



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter June 2023



Photo by Xavier Courouble

NATURAL HISTORY/STORMWATER

Community Gardens Benefit Sligo

Friends of Sligo Creek Stewards have been involved with three large-scale native plant gardens in the Sligo watershed. These projects beautify their neighborhoods, absorb stormwater, and provide nectar and pollen for bees and butterflies.

These gardens improve the health of the overall watershed and will hopefully inspire other communities in Sligo to create their own conservation gardens.

North Hills of Sligo Gardens



In the North Hills of Sligo neighborhood of Sligo Creek, two large pollinator gardens have been installed at the intersection of Bristol Ave and Guilford Street, replacing non-native turf grass in unused rights-of-way.

In order to convert 2,500 square feet of county property for this purpose, residents devoted months of work to obtain permission to landscape and plant here, coordinating with the Dept. of Transportation, seeking sources for plant material, and generating neighborhood support.

A team of five, including FOOSC member and steward Ross Campbell, Eric Cathcart, Eileen Chmielewski, Lelyn Saner, and Kyle Simpson led the effort. Neighbors provided the labor to prepare the soil and install the plants. In a recent FOOSC webinar, Eric, Kyle and Ross described the path they took to successful completion of the project. [View the video here.](#)

The project is such a success that a group of residents elsewhere in the neighborhood got together to build a second conservation garden, currently underway.

A dedication event this past Saturday, June 10, drew more than 50 neighbors, staff from the Dept. of Transportation, and local and state officials, including County Executive Marc Elrich, State Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, County Council members Laurie-Anne Sayles and Kate Stewart, and Joseph Eyong from Congressman Jamie Raskin's office.



Kyle Simpson with a lawn sign about the gardens in front of the cardboard-covered grass in the early stage of the project (R. Campbell photo)



Officials came to celebrate the second year of the community pollinator garden in the North Hills of Sligo on June 11, including (L to R, at center) County Executive Marc Elrich, State Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, County Council members Kate Stewart and Laurie-Anne Sayles, and Joseph Eyong (in blue plaid shirt), representing Congressman Jamie Raskin (C. Dunathan photo)

Melbourne Avenue at the Three Oaks community

During storms in past years, Melbourne Ave. in the Sligo-Branview neighborhood channeled stormwater straight downhill into the Three Oaks community and from there to Sligo Creek (which runs directly below Three Oaks) causing considerable flooding and erosion.



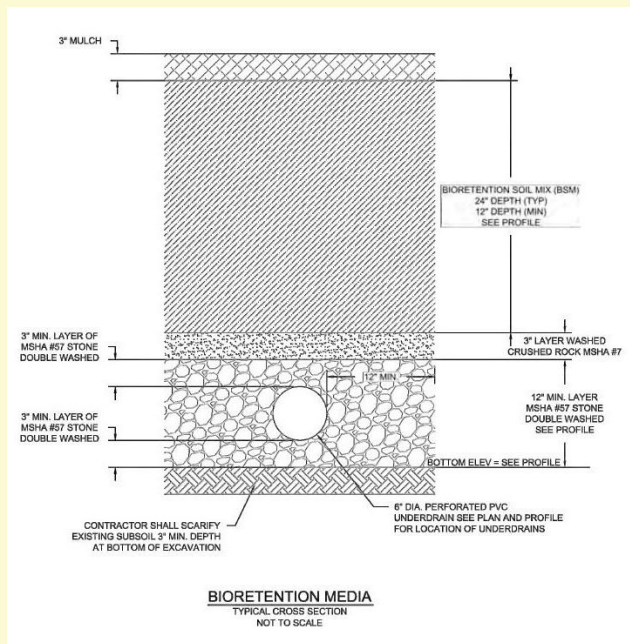
The stormwater problem before the project, flowing south toward Three Oaks (K. Payne photo)

A joint effort by the Three Oaks community, FOOSC, and the County Dept. of Transportation converted the end of Melbourne Ave. into a stormwater bioretention garden with a shaded path alongside it for pedestrians.



During construction, looking north toward Melbourne Ave. Notice the drop from street height down into the bioretention area and the subsequent rise in height to help keep water from heading into Three Oaks. (MCDOT photo)

The bioretention garden soaks up water and pollutants from the street. The soil is engineered in multiple layers, more than 3 feet deep, to capture, filter, and then infiltrate the water slowly and deeply. Perforated pipes (below left) ensure the water is distributed over a wide area.



