



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter April/May 2024



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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WATER QUALITY

Stories from the Water WatchDog Pollution Files

As many FOSC members know, Water Watch Dogs is a 10+ year partnership among FOSC, MoCo Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the Sligo watershed community. It gives

See pollution in the creeks or heading into a storm drain?

Be a Water WatchDog!

anyone with a cell phone a quick, easy way to report pollution on the spot by emailing reportsligopollution@fosc.org with a photo and a description.

How the Water WatchDog program got its name

It all began when a new resident of Silver Spring, walking her **dog** along Sligo Creek and its tributaries, began spotting and reporting water pollution to the County. Together with her neighbor (who also hated water pollution) they envisioned a reporting mechanism, named it the Water WatchDog (WWD) program and created the logo. FOSC provided crucial support, and DEP embraced the program.

The WWD email goes directly to Steve Martin, head of Environmental Health Enforcement, and his team at DEP. They investigate, and if they track down the offender, may be able to issue a fine.

Anne Vorce, the WWD coordinator at FOSC (and co-founder/dog owner) and a member of FOSC's Water Quality committee, gathers additional information as needed for DEP and reports back to the community on reported pollution and the results of DEP's investigations into the pollution and the polluter.



Report it on the spot to:

reportsligopollution@fosc.org

Include:

- **photo(s)**
- **location**
- **time**
- **any details such as color, odor, sheen, muddiness, etc.**

These are invaluable to DEP's investigation team.

Anyone can report pollution in the Sligo Creek watershed -- Sligo Creek, Long Branch, Wheaton Branch, their tributaries, and in the streets that drain into these creeks!

Notable Water WatchDog Pollution Successes

People out along the creeks and in the neighborhoods of the watershed have discovered some unusual pollution taking place. Some of these memorable pollution incidents from the Water WatchDog files follow. In a subsequent issue of this newsletter, we will feature more mundane yet just as important pollution incidents. The WWD reports really do make a difference to the creeks!

The Firefighter Training Incident - Feb. 2021

The thick foam spread across the parking lot, billowing 1 foot high or more in places, blanketing all underneath it, as it was designed to do. MoCo firefighters were honing their skills deploying firefighting foam at a training held at a privately-owned parking lot at Dale Dr. and Colesville Rd. in Feb. 2021. When finished, they washed the foam "away"...straight into Sligo Creek via the nearest storm drain.

At the same time, parkgoers on the Sligo Creek trail reported an odd, shaving cream-like foam entering the creek from a storm drain pipe near Colesville Rd.



The foam was quite thick, like shaving cream.

Illegal firefighting foam from the firefighters' training exercise in Feb. 2021 at the parking lot at Dale Dr. and Colesville Rd. The photo shows the foam partially washed down the storm drain with water from the tank engine.



Above, the foam as it began to enter into Sligo.

The foam continued to drain into the creek and flow downstream for several days (at right).



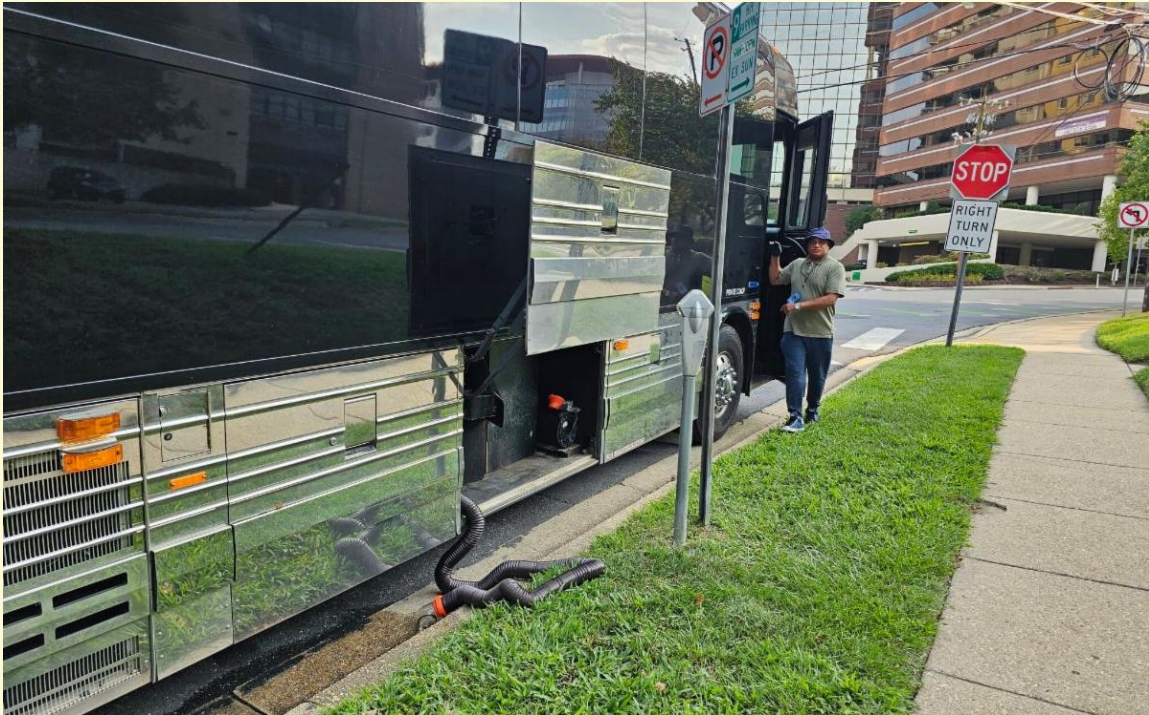
The investigation found that the firefighters had used the toxic foam "Knock Down", did not protect the storm drains as required, and did not clean up the foam. In fact, rain the next day washed the rest of it into the Creek, which was evident for the next three days.

