Counties, was met with strong local opposition all along its route. In addition, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) did not provide the company a needed water quality permit in order to disturb waterways and wetlands. This led to a lengthy legal battle, ultimately reaching the US Supreme Court, which rejected Constitution's attempt to appeal. Facing the inevitable, the company formally abandoned the project in 2020.

DOAS played a significant role in this battle, serving as an intervenor, along with other groups, in the actions before FERC and related legal proceedings. We provided information on threats to birds from the project, including fragmentation of large swaths of mature forests for the pipeline right-of-way. Also, the pipeline route would have passed near the Audubon Sanctuary on Franklin Mountain. In fact, the Sanctuary was considered an alternate location for the pipeline.



*Audubon Sanctuary, Franklin Mt.
Photo by Matthew Bechtold
Bechtold Photography*

Pipeline Resurrected—Although the pipeline was considered dead by all parties, including Constitution and FERC, late last year the company petitioned FERC to restore its 2013 application and approval and declare that DEC had lost its authority to decide on a water quality permit. FERC is presently considering this request and there are numerous strong legal arguments that they should deny it. However, the Commission now has a majority of Trump appointees, charged with a pro-fossil fuel agenda, and indications are that it will OK the petition.

In response, a coalition of organizations, including DOAS, the Sierra Club, Delaware Riverkeeper, Catskill Mountainkeeper, Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, and others joined together as intervenors to be represented by Earthjustice, the environmental law firm that led the way in the earlier battle

Continued on page 3

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

Continued from page 2

to halt the Constitution Pipeline. In January Earthjustice submitted extensive and detailed comments along with a motion to dismiss to FERC on behalf of DOAS and the other intervenors (this can be viewed at

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fX8Yu3_erRGjkzpEksHIFlMeQx9KBhKs/view

What you can do—There will almost certainly be opportunities for public input to FERC and other agencies as this matter moves forward. Watch this space for how you can participate. Another good resource is the website of the locally-based group Stop the Constitution Pipeline:

<https://stoptheconstitutionpipeline.org/>

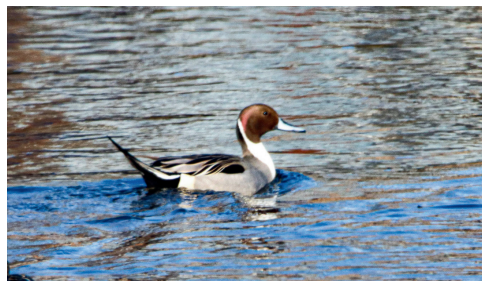
It is also nearly certain that this fight will reach the courts, in which case DOAS will serve as a plaintiff. We will stand strong as we did over a decade ago and will work to again turn back the Constitution Pipeline.

Waterfowl Count Results

By Andy Mason

The 2026 statewide waterfowl count was held the weekend of January 17-18. As with most of this winter, conditions were cold and snowy, with most waterways frozen. However, a good variety of 15 species and a total of 1189 birds was found by the DOAS parties that braved the conditions.

Areas covered included Otsego Lake and tributaries; Susquehanna River, Cooperstown to lower Unadilla bridge; Ouleout Creek to East Sidney Lake; Canadarago Lake and watershed; West Branch Delaware River, Delhi to Deposit including Cannonsville Reservoir; Unadilla River and tributaries, Leonardsville to Sidney.



*Northern Pintail on Delaware River
Photo by Landa Palmer*

Other species of interest included Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Snow Bunting, Eastern Bluebird, mink and muskrat.

Thanks to participants who put in 62.7 party hours: Italo Bironi, Joe Branco, Bill Carbine, Charles Cummins, Bob Donnelly, Becky Gretton, Laura Kilty, Carol Lynch, Randy Lynch, Andy Mason, Nancy New, Kylie Pecord, Tom and Jo Ann

Salo, Tracy Sheldon, Justin and Sarah Williams.

