

Website: www.vmnbancheereeks.org Email: vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com

President's Message

By Barbara Erlandson

It's the beginning of a new year and we have much to be thankful for.

- The previous president, board, and committees left our chapter in great condition. A big thank you to Brian and the team.
- Our active volunteers have worked 4,154 hours this past year, which amounts to \$108,378 in monetary value
- We have 85 chapter members and 43 of them are certified.
- There is a wonderful infusion of new talent from last year's class (both the Secretary, Treasurer, and Chair of the Communications Committee graduated in 2016)
- The vital Volunteer Service Committee has a new chair ... Jane Yocom. She was amazing in her role as Chair of the Training Committee. I know that she will apply her focus and attention to detail to the VS Committee.
- The current class of students is half way through training. They are bright, engaged and exciting to be around.

I look forward to a year of great things! Thank you all for being part of it.

SAVE THE DATES!

Upcoming Banshee Reeks Volunteer Days

Saturday, February 18th

Saturday, March 18th

Spring Native Plant Sale

Saturday, April 1st

Journey Through Hallowed Ground Dedication Ceremony

Saturday, April 15th

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New Officers and Board

Officers

President - Barbara Erlandson

Vice President - Frank McLaughlin

Secretary - Susan Sims

Treasurer - Angie Bommersbach

Board of Director Members

Dave Cazenias, Bill Cour, Liz Dennison, Allison Gallo, Thaissa Klimavicz, Thomas Letonja

Other Members

Kevin Rose, Chapter Advisor

Brian Meyerreicks, Past President & Chapter Agent

Thanks to everyone who has participated in running our chapter in 2016 and all those who have volunteered to help run it in 2017! We truly appreciate your time and service.

Banshee Reeks Has A New Employee!

By Eric Bishop

My name is Eric Bishop, and I am the newest employee here at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. I would like to introduce myself and share a little information. I was born and raised here in the charming town of Leesburg, Virginia. I was very active in sports (football and lacrosse) and 4-H (sheep, goat, swine, and livestock judging clubs). I have spent a lot of my upbringing in the outdoors, camping, hunting, and gaining various work experience on farms, nurseries, and orchards throughout Loudoun County. I was part of the first graduating class of Tuscarora High School and then went on to further my education at West Virginia University. I recently graduated in May of 2016 with a BS in Forestry while gaining invaluable experience working and studying on the WVU research farm. On December 1st, 2016, I was very pleased to accept the position of Maintenance Technician and become part of the staff here on the preserve. With my love for the outdoors and my degree in forestry, I feel there is no better place to work than here at the beautiful Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve!



Eric Bishop at work

Peregrine Falcon

By Anne Owen

Peregrine Falcons are global birds, found on every continent except Antarctica. They occupy a variety of habitats, including mountains, forest, valleys, desert and coastlines, preferring tall cliffs for nesting sites. They are fast fliers and primarily eat other birds, which they catch on the wing using a spectacular 'stoop', or closed-wing aerial dive.

Increasingly, these adaptable birds are moving into our cities, finding suitable nesting sites on tall buildings (and other man-made structures) and preying on abundant urban birds such as pigeons.

There are Falcon Cams set up in numerous cities across the world, including Richmond, VA and Baltimore, MD.

Peregrines are normally thought of as day-time hunters and indeed their eyes are rich in the 'cones' that provide the birds with color vision and work best in daytimes conditions. In contrast, night-time hunters like owls have eyes that predominantly feature 'rods' that provide black and white vision and operate best under low light conditions.

Researchers studying urban-dwelling Peregrines in Bath, England were therefore rather surprised to find the remains of nocturnal migrant birds near the nests. Infra-red nestcams went on to show the peregrines returning to the nest with kills at night, confirming that they were indeed hunting under cover of darkness.



Peregrine Falcon By [Will Mayall](#) - [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

The next question was – just how good is the Peregrine’s night vision – can they actually hunt by moonlight? In a fascinating experiment carried out in a large, darkened studio equipped with low-light cameras a 3 year old captive bird was first shown a lure in simulated daylight. He didn’t hesitate and hit the lure hard. When the lighting was dimmed to the level of moonlight, however, the bird gave no reaction at all, suggesting that he didn’t see the lure. With the lighting set at a level to simulate urban street lighting, the bird once again hit the lure.