The restored storm drain pipe (at right) carries overflow into the storm drain system, which drains into Sligo Creek. Perforated piping (at left) in the bioretention media, roughly 2.5 feet below the surface, helps distribute the water throughout the bioretention area. (MCDOT photos)

The square concrete structure in the middle of the garden (below, red arrow) is a riser for any overflow during especially heavy storms. It connects to the restored stormwater pipe (above right), which connects to the storm drain system, which drains into Sligo Creek. During each storm, this bioretention garden can hold and treat up to 1,400 cubic feet of water.



The completed project, just planted this month, looking south from the end of Melbourne Ave. toward Three Oaks (C. Dunathan photo)

The native grasses, flowering perennials, trees, and shrubs planted in the bioretention area absorb water, filter pollutants, feed and shelter pollinators, and add to the neighborhood's green corridors. These plants are hardy enough to withstand the fast runoff from Melbourne Ave. and the streets that lead into it, as well as periods of drought.

Hillwood Manor Community Gardens and Artworks

This June, Hillwood Manor celebrated its two native plant pollinator gardens and the eight murals that greet Sligo Creek trail users along the east side of New Hampshire Ave. in Sligo Section 1.

Started 15 years ago, the gardens replaced non-native invasive plants with native ones that feed pollinators. They now occupy approx. 4,000 sq. ft. along Sligo Creek trail and nearby streets. Each year since, hundreds of volunteer hours have been devoted to expanding and maintaining the gardens with sustainable, organic methods.



The Lower Garden includes a birdbath, a sculpture made by recycling an old bo wling ball, and a peace pole with messages of peace in four languages (E. Murtagh photo)

The celebration honored Takoma Park artist Renee Lachman, who created eight mural panels that grace the gardens, the bridge over Sligo at the Lower Garden, and nearby Erskine Street.



Just beyond the Lower Garden, the bridge over Sligo Creek displays four murals, two on each end, created by Takoma Park artist Renee Lachman (P. Sparr photo)

The International Welcome panel (above, left) features flowers with 16 greetings by people who helped create the gardens, with many “languages of their heart” written into the flower petals. Another six panels, three at the bridge and three at Erskine St. and 13th Ave., depict residents of Hillwood Manor and other key volunteers working in the gardens. The eighth panel welcomes passersby to the neighborhood in the Upper Garden at Erskine and NH Ave.

Funding and in-kind donations from the City of Takoma Park, Montgomery County, M-NCPPC, several private foundations, and individuals made these extensive long-term projects possible. FOOSC served as fiscal agent for the project.

The gardens and artworks have strengthened neighborhood cohesion, spirit and identity, while providing resilient landscapes that are places of respite and beauty for people using the Sligo Creek trail and park.

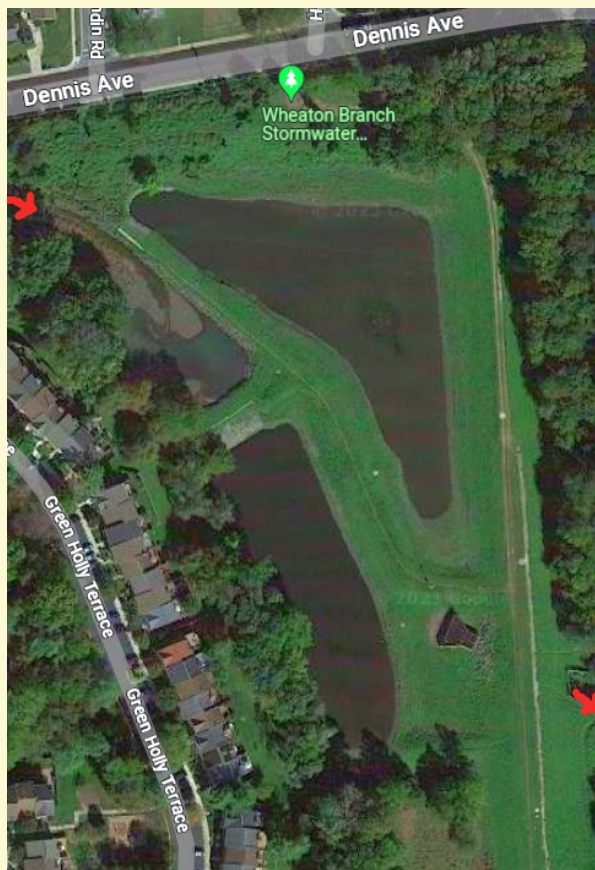
As we all know from the smoky days of early June, environmental challenges in one area can affect us all, even hundreds or thousands of miles away. These three gardens are important projects that improve local resilience to environmental events, whether they occur near or far.

