



THE BELTED KINGFISHER

DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

May 15 Program: Wild Wonders of New Zealand

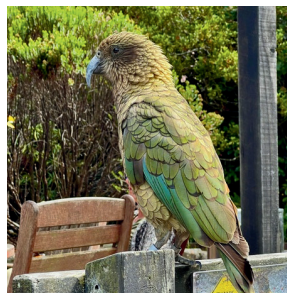
By *Kathryn Davino*

New Zealand is a fascinating island nation, 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. Fans of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* will recall the beautiful landscapes of New Zealand where these trilogies were filmed, leveraging the country's diverse landscapes for the movies.

Kathryn and Al Davino made their winter escape to New Zealand in February of 2025, and Kathryn



Tasman Glacier and Lake
Photo by Kathryn Davino



Kea
Photo by Kathryn Davino

returned full of stories and photos about this captivating place.

Presenter Kathryn Davino is a retired high school biology teacher from Delaware Academy in Delhi. She is an enthusiastic birder, gardener, and watcher of wildlife. She has served on the DOAS Board of Directors since 2016.

Join us at 7:30 p.m. on May 15 for this fascinating in-person program at Elm Park Methodist Church, 401 Chestnut Street in Oneonta. Refreshments will be served, and bird-friendly coffee, DOAS hats and mugs, and copies of *The Eagle Guy* will be available for sale. The program will also be available via Zoom; register at <https://tinyurl.com/2junt69v>

Big Day 2026

By *Charlie Scheim*



A reminder: On May 16, 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 day. 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.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Conservation & Legislation 2-3**
- Ode to the Indigo Bunting 3**
- Board of Directors Elections 3**
- Bird Sightings 4**
- Director's Column 5**
- Upcoming Activities 6-7**
- Montezuma Trip 8**

Conservation and Legislation

By *Andy Mason*

SEQRA under attack— One of the most important environmental statutes in New York is the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). This is the law that requires a hard look at potential negative effects to the environment of projects requiring government approval.

SEQRA arose from a simple, sensible idea—let’s consider what might happen before an action takes place rather than dealing with the consequences afterward. SEQRA grew from the federal National Environmental Policy Act, passed in 1970, based on the same common sense principle of looking at environmental ramifications before proceeding. New York’s version fills the requirements of NEPA.

SEQRA is the law that sometimes requires preparation of an environmental impact statement, but in fact this is a rare occurrence. Much more commonly a proposed project receives a brief review by a local planning board or other entity which gives the project a negative finding, meaning it will not have a significant environmental impact. But at least this basic step is taken, which also provides for public input.

The SEQRA process has been considered a success, with the environmental review often heading off potential problems that even the developers did not recognize. Any administrative burden is generally light and is now an accepted part of development proposals. However,

New York Governor Kathy Hochul is proposing to significantly weaken SEQRA in order to promote construction of housing projects in the state. Although there is a generally recognized need for affordable housing in the state, the “Let Them Build” agenda, as it has been dubbed, raises several critical issues, including no mention of affordable housing—despite addressing the housing crisis as a key goal; severe restriction of local land use authority; disregard of community planning needs; changes to the regulatory review process; lack of clarity for development sites; and more.

Development projects can often impact ground and surface water quality, wildlife and critical habitats, traffic, and community character. Without the benefit of a full SEQRA review, these impacts not only have the potential to jeopardize the environment but reduce the public’s ability to fully understand the impacts and participate in a comprehensive review process. Any changes to SEQRA should come about as a result of a well-thought out, transparent process—not a back room deal put together as part of the hidden state budget negotiations. The governor is using the need for housing as an excuse to weaken a critical environmental law that would affect all development projects. SEQRA has been a successful, well-supported law for over 50 years and is needed as much today as at its inception.

Continued on page 3

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

What you can do—Let Governor Hochul know that you support SEQRA and do not want to see changes to weaken it. There are means to reduce the regulatory requirements for affordable housing that do not broadly wipe out the important review function of this law. Tell the Governor to allow a full open public discussion of any changes to SEQRA before promoting legislation.

