



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

April Program: Protecting Birds Across Their Whole Migratory Paths: Good News for Linking Habitat Conservation Across the Americas

By *Becky Gretton*

Audubon is encouraging chapters to engage in full-life cycle bird conservation efforts, from their local sanctuaries and Important Bird Areas to the key migratory stopover and wintering grounds our nesting species use. Bedford Audubon Board President John Hannan has worked with multiple bird conservation organizations across the Americas doing just that.

Join us on April 17 at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom to enjoy John’s beautiful imagery of birds and landscapes while learning about some of the key hemispheric bird conservation initiatives happening right now across the Americas.



Blackburnian Warbler
Photo by John Hannan

This work, being done by a wide-ranging coalition including National Audubon, will build long-term sustainable economies and community benefits while protecting the same birds we work to safeguard right here in New York State. From massive endeavors to preserve more than 1.2 million acres of high Andes habitat to community science projects you can be part of,

John will present an uplifting view of bird conservation in the Americas and ways in which you can participate.

John is an avid naturalist, conservationist, and photographer. He has been part of the Audubon family at many levels, including on staff at National Audubon, a past Chair of the Audubon NY State Chapters’ Council, and past and current president of Bedford Audubon’s Board of Directors. In 2024 he retired from BirdLife International, the world’s largest partnership of bird conservation organizations.

Registration for this Zoom program is required at <https://tinyurl.com/2ehh375s>

Mark your Calendars...

By *Kathryn Davino*

Kathryn and Al Davino made their winter escape to New Zealand in February of 2025, and Kathryn returned bubbling over with photos and stories about this captivating place. The island nation is characterized by soaring, snowy peaks in the south and bubbling hot springs in the north. It’s home to bizarre birds like flightless, nocturnal Kiwis and Kākāpōs (the heaviest parrot on earth), and mischievous alpine parrots called Keas.

Join us on May 15 at 7:30 p.m. for this fascinating in-person presentation at Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street, Oneonta, and on Zoom.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Conservation & Legislation 2**
- Director’s Column 3**
- Fake it Till You Make It4**
- Bird Sightings 4-5**
- Co-President’s Column 5- 6**
- Upcoming Activities 6-7**
- Big Day 2026 8**

Conservation and Legislation

By *Andy Mason*

State Legislature Back in Session—

This is not necessarily good news! While positive environmental legislation is introduced in the Senate and Assembly, it often passes one house but not the other. And there is always the possibility of backsliding on good laws, particularly this year.

It appears Governor Kathy Hochul is set on rolling back provisions of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) — a move that would increase fossil fuel dependence, raise long-term energy costs, and undermine protections for our air and water. Passed in 2014, the CLCPA is one of the most forward-looking climate statutes in the country and in the world. Unfortunately, Governor Hochul has never fully instituted its provisions and now wants to put off cap-and-invest regulations until 2030 and to change the accounting methods used to determine the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions. These are two of the most critical aspects of the law.

The governor is attempting to include these changes in the state budget, which may already be adopted when you read this. However, legislators supporting strong climate action are trying to keep this as stand-alone legislation, which is what policy changes should be.

What you can do—Call or email Gov. Hochul and your state Senator and Assemblymember; tell them that the CLCPA is more important than ever with the federal government gutting climate change regulations.

Plastics Packaging Bill Needs a Vote—On the last day of the 2025

legislative session, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie blocked a floor vote on well-supported legislation that would make a modest start on making plastic manufacturers responsible for properly handling the single-use packaging that makes up a large proportion of our waste stream. And of course much of this plastic ends up littering neighborhoods and floating down waterways or dumped at sea. Birds and other wildlife are at risk from this plastic debris; humans are not immune either. The microplastics from the breakdown of plastic packaging are in everyone's body with growing recognition of negative health effects. Plastic producers and packaging manufacturers heavily lobbied the Legislature and Speaker Heastie to stop the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (PRRIA), and their money and pressure paid off in 2025. However the legislation remains active in Albany and likely has enough votes to pass the Senate—where it has succeeded before—and in the Assembly if the leadership allows it.