FOOSC's dedicated Stewards were involved with all these projects - Ross Campbell at North Hills of

NATURAL HISTORY

FOSC to Install Bird Nest Boxes at Wheaton Branch Stormwater Ponds

Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC) will install up to four bird nest boxes in coming months at the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds after working out the details with county officials and receiving their formal approval. The nest boxes will be designed to support Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows, native cavity-nesting birds that must compete for precious habitat with aggressive non-native species.



Above left: Stormwater retention ponds on the south side of Dennis Ave. These artificial ponds are fed by Wheaton Branch (a tributary of Sligo Creek), which enters from the north end (upper left) and exits toward the south (lower right). (Google Maps)



Eastern Bluebirds using a nest box attached to a tree near the ponds in fall 2020 (Ron Wertz). While bluebirds may roost there, none have used the box recently for nesting.

One bird nest box proved successful at the ponds in the past. It was installed in the middle of pond #1 (into which the stream empties from under the bridge) and hosted nesting Tree Swallows until about 2013, after which it collapsed. A nearby nest

box, attached to a mature tree in the bordering woodlands, has not recently hosted any nesting birds.

The 40-year-old pond complex, managed by the county Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), protects Sligo Creek by slowing the rush of stormwater runoff and collecting litter, sediment, and other pollutants that flow from downtown Wheaton and other paved areas upstream.

An abundance of wildlife makes use of these ponds, including turtles, wading birds, raptors, warblers, beavers, and red foxes. Nature photographers frequently document them on our [iNaturalist project](#).

FOSC approached DEP about bringing nest boxes back to the ponds as the agency readies a major renovation at the site, scheduled to begin in late 2024. It will expand the floodplain upstream from Dennis Avenue, replace the Dennis Ave. bridge, dredge the first (most upstream) pond in the complex, and renovate the concrete stormwater control structure.

FOSC sought guidance for these nest boxes from Emily Huang, vice president of the Montgomery Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society. She is also Montgomery County coordinator for the third *Maryland-DC Breeding Bird Atlas*3. She is developing nest boxes on DEP property in the Olney area.

Huang visited the ponds in late March and suggested several locations for nest boxes. DEP approved all of the sites located outside the boundaries of the 2024 project.

FOSC hopes to install these boxes in fall of 2023 so that they're available at the start of the 2024 Bluebird breeding season, which can occur as early as February.

Nest boxes for Bluebirds and Tree Swallows require specific dimensions to deter unwanted species (such as House Sparrows and European Starlings) and baffles to protect them from predators such as snakes, squirrels, and raccoons.



*Great Egret at the ponds in early June
(Susan DeFord)*

FOSC is looking for volunteers who can commit to regularly visiting the nest boxes for monitoring and maintenance. Birding experience is valued, but interested beginners are also welcome.

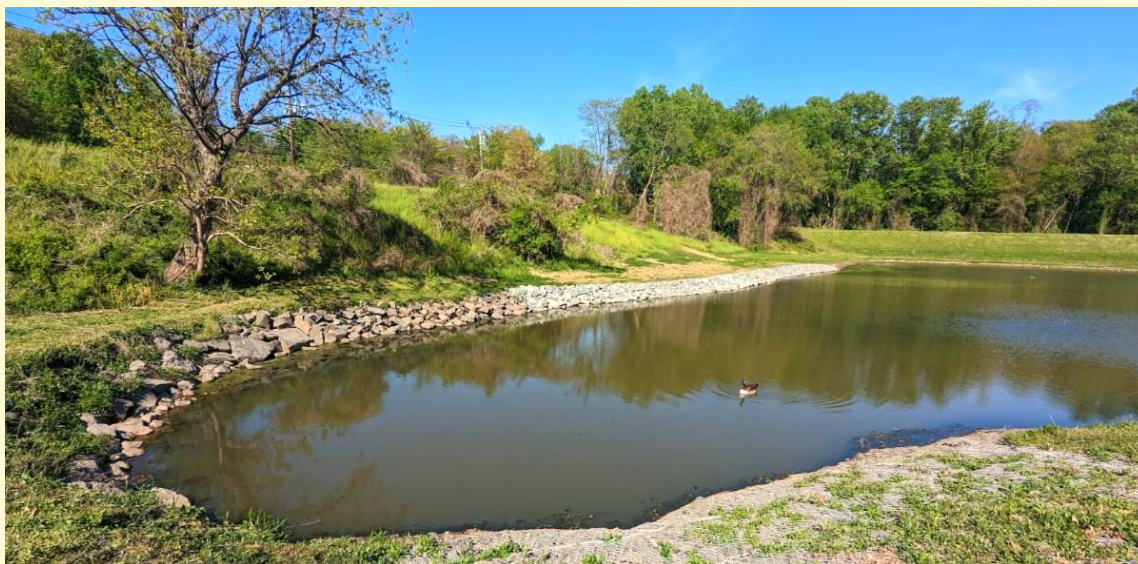
To be part of this new environmental stewardship project, send an email with your contact information and a description of your birding experience to naturalhistory@fosc.org. Please put **Nest Boxes** in the subject line. Thanks!