The experiment suggests that not only can the peregrine adapt to urban life by finding nesting sites, it can also exploit the glow of our street lighting to extend its hunting hours around the clock! Is this evolution in action? You can see a BBC report on this experiment at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03hmc5v>.

These beautiful birds will be starting their courtship and nesting cycle very soon and you can find urban Falcon Cams on line:

Baltimore:

<http://chesapeakeconservancy.org/explore/wildlife-webcams/peregrine-falcon/>

Richmond:

<https://blog.wildlife.virginia.gov/falcon-cam/>

eBird – handy tool for science

Lists

Most people as they start birding on a regular basis decide to start keeping lists. A [life list](#), a state list, a county list – sometimes it seems that birders are more interested in lists than birds. Did you know that eBird can **BE** your list? If you enter your data regularly into eBird, it shows you a breakdown of your history of sightings by all kinds of different measures.

Your Lists

| Major Regions | Country | State/Province | County |
|----------------------|---------|----------------|--------|
| | Life | Year | Month |
| Loudoun, Virginia | 163 | 156 | 81 |
| Fairfax, Virginia | 155 | 129 | 48 |
| Cape May, New Jersey | 113 | 101 | 9 |

eBird provides many list varieties at your fingertips

Checklists

When going to a new park, many folks pick up the copy of the bird checklist for that park – often a paper copy can be found in the visitor’s center. Sometimes you go to a new park and there is no checklist, even no visitor’s center. So you have to guess at what birds are likely and at what else you might have seen. eBird can provide you a good checklist in all kinds of locations. For a Hotspot (a publicly shared location like [Banshee Reeks](#)), it is based upon what has actually been seen at that location at similar times of the year. And not just by the season (e.g. Winter), but for the week that you are there visiting. Further, eBird will highlight which birds are rare – the central point of the feature is to keep the data clean, but it can be very helpful to help you choose between two similar species based upon likelihood. [eBird Mobile](#) can be your notebook/checklist in the field – I find it much easier than scribbling notes down on paper.

Planning

eBird has a few features that help with planning birding trips. You can look at a particular Hotspot (or even a region) and see what birds are likely by looking at the bar charts for that location. Or if you know you’ll be in a place, you can explore that region (a country, state, [county](#)) and find the Hotspots with the biggest number of species seen. Next, if you want to see a particular bird, you can explore the data by species and see where you could go to see that bird. Finally, you can look at a [list of target species](#) at a location based upon your life lists.

48 species observed in Loudoun County, Virginia, US that you need for your World Life List (

| | SPECIES NAME | FREQUENCY (%) | MAP |
|---|--|---------------|-----|
| 1 | Great Horned Owl <i>Bubo virginianus</i> | 0.66249 | Map |
| 2 | Northern Bobwhite <i>Colinus virginianus</i> | 0.52617 | Map |
| 3 | Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i> | 0.41080 | Map |
| 4 | Bonaparte's Gull <i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i> | 0.38732 | Map |

eBird helps you find birds you have never seen

Alerts and Social

eBird provides the capability to [subscribe to alerts](#) – both rare birds (anything that would be flagged by eBird) and ‘Need’ birds. ‘Need’ birds are birds that you haven’t seen that have been seen in a particular area. These two features really help to ensure that you are more likely to see a wide variety of birds. Finally, for each area, eBird will show you [who](#) has seen the most birds and who has submitted the most checklists – you can even see recently submitted checklists to see who is recently active. This can help you connect with other active birders in your area.