What you can do—Contact Assembly Speaker Heastie and ask him to allow his house to vote on the PRRIA and help to put responsibility for plastic waste where it belongs. (Speaker Carl Heastie, NY State Assembly, Albany, NY 12248: 518-455-3791, fax: 518-455-5459; Speaker@nyassembly.gov.)

Contact information can be found in the Advocacy section of our website, [DOAS.us](https://doas.us)

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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

The Story of a Winter Hummingbird

By Director Kathryn Davino

It was late autumn of 2025, and in the forested and snow-covered hills of central Delaware County there was a tiny hummingbird being fed by a very kind person. Rieko Saito provided nectar daily from October through early December for a vagrant hummingbird that most likely originated in the western regions of the continent. She first noted the bird was different from the usual Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in August. The bird, which was most likely an adult female Rufous Hummingbird, stayed nearby, even after the October frosts and the steady decline in November temperatures. She maintained a daily routine of seeking nectar, often appearing expectantly at Rieko's window.

It is noteworthy that Rufous Hummingbirds breed as far north as south-eastern Alaska – the northern-most breeding range of any hummingbird in the world. Of the western hummingbirds that occasionally show up in the east, the Rufous Hummingbird is the most common. I was surprised to learn that there are many accounts of vagrants that visit feeders from October into December, and even a few that survive the entire winter in northern regions. This bird was very lucky to find Rieko willing to keep her nectar feeder going.

One morning in mid-October, Rieko found the nectar frozen, so began taking the nectar feeder indoors each night, then putting it out again the next morning.

As knowledgeable birders noticed her Facebook posts about the bird, she was advised to increase the sugar concentration in her nectar to three parts water to one part sugar (it's usually 4 to 1), and to get a heated nectar feeder. Rieko found a helpful group on Facebook that focuses all of their discussions upon what they call winter hummingbirds:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/winterhummingbirds>.

Several New York State ornithologists and hummingbird experts also offered advice and encouragement.

On December 2, a snowstorm dumped 5 to 7 inches of snow on the hills of Delaware County, and still the hummingbird returned the next morning. Rieko was very concerned about the prediction for sub-zero temperatures for the night of December 3, so she engineered a heating pad for the feeder to keep it from freezing. Her feeder worked great, but unfortunately, the bird did not return the next morning. Rieko continued to maintain a heated feeder for a while longer, just in case that bird or any other migrating bird came through; however, the hummingbird never reappeared.

Did the bird move on or succumb to the cold? It was suggested by some members of the Facebook group that the bird may have been an older female who didn't have the fat reserves to carry on south. We may never be certain of the bird's fate, but I hope you will agree that this is an incredible



Rufous Hummingbird
Photos by Reiko Saito



story! Because of her dedication to providing a lifeline to this tiny bird, Rieko can certainly be considered a hero. Watching her story unfold on Facebook allowed all of us to learn more about the marvels of western hummingbirds and those who support them when they wander east.

The members of the winter hummingbirds group aim to provide a network of feeders to support those late migrants as they journey south. Perhaps this story will encourage you to keep your nectar feeder up into the late fall, so you can assist these tough little birds, too.

Rieko regularly shared her photos and videos on Facebook through the fall, and all photos included here are hers. Many thanks to Rieko!

If you're interested in another fascinating story about a hummingbird that stayed the entire winter in 1989, I suggest *A Hummingbird in My House: The Story of Squeak* by Arnette Heidcamp. For those interested in learning more about Rufous Hummingbirds, visit

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rufous_Hummingbird.



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Fake It Till You Make It

By Loretta Brady

There's really only one way to up your raptor ID game: field time with the pros.

That's just what ten of us did one fine March day spent with Becky Gretton, Tom Salo, and Nancy New amid the pastoral charms of Betty and Wilbur Davis State Park during the DOAS Raptor Identification Training.

Sure, my comrades and I had flipped through falcon photos, studied mug shots of Golden vs. Bald Eagles, and autplayed way too many video hours of flying hawks, but there's nothing like good ol' practice and feedback.

We also practiced swallowing our pride that day.

