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## President's Message

By Barbara Erlandson

There was good news presented during the 2017 Banshee Reeks Annual Meeting. The percentage of trainees that become certified within one year of graduation has improved significantly over the last two years. The average from 2012 through 2016 is 48%. But 61% of the 2016 class and 58% of the 2015 class achieved certification within the time period. This represents an improvement of over 20%.

We currently have 99 active Members. Of those, approximately ½ are certified; 29 are current, non-certified members; and 22 are trainees. Individuals are considered current members if they have some volunteer time each year even if they don't have the 40 hours required to become certified. If an individual does not participate in any volunteer activity or CE over the year, they are considered inactive. Our membership has been around 100 active members for the last several years.

most hours and most individuals with 22 people participating. And 15% of volunteer time was spent on Stewardship with the largest effort going towards Banshee Reeks volunteer day with 18 participants.

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### SAVE THE DATES!

**Christmas Bird Counts**  
December 17<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>

**Winter Tree ID CE @ Banshee**  
Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup>

**Tick CE @ Banshee**  
Saturday, January 27<sup>th</sup>

## Wanted: Fisher Camera Project Research Assistants

Do you like field work? Do you want to be part of an on-going research study?

Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve is embarking on its third year of a camera trapping study with efforts to document the presence of the American Fisher within the Nature Preserve. We are looking for a couple more volunteers who can afford one day a week from the end of November through April to go into the field and check the wildlife cameras and help analyze photographs. It's an excellent way to gain volunteer hours and an exciting way to get to know the beautiful back county!

Please contact BRNP Naturalist, Julie Paul at [julie.paul@loudoun.gov](mailto:julie.paul@loudoun.gov) if you are interested.

During 2017, 45% of volunteer time was focused on education and outreach. The largest recipient of volunteer time in this category was Audubon at Home with 11 members participating. 40% of volunteer time was spent on Citizen Science activities with Blue Bird Monitoring involving the

## Christmas Bird Counts!

Every winter for more than a hundred years, naturalists and birders have carried out a great tradition – the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). During a CBC, volunteers will help survey a 15-mile diameter circle divided up into sectors.

Anyone can and should participate regardless of skill level and you can participate for a couple hours or all day; you can even count birds at your home bird feeders.

### How it works – volunteer perspective

The first step is to sign up to volunteer. For many counts, this is as simple as emailing the main person planning the count, the compiler, saying you want to help and giving an indication of your birding skill level and any specifics about how much or what part of the day you can participate.

Count	Date	Contact
Seneca	12/17	<a href="#">Jim Nelson</a>
Calmes Neck	12/23	<a href="#">Margaret Wester</a>
Central Loudoun	12/28	<a href="#">Joe Coleman</a>
Sugarloaf	12/31	<a href="#">Gerco Hoogeweg</a>

Generally, the sector leader will contact you and tell you where the group will meet, what route you'll take, who else is in the group and how long it will likely take.

### The Big Day

On the day of the count, you'll meet up with your group and hike/drive through your sector. As you go, you'll find and identify as many birds as you can. Your sector leader will track duration/effort and someone in your group will keep track of the birds your group has seen. Some birds will require additional notes:

- Birds that could be counted by two groups – for example, Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) fly high enough they can easily be seen by multiple groups, so you need to note location and direction
- Rare birds – uncommon sightings need additional documentation to substantiate the

sighting – last year our group had the good fortune to find a LeConte Sparrow

Many groups stop for a lunch at a local restaurant or pack a lunch to eat along the way. At the end of the day, the circle often has a get together (Tally Rally) to summarize the results and celebrate a successful day.



LeConte Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) from last year's count

### Checklist for a successful day

- Wear comfortable shoes
- Wear weather/terrain appropriate shoes
- Wear layers and warm enough clothes
- Know where and when you are meeting
- Know the route
- Bring binoculars and camera
- Bring water
- Pack lunch or bring money for lunch time
- Take some pictures
- Enjoy the walk
- Stop to watch the birds