Manage My Alerts

| My Alerts | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|----------------------|--|
| ABA Rareties | DAILY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Needs - Darién, PA | DAILY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Needs--Fairfax | DAILY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Needs--Loudoun | DAILY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Rare Birds--Arlington | HOURLY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Rare Birds--Darién | DAILY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Rare Birds--Fairfax | HOURLY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Rare Birds--Fauquier | HOURLY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |
| Rare Birds--Loudoun | HOURLY | View | Edit Unsubscribe |

eBird can alert you to interesting bird sightings

Science

eBird captures all this data and from it the researchers at Cornell (and other institutions) produce many [papers](#) and [tools](#). This dataset is one of the largest ever amassed biodiversity data sets. Also, eBird is being increasingly used to support [Breeding Bird Atlas](#) projects which dramatically reduces the amount of manual effort required to collect and compile the data.

To Get Started

- Create an account – <https://secure.birds.cornell.edu/cassso/account/create?service=https%3A%2F%2Febird.org%2Febird%2Flogin%2Fcas%3Fportal%3Debird>

- Download eBird Mobile – <http://help.ebird.org/customer/portal/articles/1848031-ebird-mobile-apps-overview>
- Enter a checklist
- Enter your historical data – <http://help.ebird.org/customer/en/portal/articles/973960-entering-historic-data>
- Share checklists with other’s in your party – <http://help.ebird.org/customer/portal/articles/1010555-understanding-the-ebird-checklist-sharing-process>

The Global Owl Project (GLOW)

By Anne Owen

The Global Owl Project (GLOW) is a non-profit consortium of some 450 researchers, museum curators, Masters and PhD students, supported by passionate volunteers working in 65 countries on the science and conservation of owls. The project started in 2002, and under the Directorship of David Johnson has 7 main tasks: 1) develop survey techniques for owls around the world, 2) DNA sampling and phylogeny, 3) make recordings of vocalizations, 4) compile original descriptions and photographs of extant and fossil owls, 5) refine maps of owl species distributions, 6) assess “Owls in Lore and Culture” and 7) disseminate project information to a very wide audience, including national and international biodiversity programs.



Of these goals, perhaps the most surprising and intriguing is the study of “Owls in Lore and Culture”, which superficially seems somewhat less ‘scientific’ than the others. As it turns out, this may be a crucial key to developing successful local strategies to protect owls. What people believe about owls make a huge difference to how they protect and conserve these apex predators.

Based on fossil evidence, it is estimated that owls have been around for some 95 million years.

Today there are 243 living species of Owl (and some 30-35 still in the queue to be evaluated, so that number may grow!). They are present on every continent except Antarctica and have been a continuous part of the human experience. Owls appear in ancient cave paintings, in petroglyphs, in Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs and even in the Nazca Lines of Peru. Today, they appear in cartoons, heraldic shields and corporate logos (think Trip Advisor!).



Barred Owl – a common owl in Loudoun

To find out what people think, feel and believe about owls, project staff interviewed about 6,000 people in 30 countries, using a standardized 4-page interview form translated into 17 languages, with fascinating and sometimes alarming results. In the west, most people viewed owls as ‘just birds’, with a tendency to associate them with great wisdom and other benign characteristics. In Mali, however, owls are thought to be dangerous spirits who can take your soul and your life.

Unsurprisingly, owls there are feared, hunted and killed. On the other hand, in parts of Australia, the owl is viewed as the Creator Being. In Africa, owl eggs are widely used in witchcraft for treating serious illness such as HIV/AIDS, driving the cost (on a per ounce basis) above that for ivory in China or rhino horn in Vietnam.

Depressing as some of these findings may be, this cultural inventory forms a highly valuable basis from which to start educational programs alongside conservation efforts to try to stem the impact of persecution, hunting and trafficking of

these beautiful birds. Closer to home, it might be very educational to find out what our neighbors think and feel about some of the species that we as Virginia Master Naturalists want to see protected and flourishing!

