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President's Message

By Barbara Erlandson

We have exciting new projects that were approved at the April Board of Directors meeting last week. The new projects include a Bat Monitoring program. This is a program that was started in the Pocahontas chapter in 2015. Our chapter will purchase a bat monitor that identifies the type of bat by their echolocation which can be "heard" by the equipment. The information on bats is entered into a database and used by scientists across the US.

We also have a new Banshee Reeks Interpretation project which involves providing signage at key features on the preserve which provides information about what makes the area significant. VMN will work with BRNP to develop and design the signs and will lead groups to the various sites.

All of these programs will help us better contribute to education, citizen Science and stewardship. Stay tuned for more information and how to volunteer.

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Chestnut Tree Planting at Banshee

Julie Paul

The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) has partnered with Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve and Loudoun County to establish a 2-acre chestnut seed orchard at the nature preserve. On April 13th, over 500 chestnuts were planted! And, this is just the beginning with more planting to come. This is a very exciting endeavor, as it has been over two years in the making. More than 115 volunteer hours were logged between Friends Of Banshee Reeks (FOBR), VA Master Naturalist (VMN), Banshee Reeks Chapter, Loudoun County Aeromodelers Association (LCAA), and TACF volunteers. Thank you to all who came out, endured the first "hot" day of spring and worked hard to help establish this historic planting! It was a great day and even Channel 9 news showed up to collect interviews and footage! It was really great to see the effort aired on the news that evening!

SAVE THE DATES!
Native Plant Sale @ Morven
Saturday, May 19th

Banshee Reeks workdays
May 19th and June 16th

Pollinator Festival @ Banshee
June 16th



The volunteers posing with their hard work

A little American chestnut history

Once a tall, magnificent tree with broad crowns, the American chestnut has been reduced to scattered stump sprouts growing at the bases of long-dead trees, the result of the accidental introduction of the fungal pathogen, *Cryphonectria parasitica*. This pathogen killed over 4 billion chestnut trees in 40 years throughout the northeastern and mid-Atlantic forest (1/4 of the hardwood population).

Although there are many approaches to combatting *C. parasitica* and returning American chestnut to its former prominence, TACF focuses on backcross breeding with the Chinese chestnut trees, a naturally blight resistant species. See <https://www.acf.org/about-us/> for more details.

The nuts planted at Banshee Reeks were harvested from Virginia orchards where the trees had been tested for blight resistance by inoculation with the blight fungus. Only the most blight-resistant trees were kept and the most “American-looking” trees were selected, all the rest cut down and killed. The nuts from these trees were planted into seed orchards at both Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve and Sky Meadows State Park in Fauquier County. The hope is to eventually plant about 20,000 nuts in the seed orchards and are starting this year with 1,440 in three American genetic backgrounds.

TACF can distinguish the most susceptible trees through artificial inoculation. Therefore, the next step at Banshee Reeks will be inoculating the trees

with the blight fungus, once the trees are old enough. From there, the blight susceptible trees are then culled (about 90%) of them, and the remaining left to grow, fight the blight, and produce “resistant” offspring. TACF’s goal is to continue the process of culling the susceptible trees so that only the most resistant trees remain – assuring that the progeny produced have the best chance for long-term survival.

Stay tuned for volunteer efforts within the orchard at Banshee Reeks. There will be a need for continued seed planting, fill-in plantings, inoculations, orchard maintenance, as well as growth and survival assessments.

Here’s to 30 years of partnership with The American Chestnut Foundation. You can read about their mission and find more information about the Virginia Chapter and how to become a member at <https://www.acf.org/va/>.



Chestnuts in planting position

Izaak Walton League Donation

On April 3rd, the Loudoun County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America Board of Directors voted to contribute \$250 to the Virginia Master Naturalist Chapter at Banshee Reeks (VMN). This is in appreciation for the substantial help provided by VMN’ers over the past three years to our conservation programs, including nature walks and project

consultations.



Paul Kreingold from IWLA presenting the donation to Barbara Erlandson, president of VMN

In response to the contribution, Barbara Erlandson, President of the VMN at Banshee Reeks, said, "thank you for your generous donation. VMN Banshee Reeks has been focusing on expanding our programs this year to place a greater focus on Citizen Science, Education and Outreach. Many of these new programs require an investment in equipment and other supplies in order to implement. Your donation will help us move forward with more of these types of programs."

Identifying Trees in the Winter Phase

Larry Johnson

A class of 20 Virginia Naturalists gathered at Banshee Reeks on February 25 to learn how to better identify deciduous tree genus, family, and species while they were in their winter phase.