DEP followed up with local firefighter leaders to come up with best practices to protect storm drains during training and to use less harmful, legal products. We need to remain vigilant here.

The Bus Incident - Aug. 2023

The bus was parked in a right turn lane on Ellsworth Drive in downtown Silver Spring - an unusual spot - and had a hose leading from its side into the storm drain. An observant and quick-thinking pedestrian took photos of the hose (below), the license plate and other identifying features of the bus and emailed it immediately to Water WatchDogs.

DEP's investigation found that the bus was pumping raw, unfiltered sewage from the bus's bathroom holding tank into the storm drain and on into Sligo Creek.



The bus and driver with the hose pumping sewage into the storm drain in August 2023.

DEP tracked down the company in Montana and fined the driver the maximum amount allowed under the law - and he paid.

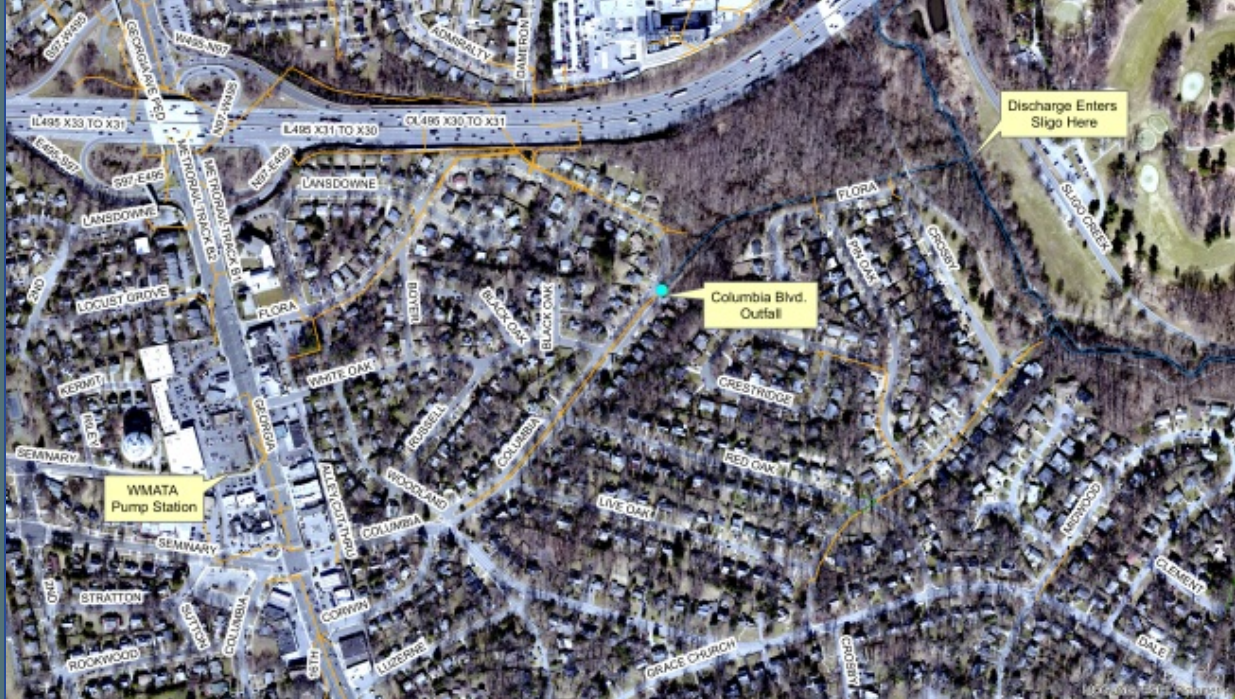
With E. coli readings often elevated in the Bennington Tributary and elsewhere in Sligo Creek, this shocker raises questions about whether sewage disposal (from buses, even port-a-potties?) is playing a role in these readings more frequently than we know.