*Governor Kathy Hochul; NYS State Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224;
518-474-8390; Email: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>*

Ode to the Indigo Bunting

By *Julene Waffle*



*Indigo Bunting
Photo by Xianwei Zeng
Audubon Photography Awards*

You are not blue, not really—
but a trick of feathered lattice,
microscopic barbs bending light
into indigo illusion.
A prism perched on my wire fence,
you split the ordinary
into astonishment.
Summer is your longitude,
your body the compass
that inhales starlight,
exhales migration.
You read the Milky Way
like scripture,
winging south on constellations.

What is indigo, if not
the syllables between violet and
night,
a threshold color,
ink before it dries,
a pigment of prayer?
You wear it as vestige,
a psalm sewn into a bruise,
your song a bright cipher
against the grain of dawn.
Fragment of sky, flame of my
hedgerows,
what sermon do you sing—
that beauty is only refraction?

That even bones can carry
the language of galaxies?
That wonder arrives
winged and weightless,
dressed in an arc of color
that is not color at all?

*This poem was first published in
One Art, an online literary
magazine, on January 4, 2026.
www.wafflepoetry.com*

Board of Directors Election

By *Prudence Danforth*

The DOAS Nominating Committee (Kathryn Davino, Katie Boardman, Prudence Danforth, and Melody Gibson), will present candidates for election to the Board of Directors at the May program on Friday, May 15. The nominated slate includes incumbents: Jane Bachman, Becky Gretton, Andy Mason, Nancy New, Charlie Scheim, and Tom Salo. In addition, Zoë Vandermeulen has been nominated to join the board.

Zoë lives in Unadilla and is the president and founder of Action Collaboration, a workforce development company. She is also an active member of the Rotary Club of Unadilla. In her free time, she enjoys watching the wild-life along the Susquehanna River from her back porch, especially Belted Kingfishers, Bald Eagles, and Green Herons. Zoë has visited the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch several times over the past few years, but is still waiting to spot a Golden Eagle. She aims to work with the other board members to promote the appreciation and stewardship of nature in our area and increase public participation in DOAS activities.

Please come to the May 15th program, when members will vote on the nominated slate for a two-year term to the Board of Directors. Nominations also may be made from the floor at the May program.

March-April 2026 Bird Sightings

By *Sandy Bright*

It's always a treat to spot a bird in an unexpected place. Barb Palmer saw two Wood Ducks flying from the top of one of her maple trees, nowhere near her pond. She also spotted the season's first American Kestrel (Jefferson, 3/15).

Jean Pettersen had a distant view of an all-white bird perched on a short power pole. When it took off, it flew over a field "powerfully low and smooth". She relocated it in a hedge-row tree, where its size—compared with two nearby crows—and overall appearance indicated she had found a Snowy Owl.

Early signs of breeding are underway in some species. Lisa Gorn observed several American Woodcocks peenting and doing their display flights over her pasture near Morris (3/17). Carly Carillo spotted an Osprey at the Springbrook nest. A pair of Eastern Bluebirds claimed one of Barb Palmer's nest boxes.

The first Merlin arrived in Oneonta March 25th. A few days later a Merlin - likely the same one - called repeatedly in Wilber Park for at least 45 minutes, apparently searching for a mate. The following day, two were seen perched together in the area. Gerianne Carillo reported a Merlin pair in Milford, where they were already "terrorizing the village birds".

Evening Grosbeaks continued with occasional reports throughout the period by Suzanne Summers, Deb Miller, and Kathryn Davino. Fox Sparrows were noted by Kathryn and Landa Palmer. Sarah Root found



Hermit Thrush
Photo by Landa Palmer

Ruby-crowned Kinglets in the woods near her Portlandville home.

Pete Fenner discovered Red Crossbills at the Arnold Lake Road wetland. Pete also documented an impressive variety of waterfowl at Otsego Lake, including a rare (for this area) Surf Scoter, along with Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Red-head, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Horned Grebe, and Common Loon. In Springfield Center, he identified three Cackling Geese among a flock of Canada Geese.