You can find out more about the Global Owl Project at: www.globalowlproject.com

Fisher Project - update

By Kathleen Neal

We are excited to report that the [American fisher](#) (*Martes pennant*) study at BRNP continues into Autumn/Winter 2016. To re-cap, the study began in February 2016, after a second winter of anecdotal reports from hunters of seeing a large, dark “otter-like” animal running across the forest floor. In the early part of the 20th century, the American fisher was extirpated from this region due to over hunting for its pelt as well as large scale timber harvesting. A small-scale reintroduction into West Virginia took place in 1969. Since hunter reports at BRNP remained consistent, preserve manager, Ron Circe’ approached the Friends of Banshee Reeks and they graciously purchased 15 Moultrie wildlife cameras. With the assistance of Michael Manning (VMN ’11) who has field experience with camera trapping, Kathy Neal (VMN ’14), and an intern from SCBI, 15 cameras were installed and monitored over the winter of 2016.



Great Horned Owl with prey

The project took a break from April 2016 to July of 2016, and with the help of preserve naturalist, Julie Paul (VMN ’14), new sites were selected and cameras reinstalled in July 2016. The new locations have captured some amazing wildlife photos!



Black Bear at Banshee Reeks



Coywolf checking out the scent

In these photos, you can see visible measuring sticks (black and white tubes affixed to the trees opposite the camera). This method gives us a way to accurately measure the size of any animal photographed. We are using a specialized scent lure, painted on the tree, made from synthetic and natural musk. Its very pungent odor is doing a great job of attracting wildlife. We are currently gearing up for the fall/winter 2016/2017 season, as we await to see whether the fisher may be more active in colder weather in this southeastern part of their range. We are keeping our fingers crossed and will keep everyone posted!



Raccoon caught on camera

Christmas Bird Count

By Bryan Henson

Christmas Bird Counts are a tradition dating back more than 100 years. It's also a nice way to get out in the winter and volunteer for a great citizen science project. In Loudoun county, there are two counts – the Seneca CBC and the Central Loudoun CBC.

The Seneca CBC was held on December 18th and had 123 participants. The Seneca CBC has been around since 1955. 105 species were found this year – the highest species count since 2002. This year there were 4 species that were found for the first time on the count – Blue Grosbeak, Eurasian Wigeon, Eared Grebe and Le Conte's Sparrow. Our team was the lucky team to find the Le Conte's Sparrow. According to the [information](#) I could find, this was only the 3rd time that a Le Conte's Sparrow has been found in Loudoun County. Jim Nelson is the compiler for the Seneca CBC and can be reached via email at kingfishers2@verizon.net if you are interested in participating next year (December 17th, 2017).

The Central Loudoun CBC was held on December 28th and had 110 participants. The Central Loudoun CBC has been around since 1997. 91 species were found this year – a bit lower than recent years. Highlights of the count were relatively uncommon Common Yellowthroat, Palm Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee and Common Goldeneye. Joe Coleman is the compiler for the Central Loudoun CBC and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsors the event and hosts a Tally Rally at Morven Park each year. If you are interested in participating next year (December 28th, 2017), please sign up via [Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's](#) website.



Le Conte's Sparrow found on the Seneca CBC

Member Spotlight – Dori Rhodes

My interest in nature began very early as I was fortunate to have grandparents who loved the outdoors. I grew up in New Jersey and spent my summers out on Long Island, NY.

I graduated from Drew University in Madison, NJ with a degree in Zoology and a minor in Anthropology and worked for a while at the Turtle Back Zoo in East Orange, NJ doing tours and educational programs with animals. Then I took a job with Western Electric, married Pat and had two children, Ken and Kirsten. We are now grandparents to two boys, Henry and Ben.

We have moved many times and that gave me the opportunity to do my favorite hobby, birding, in so many different places, joining birding clubs, meeting other birders and doing Christmas Bird Counts in some very different environments and climates from Canada, Texas, California and North Carolina.

In 2006 we moved to Leesburg, VA and I immediately volunteered at the Smithsonian Naturalist Center and joined LWC. When I saw the newspaper article about the first class of Virginia Master Naturalists at Banshee Reeks N.P., I knew that is exactly what I would like to do. I was in the second VMN class and became certified in 2007. Being a Virginia Master Naturalist has been one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had, from working with the Weed Battalion, the Training Committee, the Outreach Committee, Stream Monitoring, Bluebird Nestbox Monitoring, Christmas Bird Counts, Audubon at Home ambassador, three years as the chapter secretary and two years as president; I have truly enjoyed it all.