The Metro Incident - May 2023

The Washington Metro (WMATA) was stopped from polluting Sligo Creek when Water WatchDog reports from many people set in motion meticulous follow up by DEP.

Over many months from Fall 2022 to Spring 2023, WaterWatchDogs received reports of extensive and unusual chalky Sligo Creek pollution on many weekends. Problems were particularly evident around the Columbia Blvd, Crosby Rd, and Flora Lane connections to Sligo Creek. Frustratingly, the pollution mystery remained unsolved.

But DEP discerned a pattern in the Water Watchdog reports and after extensive research identified the cause: runoff from grout work on the weekends in WMATA's Georgia Ave. pump station near Aldi's! The runoff was going into drains in the metro tunnels and ending up in the Creek via the Columbia Boulevard outfall pipe into the Flora Lane tributary and on into Sligo Creek.



Click on the map to see a larger version. (Photo of WMATA pollution map courtesy of DEP.)

DEP referred the case to the MD Dept. of the Environment, which required WMATA to implement a correction plan. DEP has continued to work with WMATA to make sure this won't happen again.

The Water WatchDog partnership was crucial: without the community's Water WatchDog reports, the extent of the pollution would not have been known; without the DEP investigation, the cause would not have been found.

The FOSC Water WatchDog Program would not work without the stewardship of the community and the dedication of DEP to improving our water quality. We would particularly like to thank DEP enforcement team head Steve Martin and team members Gretchen Ekstrom, Alex Torrella, Jacquelyn McGrady, Sanket Patel, and Aftan Sylvester (plus former member Dan McCann).

LITTER/STEWARDS

Sweep the Creek

Sweet Sweep Success

From Ed Murtagh, Sweep Coordinator and FOSC Vice President:

I want to thank everyone who came out for our Earth Day weekend 2024 weep the Creek cleanups. Over 225 volunteers collected well over 100 bags of trash and hundreds of pounds of oversized items (shopping carts, electric bike, tires, etc.) I also want to especially recognize FOSC's

Sligo Stewards who were our cleanup site leaders.

In addition to the Sweep the Creek cleanups, there was an Anacostia Watershed Society cleanup in the PG County portion of our watershed (part of Section 1) and the newly formed Environmental Committee of the Glenview Neighborhood Association that cleaned up parks leading to Sligo in Section 8 (Dennis to University.)



Volunteers at the Wheaton Branch Ponds



Nick Clements, the FOSC Litter Hot Spot coordinator



An intrepid volunteer with trash and recyclables. Awesome job!

(All 3 photos at the Wheaton Branch ponds by S. Deford, Sligo Steward and FOSC Board member)

The great news is that the cleanup leaders reported less trash at many of the sites in the parks than at past cleanups.

This isn't too surprising since the Sweep came fairly soon after the litter hotspot cleanups on Presidents Day, when volunteers removed record amounts of trash from the Wheaton Branch Stormwater Ponds, mid-Sligo, and lower Sligo near East/West Highway. In these areas we found significantly less litter than in past Sweeps.

In Section 6 (Forest Glen to Colesville Rd.) there was also a reduction in bags of trash collected, due in part to two new Friends of Sligo Creek Adopt-A-Road groups at Forest Glen Rd. and Brunett Ave. They join the Section 5 Adopt-A-Road group led by FOSC Steward Carrie Noel-Nosbaum.

Weed Warriors and ploggers working throughout Sligo and Long Branch have also helped by collecting many bags of trash over the past year. FOSC Weed Warriors and others have collected litter weekly in Long Branch, where sweep volunteers found far less trash than usual. Thank you all!

These ongoing efforts to clear trash have been quite successful. As DEP notes on its website, "Trash is a magnet for more trash."

Still, we have some litter hotspots in the watershed that FOSC hot spot coordinator Nick Clements plans to tackle, with your help. The next hot spot clean up will be on Sat May 18 from 1pm -3pm at Arliss park in Long Branch (details in Upcoming Events, below). All events are posted on the [FOSC website](#).