Additional migrating waterfowl included Ring-necked Duck and Pied-billed Grebe (Lake Delaware, Ruth Pedersen), Red-breasted Merganser (Lance Verderame, Cannonsville Reservoir), and Wood and Ring-necked Ducks and Green-winged Teal at the West End swamp in Oneonta (Brooke Gregory).

Early migrants continued to arrive: Northern Flicker (3/26, Tom Salo), Belted Kingfisher (3/26, Sarah Root), Brown-headed Cowbird (3/29, Becky Gretton), Eastern Phoebe (3/24) and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (4/3, Pam Peters), and Pine Warbler (4/8, Suzanne Summers). Pam listened to a Hermit

Thrush as it was "singing tentatively in the early morning April snow", and observed a pair of Chipping Sparrows at the Cannonsville Reservoir on April 8th. Two days later she recorded the first Broad-winged Hawk, and she, Kathryn Davino, and Barb Palmer all reported the arrival of Tree Swallows. April 12th brought some more firsts for Pam: Blue-headed Vireo and Field Sparrow singing on a cool morning. As the days lengthen, the returning chorus becomes one of spring's greatest charms. Jane Bachman remarked on an unusual three-note variation in an Eastern Phoebe's song - from two birds - rather than the typical two notes.

Rick Bunting photographed an immature Bald Eagle gathering sticks from an old heron nest, a behavior that reflects a young bird's early breeding instincts. It also illustrates why we need to leave nests in place; birds have been reusing materials long before we humans began to appreciate the value of recycling.

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



Immature Bald Eagle Stealing Sticks
Photo by Rick Bunting

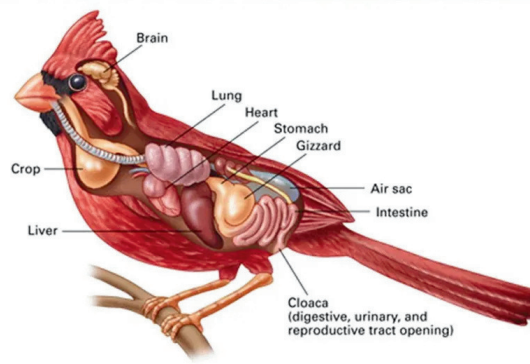
Avian Anatomy 101

By Director Pam Lea DVM

Empirically we know how very different our feathered friends are anatomically from us (and other mammals), but just how different are they?

Mammals and birds diverged in evolution some 300 million years ago. Though both are warm-blooded vertebrates, most of their anatomic differences relate to birds' ability to fly versus a ground-based life (i.e. form follows function). Flight is energetically costly and as such, birds have a high metabolic rate. Their internal temperatures run between 105-109 degrees (versus 97-102 for mammals). Their 4-chambered hearts are proportionately larger, especially the ventricles, allowing for adequate blood flow to the powerful flight muscles which account for 25-35% of their body weight. They also have a higher heart rate, with some songbirds having resting heart rates of 300-400 beats per minute.

Birds have no diaphragm, thus their respiratory system is very different from that of mammals. They do have lungs but also a system of nine air sacs. These air sacs are located before and after the lungs and some extend into hollow bones (ribs and vertebrae – termed “pneumatic bones”). The hollow bones and air sacs not only help to “lighten the load” for flight but allow for a very efficient exchange of oxygen to again fuel the flight muscles. On inhalation, air passes into both the lungs (where the oxygen is exchanged) and the air sacs. On exhalation, the air sacs act as bellows and air passes back through the lungs to again allow for additional oxygen



Bird Internal Anatomy
From *bird-internal anatomy-webp*

exchange. Mammals exhale only stale air. Lacking a diaphragm, birds need to expand their chest to inhale. For this reason, it is very important not to hold a bird too tightly when handling it.