"Wait, where do you see that bird? What do you mean above the trees? They're all trees!" we'd refrain. Each

time we failed to name—or even spot, for crying out loud—the main character, we had to stifle a rising inferiority complex.

"It's not about shaming, but improving your skills," Becky encouraged. "We're all upping our skills all the time," she added. Then came the moments when we'd nail it, and we beamed with geeky pride.

"Bam: white rump flashing, that's an acrobatic Harrier up there."

"Oh, oh, oh. pointy wings and tippy, trippy speed: that's an angelic little kestrel."

"You'll get to a point where you'll know these birds so intimately, it's like recognizing people you love from far away, just by their movements as they walk down the street," Tom said.

Even when we didn't know what ID to assign--Cooper? Sharpie?--we



Northern Harrier
Photo by Lisa Brown-Hite
Audubon Photography Awards

were repeatedly struck by the sacred soaring, the graceful gliding of these divine creatures.

For some self-study, Tom and Becky recommend the book *Hawks in Flight* by Dunne, Sibley and Sutton and the youtube videos of David Brown, from Derby Hill. It's never too late to join the training, and eventually volunteer with us.

See you this fall at Franklin Mountain. You'll come for the counting, but stay for the fun.

February-March 2026 Bird Sightings

By Sandy Bright

While I try not to anthropomorphize, sometimes it's irresistible. As Valentine's Day approached in February, Rick Bunting captured the spirit in an enchanting photo of two Bald Eagles, their curved necks forming the shape of a heart as they touched beaks in a tender courtship ritual. A week into March, the female was sitting on eggs.

Wintering waterfowl reported this period included Mute Swans and Common Mergansers spotted by Chris DeCesare in the Susquehanna near Wells Bridge; Redheads and Greater Scaup on Otsego Lake by Tom Salo; Gadwall, Mute Swans,



Pair of Bald Eagles
Photo by Rick Bunting

American Wigeon, and more at the Cannonsville Reservoir, and Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye in Downsville (Lance Verderame).

Migration is clearly underway. Sue and Tom Whitney watched a juvenile Golden Eagle soaring over

Glimmerglass State Park on the last day in February. Kathryn Davino noted the declining number of visiting Blue Jays. Several hundred Snow Geese and a few thousand Canada Geese migrated over the Davis State Park Hawkwatch near Westford on their first two days of counting this season.

Short-distance migrants began to arrive. On the final day of our shortest month, a Turkey Vulture soared over upper East Street in Oneonta (Sue and Tom Whitney, 2/28). Red-winged Blackbirds and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers arrived March 1st (Sarah Root); Common Grackles on

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

the 2nd (Randy Lynch), and Great Blue Herons on the 10th (Rick Bunting). Although this sighting occurred outside our local counties, the Yellow-rumped Warbler Rick found at Cayuga Lake deserves a mention for its choice of food, which Rick found quite unappetizing: poison ivy berries.

Pam Peters heard Killdeer calling and Song Sparrows singing near Treadwell, spotted an Osprey near Middleburg, then found a pair of Hooded Mergansers and a lone male Wigeon on ponds (3/11). The following day, despite blustery winds, she heard an Eastern Meadowlark sing.

A Barred Owl appeared one day on Becky Gretton's feeder pole around dinner time and hung around for about 15 minutes then flew up to a tree branch, possibly hoping for an easy meal.

As days lengthen, birds prepare for breeding season. Rick Bunting spotted Common Ravens carrying nesting material and photographed two male Hooded Mergansers, one posturing for a female, another



*Hooded Mergansers
Photos by Rick Bunting*



preparing to charge a rival male. Barb Palmer observed one Blue Jay feed another in a bonding ritual, heard Pileated Woodpeckers drumming, and found Mallard and Wood Duck pairs. Pam Peters listened to



*Evening Grosbeaks
Photo by Randy Lynch*

DOAS in Court

By Co-President Andy Mason

If you read last month's conservation column you learned that DOAS has signed on with the environmental law firm Earthjustice as a client in the renewed battle against the Constitution Pipeline. Entering a legal fray is something we have done before and is a very different animal than writing elected officials or even speaking at public hearings.