New Partnership

Starting in August, FOSC is also partnering with Anacostia Riverkeeper(ARK) to count and sort the litter removed at our hotspot cleanups according to ARK's classifications. This is part of a region-wide effort to understand the materials being tossed on our parks and advocate for region-wide and state-wide policies to reduce specific pollutants, especially plastics.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Plastic Bottles <i>Single use plastic beverage bottles.</i></p> | <p>Glass <i>Unbroken glass beverage bottles, including alcohol.</i></p> | <p>Cans <i>Aluminum beverage cans, including alcohol.</i></p> | <p>Other Categories <i>Household Products Personal Care PPE Clothing & Textiles Balls Cardboard Electronics Auto Other Hard Plastic Other Soft Plastic</i></p> |
| <p>Food Packaging <i>Chip bags, takeout containers and cups, candy wrappers, etc.</i></p> | <p>Restaurant Takeout <i>Cutlery, condiment packets, and straws.</i> All must be requested by customer in DC. Straw ban across all of the watershed.</p> | <p>Retail Bags <i>Plastic shopping bags with handles.</i> 5 cent fee in DC and Montgomery Co, ban in Prince George's Co.</p> | |
| <p>Food Foam <i>Foam takeout containers, cups, plates, etc.</i> Ban across all of Anacostia watershed.</p> | <p>Non-Food Foam <i>Foam shipping material, packing peanuts, etc.</i> Retail ban in DC and Montgomery Co.</p> | <p>Bulk <i>Tires, construction debris, large auto parts, metal, large electronics, furniture, etc.</i></p> | |

The 19 litter categories used by Anacostia Riverkeeper (ARK) *(Courtesy of ARK)*

Join Us

We are very excited about these initiatives and hope you can participate in at least some of them.

In addition to participating in our cleanups, you can work with our Outreach Committee efforts to educate people about the impact of litter on the ecology of the creeks and parks. The Advocacy Committee is working on litter issues as well. All of us working together are making a real difference.

If you want to become more involved with our FOSC litter reduction efforts, please contact us

at litter@fosc.org.

-Ed Murtagh
Sweep the Creek Coordinator
FOSC Vice President

EARTH DAY

Takoma Park Earth Day Celebration



Mimi, Pat, Kit and Elaine at the FOSC table

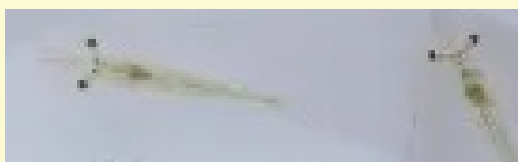


Barbara telling people about invasive plants and FOSC's work.

Earth Day celebration brought hundreds of people to Sligo Creek at Kennebec St. to have fun in the park and learn about all the work that local groups are doing to preserve the environment in our area. FOSC offered info and hands-on experiences with invasive weeds and Weed Warrioring, monthly water quality including E. coli testing, and our macroinvertebrate monitoring partnership with Nature Forward. Many thanks to Dory Estrada of the City of Takoma Park for inviting FOSC to the event.

WATER QUALITY

Sligo Macroinvertebrate Monitoring

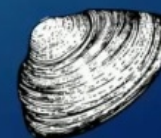


The latest Nature Forward/FOSC macroinvertebrate monitoring team found fewer macroinvertebrates this April than in past spring monitoring sessions.

Freshwater shrimp (at left) and XYZ (above)

Why use macroinvertebrates for biomonitoring?

- ▶ They are excellent indicators of stream health.
 - ▶ Common, abundant and diverse
 - ▶ Easy to collect and identify
 - ▶ Species differ in their tolerance to pollution
 - ▶ Individuals show cumulative impacts of pollution
 - ▶ Most macroinvertebrates have limited mobility, so their health reflects the habitat



Please be sure to view the entire newsletter including the Recent Nature Sightings by clicking on "View entire message" or similar text at the bottom of your browser.

Which Would You Choose: T-Shirt or Ball Cap?

The next drawing for a FOSC tshirt or ball cap is coming up in June!

- If you are FOSC member, join the [main FOSC listserv](#) to be automatically entered for the drawing.
- If you are not yet a FOSC member and are reading this newsletter from your neighbor's copy, please join FOSC [at this link](#)! You will also be entered in the drawing.



The FOSC ball caps

Ball cap or t-shirt: which would you choose?

Join the main FOSC listserv and you'll be entered into the next drawing.