Tree Swallows at the former nest box at the ponds in 2013 (Stephen Davies)

Because the boxes need to be routinely monitored during nesting season, and cleaned and maintained in the off season, FOSC is looking for volunteers to help out with this valuable addition to our watershed. *(See the sidebar above for details.)*

-- Susan DeFord, FOSC Board member and Section 7 steward



One of the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds, this one adjoining the berm (at left) that parallels Dennis Ave. (M. Wilpers)

Early Detection, Rapid Response

Emerging Invasives, the Invasion Curve, and Community Science

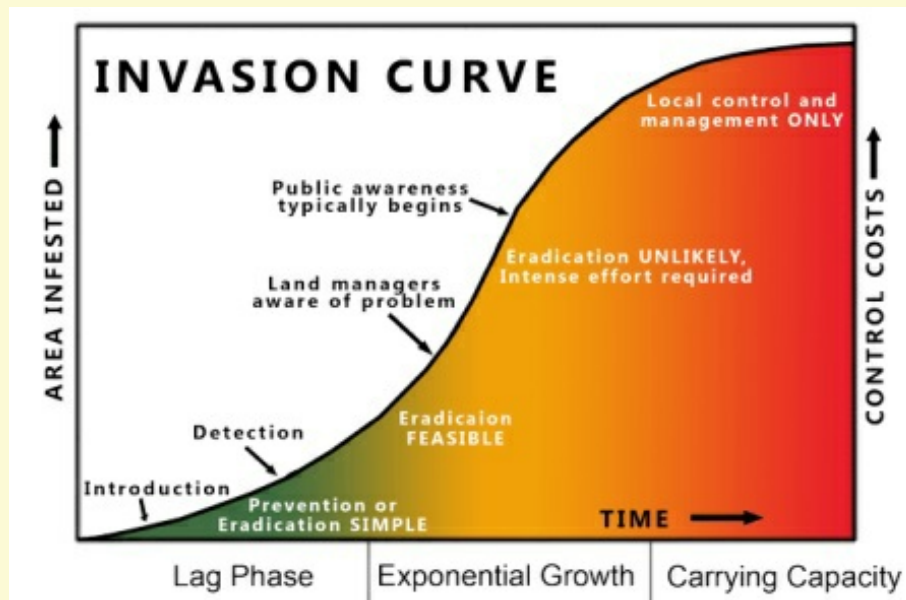
Non-native invasive plants, or NNIs, are a fact of life in Sligo Creek park. For certified Weed Warriors, who collectively spend thousands of hours removing NNIs annually in Sligo, they can be very frustrating. They can be difficult to remove, even with a weed wrench. They reappear from old seeds in the “seed bank” in the soil, and they are replenished from many sources outside the park -- yards, commercial and institutional plantings, from birds, through the water flowing in the creek, and the wind. Management rather than eradication is the goal.

At the invitation of Walter Mulbry, FOSC’s Invasives Committee chair, Sara Tangren recently spoke about the NNIs, the “Invasion Curve,” and the region-wide Early Detection Rapid Response Program. Sara is the coordinator of NCR-PRISM*, a group that tracks new invasives in the DMV region and develops strategies for containing them.