### Why It Matters

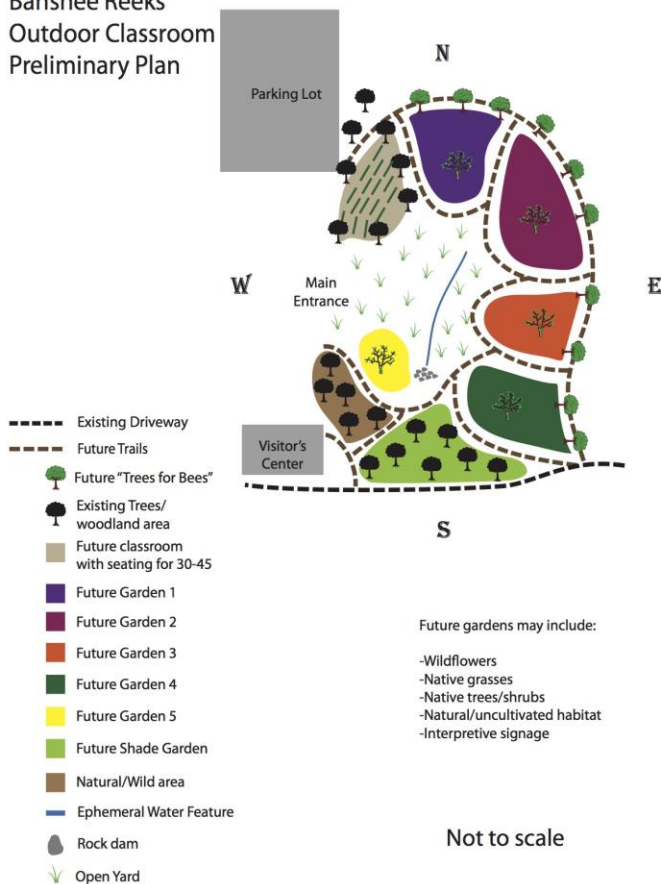
This is the longest running citizen science project. Its long running length provides insight into long term trends better than most other datasets. Local circles have been in existence for decades. Hundreds of publications (<http://www.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count-bibliography>) have been written and published based upon the CBC data.



## Upcoming Banshee Reeks CE

Banshee Reeks has arranged for a couple CE opportunities in the next couple months. Both will be held at the education annex at Banshee Reeks and both are open to anyone. The first will be held on December 16<sup>th</sup> at 1pm on Winter Tree Identification and will be taught by Kyle Dingus, a Virginia Forester serving our area. On January 27<sup>th</sup>, Ron Circe, on site naturalist and great speaker/teacher, will be presenting a talk on Ticks at 1:30pm.

Banshee Reeks  
Outdoor Classroom  
Preliminary Plan



Outdoor classroom design depicting seating area, gardens, trees for bees trail, water feature, woodlands, and wild area, created by Lisa McKew (Class of 2018)

## Banshee Reeks Outdoor Classroom

The Outdoor Classroom construction is a featured long term volunteer project that began in May, 2017 with Phase I being the applied use of goats for invasive plant removal. The 11 goats included the usual bunch from 2016, plus the newest kid, Millhouse, who went to work for 6 weeks clearing the area just east of the Visitor Center. With Phase

II now underway, the staff at Banshee Reeks, alongside some committed volunteers, have been busy raking and hauling the last of the remaining debris. Goodbye Autumn Olive!



Banshee Reek's goat herd working hard on Phase I invasive plant removal from the outdoor classroom site in June 2017.

With much of the grunt work now behind us, this restoration site now gives way to five delineated garden areas that will serve as the center pieces of our classroom. We need to begin the process now of selecting the appropriate native plants for these gardens so we will be ready for planting in the late winter/spring. With Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve known for the biodiversity within her 725 acres of habitats, much of the faunal diversity lies in our native insect populations. We have decided on a pollinator themed outdoor classroom with native wildflower gardens consisting of pollinator loving plants accompanied by a perimeter "Trees for Bees" trail that will be sure to attract all sorts of buggy biota.

This space will truly be a wonderful place for observation, investigation, field study, and on-going citizen science efforts! This site will cultivate a



love for learning for all to enjoy.



VMN volunteers working hard to clear debris on the September volunteer work day.

Thank you to the Virginia Master Naturalists, Banshee Reeks Chapter, who have been and will continue to be a big part of this project! This Outdoor Classroom will continue to be one of your greatest investments yet!

We are still looking for volunteers to help with plant selection for each garden. This should be the most exciting task at hand! The VMN coordinator for this project is Angie Bommersbach (Class of 2016). If you would like to be more involved, please email her at [abommersbach@hotmail.com](mailto:abommersbach@hotmail.com), or Julie Paul at [julie.paul@loudoun.gov](mailto:julie.paul@loudoun.gov). This is a cooperative effort between Virginia Master Naturalists, BRNP Chapter, The Friends of Banshee Reeks, and the Nature Preserve. Thanks in advance for your help!

## White-throated Sparrows

With the cold weather comes a winter resident back to our area, the [White-throated Sparrow](#) (*Zonotrichia albicollis*). This sparrow breeds mostly in Canada and perhaps that's why so many birders describe its song as "O Sweet Canada, Canada, Canada". It's found all over (backyards, forests, thickets, and more) and in large numbers in Loudoun county during the winter.

Their colors can be bright and bold with their eponymous white throat, yellow between its eyes and beak, and its black and white striped head. But there are two color morphs, white-striped and tan

striped; research indicates these color variations are much more important than just plumage variation and may be related to their sexual [behavior](#).