Totals:

Canada Goose 379
Gadwall 1
American Wigeon 4
Northern Pintail 1
American Black Duck 47
Mallard 374
Ring-necked Duck 49
Redhead 60
Greater Scaup 15
Lesser Scaup 6
Bufflehead 42
Common Goldeneye 34
Hooded Merganser 42
Common Merganser 83
American Coot 52
Total 1189



*Audubon Sanctuary Wetlands
Photo by Landa Palmer*

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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How Chickadees Survive the Winter

By Co-president *Becky Gretton*

This has been a remarkably cold and snowy winter. I am grateful to see Black-capped Chickadees appear at my feeders despite the weather, and looked into how this happens.

Birds must maintain an elevated body temperature (generally about 105 degrees) to stay active. They must maximize calories ingested while minimizing calories spent. If a Chickadee maintained foot temperature equal to its body, calories would be drained to an unsustainable level. Therefore, its feet maintain a temperature near freezing while the body temperature remains high. Blood flow into the feet is continuous, with the veins of warm blood flowing to the feet running next to veins of cold blood



Black-capped Chickadee
Photo by Landa Palmer

returning to the body, transferring some warmth as a result. Thus, calories are conserved and the feet are fully functional.

They fluff out their feathers to trap body heat. At night they seek natural tree holes or crevices and reduce their body heat, often shivering all night which makes calorie

replacement vital the next day.

Just when they need the most food, winter food sources are much scarcer. Chickadees forage in groups, feeding everywhere and watching one another for sources. They seek seeds, insects and pupae, spiders and spider eggs which are hidden away in their own fashion for winter survival. Teamwork enhances Chickadees' survival rate.

The DOAS Bird Seed Sale is a splendid way to enhance bird survival, and who could have predicted the extreme demand this winter? Thankfully, many of us are well prepared.



Pair of Hooded Mergansers
Photo by Tom Salo

The 2025 Butternuts Christmas Bird Count

By *Sandy Bright*

The second Butternuts Christmas Bird Count, organized by Samuel Weaver, took place on January 3rd under cloudy skies, with temperatures starting in the teens. Twenty-two field participants braved the cold, some biking, some walking, and some driving, while six feeder-watchers contributed observations from home. A total of 43 species were recorded, two fewer than last year, but the 6434 individual birds counted exceeded last year's total by nearly 3000.

Five species of waterfowl were spotted. Tom and Jo Salo discovered a pair of Hooded Mergansers and

captured a striking photograph set against shimmering water and ice- and snow-covered vegetation.

Other highlights included a flock of Evening Grosbeaks in Westville, as well as two adult and two immature Bald Eagles flying together, seen by Randy and Carol Lynch.

The scientific value of the CBC lies in its massive database – from 125 years and 2,700 count circles – that helps identify regional trends. Individual counts are just a snapshot in time and space, with results highly dependent on conditions, observer effort, and the habitats present in that local area.

For example, last year's count recorded four Belted Kingfishers when water was largely unfrozen, whereas none were found this year when water was mostly frozen.

Habitat differences also influence results: Butternuts, with its many open agricultural fields, yielded 90 American Tree Sparrows and 16 Golden-crowned Kinglets, compared to Oneonta's rolling hills and forests, where only 16 Tree Sparrows and no kinglets were found.

Continued on page 5

The success of the second Butternuts Christmas Bird Count reflects both the dedication of its volunteers and the value of expanding our coverage. While individual results may vary from year to year based on weather and habitat, each count contributes to a growing dataset that enhances our understanding of bird populations and long-term trends in this area. We look forward to building on this inaugural effort in future years, welcoming new participants and continuing to celebrate the diversity of birds in the Butternuts region.

Making Space for Nature: The Stewardship Act of 2026

By DOAS Director Susan O'Handley

Bird populations have faced a staggering decline of 30% since 1970, a loss of nearly 3 billion birds. While the scale of habitat loss can feel overwhelming, a new bipartisan effort is bringing the solution directly to our doorstep. The *Local Communities & Bird Habitat Stewardship Act* is a transformative bill designed to protect the birds we love, right where we live.