Longtime FOSC member Joe Howard modeling the FOSC t-shirt at FOSC's 20th anniversary fete, Sept 2022

FOSC WEED WARRIORS

Meadow Planting

FOSC held a Meadow Planting/Weed Warrior Day in Sligo north of Dennis Ave. with the Stone Ridge Students, the Montgomery County Conservation Corps and Montgomery Parks. We had a great turnout and got a lot completed.

After the workday, Ed Murtagh made a super-spiced-up time-lapse video of John, Becky and himself tackling a huge Multiflora rose. It gives a great perspective on what we are up against in our battle with invasive weeds in the parks. The actual time lapsed was about 20 minutes.



NATURAL HISTORY

Yellow Crowned Night Heron's Adventure



On Friday, April 12 Sligo Trail walker Nick Rada spotted an exciting event along Sligo Creek south of Colesville Road. A Yellow-crowned night heron was standing in the creek with a big fish in its mouth! Nick fortunately recorded the event to share with FOSC.

We couldn't quite tell what kind of fish the heron caught, so FOSC's Natural History chair Michael Wilpers sought the opinion of Montgomery Parks Natural Resources Specialists Rachel Gauza and Dave Sigrist, who said: "It is likely a Largemouth Bass considering the elongated body shape, what looks to be the presence of a lateral stripe running along the side of the body, and that you can see quite a large, terminal mouth starting at around the 30-second mark."

Birds like this swallow fish whole, so they must maneuver the fish to be eaten head first so the fish

scales slide smoothly instead of getting caught in the bird's GI tract!

Sadly, this heron's eyes were bigger than its stomach and despite a good try, couldn't swallow this prized meal. Better luck next time!

If you see something cool along Sligo Creek, send a photo or video to info@fosc.org so we can all enjoy the natural wonders of Sligo Creek.

FOSC

Past Events

Bird Walk on Saturday, May 4

The group of 20 birders saw or heard these 34 birds in Section 6 of Sligo Creek:

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Belted kingfisher | House finch |
| Black throated blue warbler | House sparrow |
| Black throated green warbler | Mallard |
| Blue grey gnatcatcher | Mourning doves |
| Blue jay | Northern parula |
| Brown headed cowbird | Northern waterthrush |
| Canada goose | Pileated woodpecker |
| Cardinals | Raven |
| Carolina chickadee | Red bellied woodpecker |
| Carolina wren | Robin |
| Catbird | Song sparrow |
| Cedar waxwings | Starling |
| Crow American | Swainson's Thrush |
| Downy woodpecker | Titmouse |
| Flicker | White breasted nuthatch |
| Goldfinch | White throated sparrow |
| Grackles | |
| Great crested flycatcher | |

The video of the **Early Botany in Sligo** zoom presentation by Michael Wilpers, chair of the Natural History Committee, with many cool old drawings, maps and photos is now up on the FOSC YouTube Channel. Check it out!



Upcoming Events & Volunteer Opportunities

Watch the [FOSC Home page](#) and the [FOSC Calendar of Events page](#) for more upcoming FOSC programs and other volunteer events.

Water Quality testing this summer - Additional Volunteers Needed!

The Summer FOSC/Anacostia Riverkeeper (ARK) Water Quality Testing program will get underway shortly.

If you are interested in participating, [view this training video](#) then [self-certify online](#). Once certified, you can sign up for the dates and locations you want to monitor. Testing is done every other Wed, starting May 15 - Sept 18, but you can join the team even after testing has started.

As a volunteer, you would sign up only for the Wed. dates that work for your schedule. And you can sign up to test at a single site, or decide to mix it up and test at different sites. Monitoring is usually done in pairs, and there are experienced volunteers looking for co-monitors!

From north to south, the testing sites are:

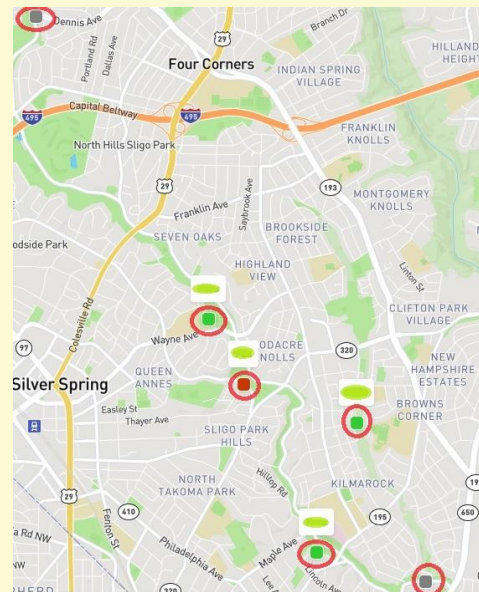
Sligo Creek - 4 sites

- Dennis Ave. at Sligo-Dennis Park
- Wayne Ave. near Dale Drive
- Fleetwood Terrace near Dale Drive NP
- Maple Ave. at Sligo Creek Parkway

Long Branch -2 sites

- Rolling Terrace/Clayborn Ave.
- Becca Lilly NP near Glenside Drive

Volunteers will test for 6 parameters: E. coli, dissolved oxygen (DO), pH, air and water temp, and turbidity.