Becoming a formal intervenor or a plaintiff in a court action is a larger and more formal commitment with specific rules that must be followed. It can also be costly. Back in 2017 we became an intervenor in a case before the NYS Public Service Commission to build a major wind farm in Broome County. We had belief and evidence that the project location

was in a significant pathway for raptor migration, particularly Golden Eagles. We applied for and received intervenor funding to make our case against the project. In addition, DOAS members and others were generous in contributing to our fight. Under the leadership of Tom Salo we commissioned

the tinkling cascade of a Brown Creeper song. Randy Lynch heard the first "PEENT" of an American Woodcock (3/13).

Regular sightings of Evening Grosbeaks began in mid-November and continued throughout the winter. The latest report came in as I was writing this article: Randy Lynch sent a photo of 16 of these voracious eaters at a single feeder. Other late lingerers were Fox Sparrows (Ruth Pedersen) and Pine Siskins (Randy Lynch).

While vacationing in Florida, my husband and I watched an American Kestrel carry a small rodent to a large live oak tree. It disappeared behind some Spanish moss, reappearing moments later empty-taloned. This was repeated a few minutes later, a behavior that, later in the breeding season, I would associate with feeding young. Research revealed that kestrels sometimes cache food - a reminder that bird behavior never ceases to surprise.

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

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Continued on page 6

expert reports on the risk to birds, conducted on-site surveys of raptor movements and hired legal assistance to help with hearings on the case, which stretched for 3 years.

Ultimately the project was approved, but we did achieve some mitigation measures to hopefully assist eagle populations. As a follow-up to this and other decisions by the state, we participated in a legal challenge to new state rules governing renewable energy projects. We support alternative energy but wanted to ensure that projects received adequate review and public

involvement. This case reached New York's highest court but again was unsuccessful.

The current effort to halt the re-start of the Constitution Pipeline is presently before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), but will almost certainly end up in federal court, as did the first attempt to build the pipeline. We were part of a coalition of environmental groups represented by Earthjustice that won rulings at several judicial levels and eventually caused Constitution to abandon its plans.

Earthjustice is not charging DOAS for its representation in this case. They are an outstanding law firm with attorneys experienced in environmental law at all levels with a good track record of success. We are fortunate to be associated with them.

Entering the legal arena is often a last resort, but a necessary one, particularly when facing an aggressive anti-environment presence such as the current administration. Pushback from groups such as ours and individuals such as our members can carry the day when right is on our side.

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.

Upcoming Activities

Please note that all DOAS Bird Walks are dog-free, aside from service dogs

April

April 16 - **Parslow Road Woodcock Walk:** 7:15 p.m. (rain date 4/17). Join Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright at the Otsego Land Trust's Parslow Road Conservation Area at 127 Parslow Road, Hartwick, to observe the courting displays of the woodcocks that inhabit this protected property. In our experience, these displays occur shortly after sunset, which is around 7:43 p.m. that day. We'll meet in the parking lot and take the trail to the woodcocks' location. The path is fairly level, although at times quite uneven, and may be muddy and wet. Total distance will be about .5 mile; the second half of the walk will be in darkness, so it's advisable to bring a flashlight. Note that there are no restroom facilities at the parking lot. Attendance is limited to 20; registration required at doas.us

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 7 - **Spring Bird Walk:** 7:30 a.m. - 12 p.m. (rain date 5/8). Join Pam Peters and Eileen Kline on Pam's property outside of Franklin. The 2.5 mile walk will start in an open field and move through mixed deciduous woods on old logging roads. Terrain is uneven and rocky with a few short steep sections. There are resting benches in the field; a bathroom is available at Pam's house at beginning and end of the walk. All levels of experience are welcomed. Bring water, snacks, bug spray and hiking sticks if needed. Registration is limited; please email Pam Peters by May 1st at ovenbirdp@gmail.com to register and for directions.

Continued on page 7

Attendees will be notified the night before if weather cancels the trip.