In winter dormancy phase, while devoid of their leafy foliage, trees exhibit numerous physical characteristics that can be used by a trained eye to determine their identification. Under the excellent tutelage of Kyle Dingus, Virginia Dept. of Forestry, the class learned more than how to use keys and guides based on physical attributes of trees.

Additionally, approaching tree identification by applying pragmatic methods was stressed. Factoring in, and interpreting, how ecosystem conditions such as location, aspect, water, successional phase, shade

tolerance, and drought impact the trees was utilized to determine the identification of trees. On our field trip, the keys and guides were fundamental for identification. Ecosystem conditions present at BRNP factored into the class's analysis of the tree identification, as well.

What better way to enjoy nature on a mild but wet day in late winter than on the soggy trails of BRNP? Also, one could not miss the early emergence of tender leafy growth on some of the more hardy plants, a hint that winter is abating and the anticipation that spring will transform the trees and energize humans alike.



Male Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker at Camp Highroad, December 2017. Camp Highroad, Loudoun County, VA.
Photo by Lisa McKew

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Lisa McKew

If you look closely at some trees, you might see neat rows of small holes and wonder what made those holes. That is the work of the Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker. The Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker got its name not only from its yellow belly, but from the fact that it likes to dine on sap. They drill holes (approx. 1/4" in diameter) in trees not only to get sap, but also the insects that the sap attracts.

The Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker spends its winters in our area and breeds in Canada, eastern Alaska, and the northeastern US. The male can be distinguished from the female by his red throat.



Tree with Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker holes.
Look closely, and you can see white-ish areas where the
sap flowed down the tree.

April 2018. Loudoun County, VA. Photo by Lisa
McKew

Bird is the Word – 2018 Celebrates Birds and Calls Humans to Action

Susan Sims

2018 marks the Centennial of the passing of the migratory bird treaty Act and is the official Year of the Bird. In recognition, National Geographic has partnered with the National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and BirdLife International, to lead a year of storytelling, science, and conservation activities to encourage environmental stewardship and protection of birds. Partnered organizations will engage with experts in the field, volunteers and the wider community to instill a love of birds, while examining how the changing environment drives loss in bird populations globally and what humans can do to help shift the tide. Virginia Master Naturalist Banshee Reeks Chapter has joined the effort!

The effort includes partnerships with upwards of 90 additional organizations, including VDGIF, one of our supporting agencies. Our Chapter's dedication to citizen science and stewardship makes Year of the Bird a perfect fit. Banshee Reeks VMN is well known for volunteer contributions to birding and protection of species, including such projects as Bluebird box monitoring, Barred Owl and Kestrel monitoring, natural area restoration, the removal of invasive plants, leading bird walks and volunteering for bird counts, and continued efforts to increase public awareness of the importance of birds.

2018 | YEAR OF THE BIRD

Participating in this celebratory year provides the Chapter opportunities to increase connections, learn from experts and join a large network of dedicated scientists and citizen scientists to address issues around bird conservation. It is an opportunity for the Chapter to leverage the extensive knowledge of volunteers and participate in a project with vast reach. Each month will feature a specialized theme to inspire action. April's theme is all about being bird-friendly and planet-friendly. Through small changes – mowing less, avoiding pesticides, saving water – thoughtful people can make a positive difference in the local community while impacting the global one.



American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginos*) seen in the
Year of the Bird in Loudoun County

We look forward to ways that we can engage with the public and our partners to share our love of nature and meet the charge of the Virginia Master Naturalist program. Stay tuned for lots of information, exciting stories, and opportunities to volunteer. May 5th is the first Global Big Day of the year. Volunteers across the globe, including the Banshee reeks chapter, will be out in the field, traveling far and wide, to count as many species of birds possible. These counts help scientists evaluate population, species wellness and develop trends in bird migration. Without these volunteers, the information available on birds would not be as rich. All volunteer work counts as volunteer hours in the VMS.

Additionally, please share all stories you have about birds this year. We know our Chapter has plenty! We encourage all members to contribute articles to the newsletter, as well as post on our Facebook group. Let's show our neighbors and the Year of the Bird community what a strong and dedicated chapter can do to support the mission.

So, fill your feeders, dust off those binoculars, and take action! Learn more about the Year of the Bird on the website:
<http://www.audubon.org/yearofthebird>

Half-Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life by E.O. Wilson

Reviewed by Crissy Bellandi

In his latest book, biologist E.O. Wilson offers a revolutionary solution to the current mass extinction crisis, which is causing biodiversity to plummet worldwide.

Wilson offers a clear assessment of biodiversity loss, both causes and implications, and from this assessment he posits that humans should allocate at least half of the planet for nature preserves. He names specific sites that would have the greatest impact for preservation of the biosphere. The Redwood Forests of California and Longleaf Pine Savanna of the American South are named along with the Amazon River Basin and Lake Baikal in Russia. Unique ecosystems and high rates of

biodiversity make these sites ideal locations for preservation. This book is a call to action for individuals and political leaders alike and emphasizes not only the feasibility of allocating half of the planet to wildlife, but the necessity of such action.