Aside from some bones being hollow, birds have fused radii and ulnas and fused carpi and metacarpals (i.e. wrists and digits), allowing for stiff attachment of the flight muscles. Their keel is an extension of the sternum or breastbone and developed to accommodate the massive flight muscles. Birds often have more than 14 cervical vertebrae (humans have 7) allowing for great flexibility when preening. They have no teeth. Their rigid beaks are made of lightweight keratin and are fused to their lightweight skulls (having only a single sinus). Bird legs are also proportionately shorter than mammals (and covered with scales). If you've ever wondered how birds keep their legs and feet from freezing, their arteries and veins lie in very close proximity to one another. This allows for the warmer arterial blood to warm the returning cooler venous blood. Bird skin is thin and lacks sweat glands but most have an oil gland (uropygial gland) at the base of

their tail to waterproof and clean their feathers during preening. Feathers of course trap air and act as insulation in place of hair or fur.

The digestive system of birds is also very different from mammals. Birds have a crop (owls are an exception) which functions as food storage and works to soften food before it passes into the gizzard (ventriculus) where it is ground up by ingested grit, making nutrients more accessible. Many birds regurgitate undigestible food parts as a pellet. Birds share a single external opening (vent or cloaca) for both excretion and reproduction. They have a single functional ovary (usually the left) and as we know, are oviparous or egg-laying, with the young developing externally. Mammals (with the exception of the platypus) are viviparous, with internal gestation and live births.

Birds also lack internal ear canals. Sound reaches the tympanic membrane through a single opening. This makes them more attuned to higher frequencies. Their eyes are generally larger relative to head size than mammals and there are more photoreceptor cells, especially cones. This allows for greater visual acuity and color discrimination, including ultraviolet perception absent in humans.

Hopefully this article has given you an appreciation for some of the more remarkable anatomic differences between the two classes of animals – *Aves* and *Mammalia*.

Note: For an in-depth discussion of “bird brains”, read “The Genius of Birds” by Jennifer Ackerman.

Upcoming Activities

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

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. 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 1)

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

Continued on page 7



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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.

June

June 7 - **West Branch Preserve Bird Walk:** 8 a.m. Charlie Scheim and Sandy Bright will lead a bird walk at the West Branch Preserve, located in the Town of Hamden, about 10 miles southeast of Delhi. Meet at the preserve entrance and parking area, on NY Route 10, about 0.9 miles west of the intersection with County Route 26. The parking area is adjacent to the Watershed Agricultural Council building at 33195 NY-10. The walk will be on unpaved and at times uneven paths through the fields and forests of the Preserve and will likely last about 1.5 hours. There will be a certain

amount of moderate uphill and downhill walking. There are no restrooms at the preserve and no resting benches along the path. For more information, see the website: https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/eny-west-branch-nature-preserve/?en_txn1=bl.ch_ny.eg.x.g For any questions or last minute weather concerns, contact Charlie Scheim at 607-434- 4880

June 13 - **Uplands Center Bird Walk:** 8 a.m. 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). 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. You may call Charlie Scheim at 607-434-4880 for more information or for any last minute weather concerns.

DOAS PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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

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.

DOAS Membership

Cost is \$25 annually or \$35 for two years; family memberships \$30 annually or \$40 for two years. Memberships can 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

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Return Service Requested

Montezuma Trip

By Chris DeCesare

On March 15, Chris DeCesare led a group of 21 birders to observe migrating waterfowl at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex. Starting at the National Wildlife Refuge, the group saw Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails, and a Bald Eagle nest whose adult would only show the top of its head since it was well tucked into the bowl. Then it was off to explore a number of wetlands and flooded fields in the area. At Tschache Pool, Great Blue Herons had returned to their rookery and were observed flying to and from the area. May's Point brought American Wigeon, a few Hooded Mergansers, and juvenile Bald Eagles sitting in the trees. Sandhill Cranes were feeding in a field along East Road and treated the group by calling and flying over our heads. The Snow Geese were not gathered in the fields or flying overhead in large numbers, but the group got a great look at one hanging out with three Trumpeter Swans and one Tundra Swan sitting in the mucklands along Route 30. Along the way, we picked up Ring-necked ducks, Buffleheads, Mallards, Canvasbacks, Canada Geese, American Coots, a Pied-billed Grebe, a few songbirds, Northern Harriers, and Turkey Vultures. It was a chilly day, but there were plenty of smiles and observations to keep things warm.



Tundra and Trumpeter Swans with Snow Goose (above); Northern Pintail (below)
Photos by Laura Sause



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