We are adding E. coli source testing to a handful of locations (include one on Sligo & one on Long Branch) during the summer through a partnership with Dr. Amy Sapkota from UMD, so we can start to narrow down where the E. coli at these locations is coming from, but all our sites will get quantitative E. coli levels tested biweekly.

At this point, all the Sligo/Wayne sites have openings summer long! Some of the sites (Maple Ave

& Fleetwood) have regular monitors who are there most weeks, but even they are looking for co-monitors!

Long Branch - Arliss Park Litter Hotspot Cleanup

Sat, May 18 from 1-3pm

Join Friends of Sligo Creek for a park clean up! Help beautify the community park, keep litter out of Long Branch, and protect wildlife.

Location: Long Branch Library parking lot, 8800 Garland Ave, Silver Spring, MD.

What to wear and bring: Please wear long pants that cover your ankles, long sleeves, and sturdy, closed-toed shoes or boots. Wear gardening-type gloves, if you have them! We will have gloves to borrow if you don't have your own. Please bring water to drink.

We will provide bags and gloves (no small child gloves) and there will be some trash grabbers available.

You will need to sign in before you start.

- Children under 14 years old must volunteer with a parent/guardian.
- All cleanups are pre-approved for SSL hours - bring your form with you. Forms are signed after the cleanup.
- **Students must pre-register on the [Parks website](#) to receive SSL hours. Note: Do not use an MCPS email!**
- This opportunity is not eligible for court-ordered service.

Clean up leader: Nicholas Clements litterhotspots@fosc.org

Invasive Weed Walk with Walter Mulbry

Sat, June 1 at 9:30am at the Sligo tennis courts near Piney Branch Rd.

Join Walter Mulbry, chair of the FOSC invasive plant removal committee, on Saturday, June 1 at 9:30am for a leisurely one hour walk to look for new and not-so-new invasive plant species in Sligo Creek and discuss management strategies.

We'll meet at the tennis court parking lot on Sligo Creek Parkway just north of Piney Branch Rd. in Silver Spring. We'll walk upstream to Wayne Ave. and back. We'll likely encounter poison ivy along the trail so wear long pants and covered shoes. In case of rain, we'll postpone the walk until June 8 (for updates visit the FOSC website, friendsofsligocreek.org).

**Donating to FOSC keeps our many projects going.
You can give anytime and in any way that suits you!**

**Make a gift, set up a monthly gift, make a birthday gift,
a gift in honor of someone or a gift in memoriam.**

**Just use this link [Donate here](#) or the Donate button below.
It's simple and secure.**



Your gift is greatly appreciated - thank you!

**If you prefer to write a check, please send it to:
FOSC, P.O. Box 11572, Takoma Park, MD 20913**

If you'd like information about planned giving, please contact info@fosc.org.

FOSC STORE

FOSC t-shirts, caps, mugs, and posters

Step out in style this spring and summer!

Order from this [FOSC store](#) link, or through the link on the upper right tab of the [FOSC homepage](#). You can have your order mailed to you or opt to pick it up locally. All sales support FOSC programs. Thank you.

FOSC tees are made of soft, 100% organic cotton and stay super soft! This is the one you will wear all the time. Short and long sleeves in 5 sizes, small to XXL, green and blue. The short sleeve tees are \$22 - \$24. The long sleeved tees are \$26 to \$28.

Ball caps are adjustable, embroidered, made of 100% cotton, and can be had for \$18.



The FOSC ballcaps have a classic low profile in light blue and dark green with the FOSC logo embroidered on the front. (S. Deford photo)



Kiosk Posters (\$15), mugs (\$10), and window clings for a car or home window (\$5) are available too.

Water Quality Committee chair Pat Ratkowski in a FOSC t-shirt on Earth Day.