Working with so many wonderful and dedicated people is inspirational, rewarding and fun.

We can make a difference.



Dori

Thank you, for telling us more about yourself and for all the work (thousands of volunteer hours!) you do for VMN!

COMMITTEE CORNER

Volunteer Service Projects Committee

Chair: Jane Yocom

Jane Yocom recently agreed to Chair the Volunteer Service Project Committee. She is looking forward to updating and consolidating the list of projects in the VMS. Also, watch for regular communications outlining new and ongoing volunteer service opportunities.

As a reminder, starting January 1, volunteers are now able to record their travel time in with the service project time in the VMS. So, if a volunteer drives 30 minutes to the project site, works on the project for 2 hours, and then drives 30 minutes home, the volunteer can report 3 hours

of volunteer service time to that project. Also note, that recording mileage is optional.

Historian

Suzanne DeSaix

VMN Banshee Reeks is looking for a new Historian. The Historian is essential to maintaining the historical record of our chapter, primarily through photos of social events and the great volunteer work performed, but also to maintain an archive of key chapter records. A project to create a digital version of our scrapbook was recently begun and would benefit from the attention of a dedicated (and much appreciated!) volunteer.

In the meantime, please be sure to send photos of your volunteer activities to Suzanne DeSaix at sumatkai@yahoo.com.

Communications/Newsletter Committee

Chair: Bryan Henson

We hope that you're enjoying our new and improved website, www.bansheereeks.org. Please also check out our [VMN-Banshee Reeks Chapter Facebook group](#). If you haven't yet joined, please do! We're seeing some great pictures and articles posted to keep you up-to-date on volunteer and members' outdoor activities, BRNP goings-on and general natural science news. We're always looking for article contributions to the website, so *remember that writing and research time count as VMN Volunteer Hours!*

Outreach Committee

Chair: Vacant

The Outreach Committee is looking for a new chairperson. The Outreach committee staffs booths at a few events throughout the year, including the spring and fall native plant sales.

Host Committee

Chair: Debbie Crew

Thanks go out to the Host Committee for all their hard work during the year, including the recent

Annual Meeting and Holiday party. Thanks to Thaissa and John for hosting the holiday party.

Membership Committee

Chair: Frank McLaughlin

January is our time for planning. As we head into another year of class recruitment, we have a few additional state requirements ... interviewing prospective students and checking references prior to accepting them into the training program. This requirement is to ensure that all new students understand that VMN isn't just an educational program but rather a training program to prepare them for volunteer service ensuring that our local natural world continues to provide joy, calm, and refuge for all that engage with Virginia's beautiful natural spaces.

Continuing Education Committee

Chair: Bill Cour

The Continuing Education (CE) Committee works to identify and provide opportunities for chapter members to earn the CE hours they need to achieve/maintain certification. In addition to classes that the chapter itself offers, we post listings of CE opportunities with other chapters and with organizations such as Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the Audubon Naturalist Society, the Virginia Native Plant Society, etc. If you have a class that you would like to offer for the chapter, or you see an event that you think would be a CE opportunity, or there is a topic on which you would really like the chapter to present a class, contact Bill Cour (wmkcour@gmail.com) or Ron (ron.circe@loudoun.gov).

Training Committee

Chair: Sue Robinson

The current class is now halfway through the class and just recently took the mid-term. The committee is working on getting the final/practicum ready for the current class. Dates for next year's class are being finalized. Overlap with the Banshee Reeks volunteer day is

being minimized to give the next class more opportunities to get volunteer hours.

About Banshee Reeks VMN

The Banshee Reeks chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist program is a volunteer corps focused on education, outreach, conservation, and management of the natural resources in Virginia. The chapter was founded in 2006 and focuses on Loudoun County and hosts many events at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. We are always looking for new members and like-minded organizations.

To find out more, visit our website at <http://www.vmnbancheereeks.org/> or email us at vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com.

And join our Facebook group:
[Virginia Master Naturalist-Banshee Reeks Chapter](#)