For those of us in our local neighborhoods, this isn't just "another bill"—it's a roadmap for greener, healthier communities. The legislation creates a federal grant program to support municipal, tribal, and NGO-led efforts to restore and enhance bird habitats in urban and suburban areas. From replacing invasive species with native plants to reducing hazardous building collisions, this act empowers us to make our own backyards a sanctuary for migratory species.

Why This Bill Matters

Most people don't realize that many of our most iconic migratory birds pass through our cities and towns as they journey across the continent. These landscapes are vital "pit stops" for survival.

Public Health & Resilience:

Investing in bird-friendly green spaces does more than help wildlife, it improves our air quality, mitigates "heat island" effects and builds flood resilience.

The Urban Bird Treaty: The bill includes \$1 million annually for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Urban Bird Treaty program, specifically targeting urban conservation.

Local Impact: This funding could directly support our work here in our region, allowing for expanded community education and action efforts.

Nature isn't something that only exists in far-off wilderness areas; it's the warbler in the park and the

swifts above us. By supporting the Stewardship Act, we are ensuring that as our communities grow, we don't leave our feathered neighbors behind.

Take Action Today

We need your voice to ensure this bill moves forward. Your representatives need to hear that bird conservation is a priority for their constituents. By speaking up now, you help secure the federal funding necessary to transform our local parks and neighborhoods into resilient havens for wildlife. It only takes a moment to advocate for a greener, more bird-friendly future for our communities.

To send a postcard to your representatives, please visit <https://doas.us/stewardship-act-2026/> and submit the form by April 10, 2026.

January-February 2026 Bird Sightings

By Sandy Bright

This sightings period has been characterized by temperatures consistently below freezing, often hovering around 0°, and snow that arrived and just didn't leave.

Keeping bird feeders and our heated bird bath clean and full has been a challenge, but has been well worth the effort to enjoy the avian visitors.

Sightings of winter visitors continued throughout the region. Evening Grosbeaks were spotted by Samuel Weaver (Morris), Jodi

Continued on page 6

Brodsky (Bainbridge) and Suzanne Summers (Hartwick), who also found four Snow Buntings near Springfield Center. Samuel also observed Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins near Morris. Lance Verderame watched a Ruby-crowned Kinglet – “extremely rare this time of year in Delaware County” - visiting a feeder station near Downsville.

A few unexpected “summer” birds also appeared: Prudence Danforth spotted an Eastern Towhee in her pine tree in Unadilla (1/23), while Deb Miller reported that a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, first seen in early January, was still present in mid-February in Fly Creek.

Some partial migrants - birds that may remain in an area depending on food availability - lingered into late January. Rick Bunting photographed young Great Blue Heron and Belted Kingfisher near Bainbridge.

Waterfowl sightings included Northern Pintail at the Cannonsville Reservoir and Horned Grebe in Stilesville (Jodi Brodsky); Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye in Downsville (Lance Verderame); and Redhead and Greater Scaup on



Belted Kingfisher
Photo by Rick Bunting



Immature Great Blue Heron
Photo by Rick Bunting

Otsego Lake (Tom Salo).

In mid-February, a Saw-Whet Owl perched on Angelika Rashkow’s hydrangea bush near her feeder for a couple of days, leaving only intermittently. Though nocturnal, it likely was doing some daytime hunting during a period when prey was harder to access under the extensive snow cover.

Predation stories added drama to the season. Tom Salo slowed his truck one day to allow a deer running at full speed to cross the road—only to realize a second deer was fleeing for good reason: it was being chased by a Golden Eagle. “Unfortunately, by the time I got the truck stopped and the camera out, the second deer had gotten into cover. The “unfortunate”, of course, depends on whether you are human, eagle, or deer.