Whether you are an accomplished gardener or don’t know a trowel from a shovel, you will likely find much of the webinar interesting and useful. [See the recording here.](#)

Some main takeaways:

- The Invasion Curve, based on data reported to NCR-PRISM, confirms that if we can identify emerging NNI plans early, we have a much greater chance of successfully removing them from our watershed before they become established.



- Increasing our awareness of non-native invasive plants in our yards and finding non-invasive alternatives makes a difference in limiting the spread of NNIs in the watershed.
- If you see an unusual plant you haven't seen before, photograph it and report it! Several new NNIs were discovered through reports from regular people (not "plant nerds") who didn't know what they'd found but reported it anyway. This alerted NCR-PRISM, who got the

word out and helped limit their spread. Use [this link for NCR-PRISM's Invaders](#)

Detectives project on iNaturalist.

Friends of Sligo Creek needs your help with the early detection/ identification of emerging NNI plants in Sligo. We also need help to increase awareness among homeowners of NNIs that could be in their yards and to replace them with native alternatives. Contact invasives@fosc.org if you're interested.

*National Capital Region - Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management



Incised Fumewort
(emerging invasive)



Italian Arum
(emerging invasive)



Nandina / Heavenly Bamboo
(established invasive)

Nandina is a fully established invasive touted in the landscaping trade.

See the [Resources on Invasive Plants page](#) of the FOOSC website for common NNIs in backyards and in Sligo Creek park.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Upcoming Events

**June 21 - Ask a Bumblebee: A
Community Science Project on Bumble**



Brown-belted Bumble Bee (photo by Kent McFarland)

Bee Floral Preference

Zoom talk with Jenan El-Hifnawi on Wednesday, June 21 at 7 pm [at this Zoom link](#)

Which flowers do bumble bees in Sligo Creek prefer? That's what the Ask A Bumble Bee (AABB) community science project is trying to figure out!

[Join us on Zoom](#) with AABB coordinator Jenan El-Hifnawi of the USGS Bee Inventory and Monitoring Lab as she presents the community science project that looks at bumble bee floral preferences. She'll tell us about the program and how to get involved and she'll share some preliminary results about that bees rank as their top plants! Bring your questions and take away some ideas for your garden.



At one of the stormwater projects in the Park Hills neighborhood. (Ed Murtagh photo)

[Register here for the Green Streets tour!](#)

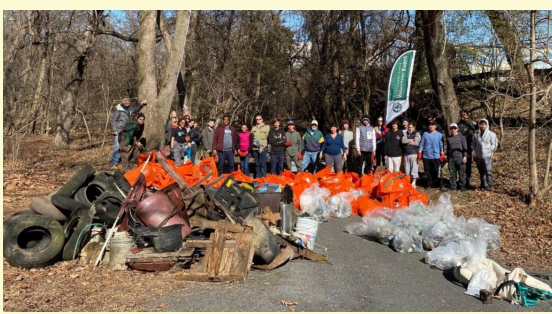
The meet-up location will be sent to registrants a few days before the tour.

The tour is offered through a grant-funded partnership with Nature Forward.

June 24 - Green Streets stormwater project tour

On **Saturday, June 24 at 10 am**, tour the Sligo Park Hills Green Streets stormwater projects with Kit Gage, a stormwater and native plant horticulturist. Kit will also show interested folks how her own conservation landscape backyard works.

The Green Streets program installed neighborhood-wide stormwater capture projects in street rights-of-way to limit flooding and capture pollution. Many of them are planted with native perennials, shrubs, and trees and so are lovely amenities for the neighborhood. Learn how they function on this approximately 1 hour tour. Note: There are gradual inclines on the streets but no steps.



An impressive haul from the first cleanup at the Sligo Mills Neighborhood Conservation Area earlier this year. Photo courtesy of Valeria Espinoza, Parks Dept.

[Please Register Here for the Cleanup](#)

June 24 - Sligo Mill Neighborhood Conservation Area Cleanup

The MoCo Parks Dept is sponsoring a Summer Cleanup at Sligo Mill Neighborhood Conservation Area. This cleanup is hosted by Montgomery Parks staff and volunteers. It is best for adults and family volunteers ages 16 and up and it's pre-approved for SSL hours. For questions, contact

volunteercleanups@montgomeryparks.org.