In this book, Wilson shuns the defeatist attitude that nature is beyond saving and offers a hopeful view of the future, if we choose to act now and act boldly.

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson

Reviewed by Crissy Bellandi

The title warns of an impending future where the chorus of birds is no longer heard as chemicals in the environment impede birds' ability to breed and survive. The book opens with a cautionary tale about a community existing harmoniously with nature that transforms into a barren, lifeless dystopia. Through detailed, though accessible scientific evidence, Carson guides the reader to understand the link between manufactured substances, specifically DDT, and health in humans and animals. This book offers an example of science driving policy by making a demonstrable case for thoughtful regulation of manufactured chemicals. Notably, the book remains relevant today as thousands of chemicals are used in the United States, many with unknown environmental implications. *Silent Spring* was a catalyst for the American environmental movement, led to the ban on domestic DDT production and illustrates the importance of good stewardship of the natural world for both its protection and our own.

COMMITTEE CORNER

Volunteer Service Projects Committee

Chair: Jane Yocom

Spring is here and it's a wonderful time to get back into volunteering outside. There are many opportunities to get your hands dirty! Stream clean-ups, Riparian Buffer plantings, Outdoor Classroom and Pollinator Garden planting are just a few of the ways you can enjoy the warm weather and sunshine while earning volunteer hours. Bryan does a great

job of keeping you informed about the monthly volunteer possibilities. Watch for his emails and get out there!

Historian

The Historian committee has been disbanded.

If you have good photos, please send them to the chapter at ymnbansheereeks@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. Please also check out our [VMN-Banshee Reeks Chapter Facebook group](#). If you haven't yet joined, please do!

Outreach Committee

Chair: Brian Meyerriecks

Look for a meeting of the committee members in the next few weeks. Anyone interested in helping at the VMN table during the upcoming native plant sale on 19 May please contact Brian Meyerriecks at brian@meyerriecks.com.

Host Committee

Chair: EMPTY – PLEASE VOLUNTEER

On April 7th, we hosted a lunch for the graduating class which followed the completion of their final exam. The next event will be the Annual Summer Picnic in early August, but date has not yet been set. We are beginning to collect new (or gently used) donations/items for the fundraising raffle associated with picnic.

We ARE CURRENTLY SEEKING anyone interested in hosting (or innovative venue suggestions for) our Annual VMN Holiday Party in December 2018. You provide the home and we provide everything else! Contact the Host Committee (debcrew@comcast.net or thaissa.klim@verizon.net) or send us an email at ymnbansheereeks@gmail.com.

Membership Committee

Chair: Barbara Erlandson

It seems that our recruitment for the next class is getting off to a good start. To date we have received six “unsolicited” applications, so we must be becoming better known in Loudoun County and surrounding areas, as occasionally we see a Maryland resident. Our small committee has a new member, Kristin Henderson. We have already put her to work helping interview the references of applicants.



Frank presenting Jennifer with her certification

At the Graduation Ceremony, last Saturday, we welcomed our “Trainees” turning into official “Virginia Master Naturalist Members”! At the ceremony, we took the opportunity to acknowledge Certification status to Angie Bommersbach, John Ellis, Karla Etten, Kathi Groover, Jennifer Lumley and Allison Weitzel. Unfortunately, not all were present to receive their certificates. In addition, the following are to be, or have been, awarded Volunteer Service pins; Debbie Crew, 250 hrs; Barbara Erlandson, 500 hrs; Susan McMunn, 250 hrs and Sue Robinson, 250 hrs.



Frank presenting Sue with her Volunteer Service pin for 250 hours of service!

Current Active Chapter Membership stands at:

Virginia Master Naturalist Members	51
Certified Virginia Master Naturalists	42
Trainees who need to finish training	3

Continuing Education Committee

Chair: Bill Cour

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 like the chapter to present a class, contact Bill Cour (wmkcour@gmail.com).

Training Committee

Chair: Sue Robinson

The VMN training class is complete for the 2017-18 year and graduated 19 people. This was concluded on April 7, 2018 with a revised new Practicum, which is set to use more of the tools a "Naturalist" would use in the field. The idea was to give the students practice and hands on in a simulated "nature walk" in the class around the variety of areas covered for the program. Much good feedback was given, with the hopes that this could be done each time, where appropriate to the subject matter. Planning is underway to book instructors for the next year's program start on September 15, 2018. If you have friends that are interested, please let them know to register.



2017 VMN Banshee Reeks graduating class!

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.

And join our Facebook group:

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