May 9 - Oneonta Susquehanna Greenway Bird Walk: 8-10 a.m. Join Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright to view returning migrant birds on the Oneonta Susquehanna Greenway trail. Meet in the parking lot by the fields near the school district bus garage, just past the transfer station on Silas Lane, off Route 205 in Oneonta. This will be an easy hike of about a mile on level ground which may be muddy. The walk will last about two hours; no restrooms are available. There are a few benches along the way. Contact Charlie Scheim for more info at 607-434-4880 or scheimc@hartwick.edu

May 9 - Earth Festival: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. at its new location: Chase Auditorium on the SUNY Oneonta Campus. DOAS will offer informational exhibits and will sell coffee, hats and mugs. Register at doas.us for the opportunity to make Acopian BirdSavers window treatments, designed to reduce bird-window collisions.

May 10 - Onderdunk Road Bird Walk: 6 a.m. Join long-time birder Bob Donnelly in Sharon Springs for an early morning trip to look for snipe, rails, and bitterns in the Onderdunk Road area. Meet at Bob's Country Store, 102 NY 165, Roseboom at 6 a.m.

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> (See article, page 1)

May 16 - DOAS Big Day: Join DOAS in this group effort to locate as many bird species as possible in a single day! (See article, page 8)

May 19 - Pine Lake Bird Walk: 8-10 a.m. Join DOAS Director Jane Bachman and long-time birder Suzanne Gaynor at Hartwick College's Pine Lake Environmental campus in Davenport Center. This will be a 1.5 mile walk past a variety of habitats including Pine Lake, Charlotte Creek, woods, a swamp, and open field. There is one moderate climb and much of the walking is

on uneven woodland trails. Sturdy footwear is recommended. We can expect warblers, ducks, other songbirds, and possibly Bald Eagles that nest nearby. A restroom is available at the start and end of the walk. Meet at 8 a.m. in the Pine Lake parking lot at 1894 Charlotte Creek Road, Oneonta, NY. Contact Suzanne Gaynor at 607-435-2939 for more information.

May 23 - Hanford Mills Exploration Days Bird Walk: 8 a.m. DOAS Director Kathryn Davino and long-time birder Suzanne Gaynor will co-lead a bird walk around the Hanford Mills property; both beginners and experienced birders are welcome. The half mile walk covers fairly level terrain and will last about 90 minutes. The trail traverses a variety of surfaces: grass, gravel, and boardwalk, and does include an occasional step up/down and a few gentle slopes. 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. Participants should meet in the event parking lot (south side of Route 12, opposite museum buildings) and bring binoculars, insect repellent, water, and curiosity about birds! When we return to the parking lot, we invite folks to join us as we drive a short distance to see a Bald Eagle nest. Pre-registration is appreciated at doas.us; this allows leaders to contact participants if there is an issue with the weather. Call Kathryn Davino (607-746-7396) with questions.

May 24 - Andes Rail Trail Bird Walk: 8-10 a.m. Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright will lead a bird walk on the Andes Rail Trail in Andes, NY. This walk has been scheduled at the request of the Andes Garden Club, but all are welcome. We'll meet at the Andes Rail Trail parking lot at 266 Depot Street in Andes. The 1.5 mile walk will follow the Rail Trail, which is firm dirt, but not paved, along generally level terrain with no steep uphill (we'll turn around before the trail gets very steep). There is parking at the beginning of the rail trail, but no restrooms.

TBA - Uplands Center Bird Walk: Check the June newsletter or doas.us for further information.

DOAS PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.
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Big Day 2026

By Charlie Scheim

Birders of all experience levels are invited to join the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Big Day! The Big Day is a group effort in which birders, working alone, in pairs, or in small groups, will try to locate as many bird species as we can in a single fun day on Saturday May 16. Birders can spend any amount of time they choose within that 24 hours, and report on their efforts to the Big Day coordinator, Charlie Scheim. Everyone is welcome, novice or experienced. If you are interested and have not participated before, please contact Charlie at 607-434-4880 (voice or text) or scheimc@hartwick.edu for information on joining in the fun.

Note that the DOAS Big Day is not the same as the Global Big Day sponsored by Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology, which occurs the Saturday before ours.



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