NATURAL HISTORY

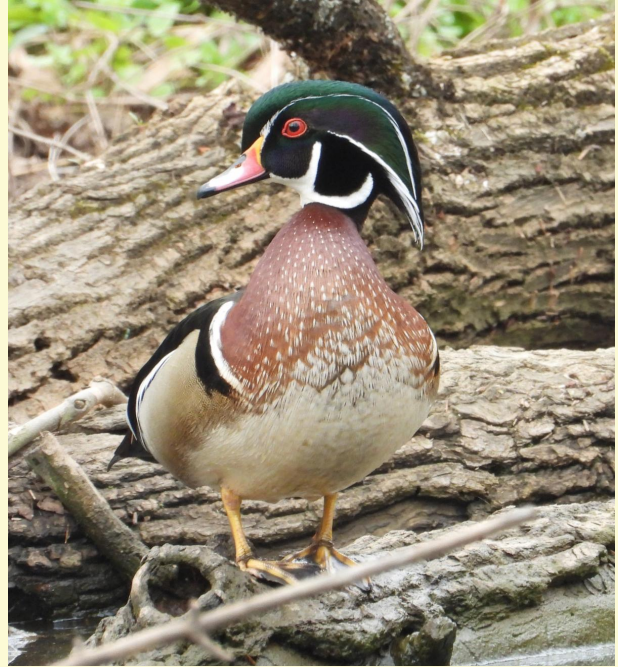
Recent Nature Sightings in Sligo



Muskrat at the Beltway stormwater ponds on April 8 (D. Treadwell)



Green Heron at the Forest Glen wetlands on April 26 (D. Treadwell)



Male Wood Duck at the Forest Glen wetlands on April 9 (D. Treadwell)



Three early-emerging bees (left to right): Sweat Bee (*Lasioglossum pilosum*) in the woodlands along Wheaton Branch on April 14 (Matt Felperin); Augochlorine Sweat Bee between Piney Branch and Park Valley on April 14 (Katja Schulz); Mining Bee on Golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*) on April 24 near Cedar and Wayne (maragay).



Eastern Gray Ratsnake along Sligo near Flora Lane on April 20 (mrmeow64)



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail: The well disguised chrysalis stage (left) near Poplar and Columbia on April 22 (Vincent Verweij) and an adult near Whitney and East Melbourne on April 23 (brittaugust)



Skunk Cabbage upstream from the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds on April 17 (M. Wilpers)



Jack-in-the-Pulpit in the Kemp Mill wetlands on April 17



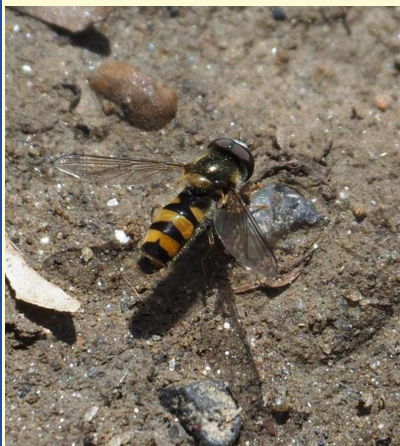
Striped Pinxter Azalea between Maple and Kennebec on April 20



Red Maple upstream of Wayne Ave. on April 15



Aniseroot (in the carrot family) between Piney Branch and Park Valley on April 24
(the four photos above by M. Wilpers)

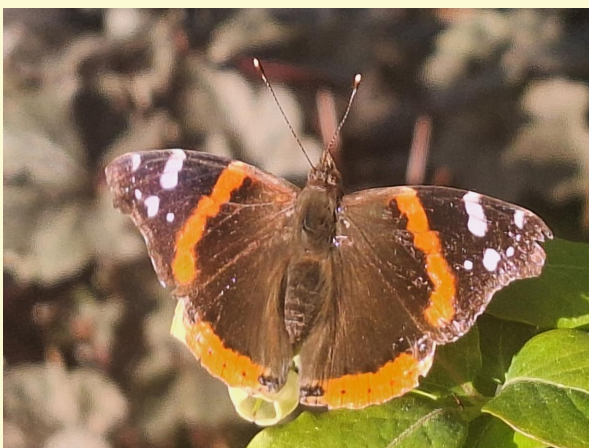




Colorful flies: A hoverfly near Aspen and an Eastern Calligrapher near Jackson, both on April 8 (K. Schulz) and a Tufted Globtail near Kimberly and Eugene on April 24 (Matt Rine)



Cape May Warbler near Franklin and Sudbury on April 28 (Stephen Davies)



Red Admiral (left) near Bennington on April 16 (mrmeow64) and a blister beetle (*Lytta aenea*) in the woods along Wheaton Branch on April 14 (Matt Felperin)