A White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) from our backyard



Some of the donated items at the annual picnic



## Annual Chapter Picnic

We held our annual chapter picnic on August 13<sup>th</sup>. As you probably know, this is one of a handful of times that we get much of the chapter together as a group. It was fantastic to see all of you. In addition, the silent auction and raffle generated a generous donation to the chapter. We were very fortunate to have an anonymous match to these donations. This extra income will be used to help finance interesting projects for the chapter.



A small portion of the feast – thanks to everyone who helped and especially the Host Committee!



The raffle in action



Enjoying the feast outside at the picnic tables

## COMMITTEE CORNER

### Volunteer Service Projects Committee

*Chair: Jane Yocom*

It's hard to believe that we are approaching the end of the year. Many volunteer projects are on hold until spring, so now is a great time to make sure that you have entered all your volunteer hours in the VMS system.

Take time to review your entries for the past year. Did you select a project for each entry or do you have some "n/a" entries where you need to go back and select a project? Do you have enough hours for recertification? You only need 40 volunteer and 8 CE hours. If not, there is still time to earn that recertification! We have some data entry type projects and there are a number of bird surveys and deer hunts that you can participate in to earn those missing hours. There is no longer a separate entry for travel hours. Just add travel time to the volunteer hours. For example, if you leave your house at 7:00 am to go check your Bluebird trail and get home at 10:00 am, you would have 3 hours of volunteer

time. Adding mileage for volunteer hours is now optional. Go ahead and add them if you want to use them for tax purposes.

If you have any questions about what projects to use or whether certain hours count for your volunteer effort, please email me at [jane.yocom@yahoo.com](mailto:jane.yocom@yahoo.com). But don't wait till Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>!

### Historian

The Historian committee has been disbanded.

If you have good photos, please send to the chapter at [vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com](mailto:vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com) or post them on our [Facebook](#) page.

### Communications/Newsletter Committee

*Chair: Bryan Henson*

We're always looking for article contributions to the website, so remember that writing and research time count as VMN Volunteer Hours! We hope that you're enjoying our website, [www.bansheereeks.org](http://www.bansheereeks.org). Please also check out our [VMN-Banshee Reeks Chapter Facebook group](#). If you haven't yet joined, please do!

### Outreach Committee

*Chair: Brian Meyerriecks*

I am looking for creative and motivated volunteers to help create our display to woo and captivate audiences to join our chapter. I plan to schedule a meeting in the Jan/Feb timeframe, please send me your name to [brian@meyerriecks.com](mailto:brian@meyerriecks.com)

### Host Committee

*Chair: Debbie Crew*

Save the date! The Annual VMN Banshee Reeks Holiday Party has been transformed into a Winter White Elephant Party to be held at Banshee Reeks. We think the date will likely be January 20 or 21 at Banshee Reeks. Details will be forthcoming, so stay tuned. Contact Debbie Crew for further information - [debcrow@comcast.net](mailto:debcrow@comcast.net).

### Membership Committee

*Chair: Frank McLaughlin*

At the annual meeting Paul Kreingold received his 250 hour service pin as well as Anne Ellis and Danielle Dillion received their Certification Certificates. Also recently certified, but unable to be at the meeting to receive their certificates, are

Anne Owen and Larry Johnson. Congratulations to all!

### Continuing Education Committee

*Chair: Bill Cour*

Several upcoming CE opportunities:

- [Reading the Land](#) on Sat, November 18 @ 10am – 1pm at Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship
- [Birding Hot Spots in Loudoun County](#) - December 10 @ 8am-4pm
- [Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls](#) - Sat. January 13, 2018, 6pm-9pm
- Tick Talk on Sat, January 27, 2018 @ 1:30pm at Banshee Reeks

Loudoun Wildlife also has an [open house](#) on December 9<sup>th</sup> that you might enjoy attending although it is not CE.

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](mailto:wmkcour@gmail.com)).

### Training Committee

*Chair: Sue Robinson*

The VMN training class is underway with a full class of 22 students. The class received the VMN embroidered, book and guide filled backpacks with the books needed and reduced paper, as OneDrive cloud storage is used for the presentations. The class is made up of a highly educated academic backgrounds and varied environmental and hard sciences; veterinarian, forestry, researchers, water management and other diverse backgrounds and energy. The class is very motivated and interested in volunteering and making a difference. All are looking for volunteer efforts and CE's. Four classes have been completed plus Orientation; Ichthyology, Ecology, and Invertebrate Zoology, Dendrology and Forest Ecology. New instructors are adding new information and delivering the information in new ways, such as the new Invertebrate Zoology Instructor, Alonso Abugattas, the Capital Naturalist, who added much energy to the class. A full day of Ecology was well received by Mr. Circe. Other new instructors will be teaching Geology and Urban Ecology in the future.

## 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.vmnbansheereeks.org/> or email us at [vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com](mailto:vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com).

And join our Facebook group:

[Virginia Master Naturalist-Banshee Reeks Chapter](#)