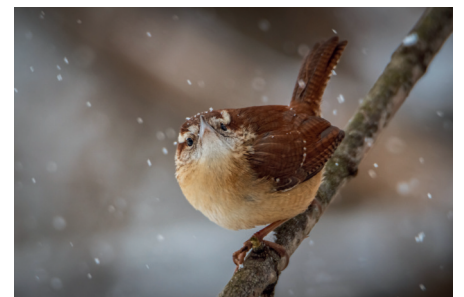
Another remarkable encounter came from Don Dickerson. While driving down a twisty road near Hartwick Seminary, he observed a crow working on its breakfast when a relatively small Red-tailed Hawk swooped in and struck. Struggling, the hawk managed to take off and fly away with its cumbersome load.

Birds learn there are easy meals available at feeders, but not all visitors are looking for seed or suet. One Mourning Dove missed the explosive exit of the other diners when a Cooper’s Hawk arrived at a previously tranquil scene at Rick Bunting’s feeder. The hawk was in no rush to leave, forcing the dove to freeze in place for at least ten minutes.



Mourning Dove
Photo by Rick Bunting

Carolina Wrens are among the few species that sing year-round. At a time when snowy landscapes and frigid temperatures deepen the quiet solitude of winter, Rick—as do we all—welcomes their bright, cheerful song.



Carolina Wren
Photo by James Monfils
Audubon Photography Awards

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

Volunteer Raptor Identification Training at Betty and Wilbur Davis State Park

by *Becky Gretton*



Red-shouldered Hawk
Photo by Landa Palmer

Are you interested in learning raptor identification skills? DOAS is interested in teaching you this month, in preparation for fall migration at Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch. We are in need of skilled counters and are reaching out to train interested individuals. Becky Gretton and others will be on site at Davis for spring migration, spotting Golden and Bald Eagles, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks and other species as well. Contact Becky at 16onogu@gmail.com to get started!

Upcoming Activities

March

March 3 - **DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 p.m.

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

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 (see article, page 1)

March 21: **Montezuma NWR and Wetlands Trip:** Meet at the NWR Headquarters at 10 a.m. (see article, page 8)

DOAS PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

April

April 17 - **DOAS Public Program:** “Protecting Birds Across Their Whole Migratory Paths: Good News for Linking Habitat Conservation Across the Americas,” presented by Bedford Audubon Board President John Hannan. Via Zoom at 7:30 p.m.; registration required at <https://tinyurl.com/2ehh375s> (See article, page 1)

April 21 - **DOAS Board Meeting:** 6:30 p.m.

May

May 15 - **DOAS Public Program:** “Wild Wonders of New Zealand” presented by Kathryn Davino, DOAS Director. In person at Elm Park Church, 401 Chestnut Street in Oneonta at 7:30 p.m. Also available via Zoom; register at: <https://tinyurl.com/2junt69v>

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

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Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge and Wetlands Complex Trip

By Chris DeCesare

The Montezuma NWR and Wetlands Complex is considered a globally significant Important Bird Area because of the number of waterfowl that stop there during migration season. It is comprised of 50,000 acres of wetlands and upland habitat that is cooperatively managed through federal, state, and local partnerships.

Join DOAS Board member Chris DeCesare to view some of the many birds that will stop on their way north to their breeding grounds. Past sightings have included Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes, Bald Eagles, swans, and a variety of ducks. The trip will begin at the refuge headquarters and then travel by car to hotspots around the complex. There may be a small amount of walking on level ground. Prepare for possible muddy or snowy ground and dress in layers. It is often windy.

Participants can plan to meet at Montezuma NWR headquarters at 10:00 a.m. Those interested in carpooling from the Oneonta area can meet at the parking lot between Dietz and Ford Streets across from the YMCA at 7:30 a.m. This is an all-day trip with time spent birding until 2:15 p.m. at the refuge and a return to Oneonta around 5:00 p.m. Bring a bag lunch, snacks, and drinks. For more details, contact Chris at 607-244-5496 or chris.decesare444@gmail.com



*Montezuma NWR, 2025
Photo by Laurie Rankin*