White-jawed Jumping Spider on Elson at Erskine St. on April 30 (bae3)



New York Fern (left) in Kemp Mill between the grocery store and the side trail on April 17, and Early Lowbush Blueberry (above) nearby the same day (M. Wilpers)



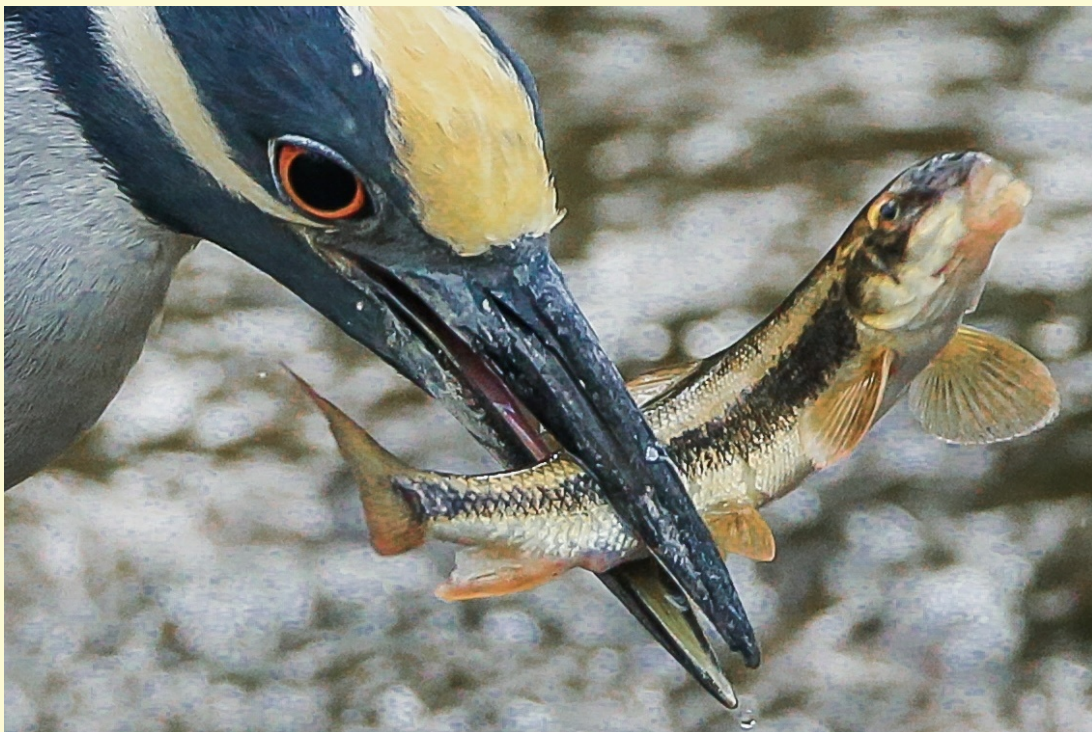
Above: Black snakeroot (*Sanicula marylandica*) on May 13 on Sligo Creek Parkway between Maple and Piney Branch (M. Wilpers)



Globose Dome Snail (at left) on Flora Ln on April 13 (mrmeow64)



A Northern Rough-winged Swallow (at right) at the Wheaton Branch ponds on April 19 (rekursiv)



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron with a White Sucker near Bennington.
Photographed April 15, 2019, posted on iNaturalist in April 2024 (Matt Felperin)

Photo selection and captions by Michael Wilpers (questions or comments, naturalhistory@fosc.org). All photos taken from the iNaturalist project, "Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed" ([Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed · iNaturalist](#)). Photo credits reflect those provided in the iNaturalist system.

Need to Reach Us?

President (Elaine Lamirande): president@fosc.org

Invasive Plants/RIP (Walter Mulbry): invasives@fosc.org

Litter/Sweep the Creek (Ed Murtagh): litter@fosc.org

Advocacy (Kit Gage): advocacy@fosc.org

Natural History (Michael Wilpers): naturalhistory@fosc.org

Stormwater (Elaine Lamirande): stormwater@fosc.org

Water Quality (Pat Ratkowski): waterquality@fosc.org

Outreach (Sergio Obadia): outreach@fosc.org

Treasurer (Tom Walton): treasurer@fosc.org

Webmaster (Christine Dunathan): webmaster@fosc.org

Newsletter Editors (C. Dunathan & M. Wilpers): editor@fosc.org



Friends of Sligo Creek is a nonprofit community organization dedicated to protecting, improving, and appreciating the ecological health of Sligo Creek Park and its surrounding watershed.

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