Saturday June 24, 2023

10:00 am to noon

Sligo Mill Neighborhood Conservation Area
Sheridan St & Sligo Mill Rd
Takoma Park, MD 20912

CBLP CERTIFICADO DE GESTIÓN SOSTENIBLE DE BMP DE AGUAS PLUVIALES PARA TRIPULACIONES

La duración del taller es de un día, Programa de Certificación Profesional de Paisajismo en la Bahía Chesapeake (CBLP en inglés).

August 26th, 2023
8:30am - 2:30pm
Chevy Chase, MD

¿Es usted un profesional del paisaje quien habla español y trabaja en el condado de Montgomery? Puede calificar para una beca completa, más un estipendio de participación de \$200 para esta capacitación. Por favor, rellene este formulario para aplicar. <https://forms.office.com/r/VEGZDAGxLU>

Diseñado para cuadrillas de mantenimiento y líderes de cuadrillas que aún no han completado la capacitación de Nivel I Certificación Profesional de Paisajismo en la Bahía Chesapeake (CBLP en inglés).

El programa educativo se enfoca en el compromiso, la interacción y el aprendizaje práctico. Los temas incluyen actividades de mantenimiento de Buenas Prácticas de Manejo (BPM) rutinarias y no rutinarias, identificación de plantas, plantas nativas adecuadas para BPM, identificación y manejo de plantas invasoras y desarrollo de un plan de mantenimiento. Se proporcionarán materiales de educativo a todos los participantes.

Los participantes que completen la clase recibirán el Certificado Profesional de Paisajismo en la Bahía Chesapeake para Equipos de Compa (CBLP-CREWS en inglés).

[HTTPS://CERTIFIED.CBLPRO.ORG/CBLP-CREWS/](https://certified.cblpro.org/cblp-crews/)

Flyer for Landscaper Training
(Click on the flyer to download a copy)

Please apply, or share the flyer below with your Sligo watershed neighborhood listservs and any landscapers you know who might be interested.

Apply for a Scholarship and/or stipend for the Sligo watershed landscaper training

Aug 26 - Spanish-language Sligo Watershed Landscaper Training for Rain Garden Maintenance

Nature Forward is partnering with the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Program to offer training for landscape rain garden maintenance to native Spanish-speaking landscape workers who work in the Sligo Creek watershed.

The training will be hands-on, using the rain gardens at Woodend, the Nature Forward headquarters in Chevy Chase.

Thanks to grant funding, Nature Forward is able to offer full scholarships, plus \$200 participation stipends.

Once a person is approved for a scholarship, Nature Forward (NF) will provide a coupon code to use for free registration. If someone registers before obtaining approval for a scholarship, NF will refund their fee. The stipends will be distributed after completion of the course.

Register here for the Sligo watershed

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.



"CHIAROSCURO V" by J. Kassovic

June 15 - Sept 7 "Celebrating Sligo Creek" art exhibit

At the Takoma Park Community Center
7500 Maple Ave, Takoma Park 20912

The "Celebrating Sligo Creek" exhibit features the work of longtime Sligo Creek photographer Julius Kassovic, who has generously shared iconic photos of Sligo with FOSC over the years; photographer Lynn Alleva Lilley; and mixed media artist Steven Robinson.



Sept 10 - Takoma Folk Festival

Join other FOSC volunteers at the Takoma Park Folk Festival for a couple of hours between 10:00am and 6:30pm. Email webmaster@fosc.org with your contact information and availability. Thank you!

FOSC STORE

FOSC T-shirts to Wear with Pride

Celebrate summer with a beautiful FOSC T-shirt for yourself, family, and friends!

The tees are made of organic cotton. Right now the short sleeved tees are available in 5 sizes, small to XL. Long sleeved tees are available in XL only. We'll get more long sleeved tees in the fall. Prices range from \$22 to \$27.

You can order the tees directly from the [FOSC store](#), now on its own tab on the upper right of the FOSC [homepage](#).

Each T-shirt purchased helps support FOSC's work on litter, non-native invasive plant removal, stormwater, water quality, natural history, and advocacy.



*Sligo resident Zia models the FOSC T-shirt
(J. Kassovic photo)*

NATURAL HISTORY

Recent Nature Sightings in Sligo



Eastern Painted Turtle at the Beltway ponds on June 8 (Dan Treadwell)

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at
the Beltway ponds on June 11

(D. Treadwell)



Above: Lesser Mulberry Snout near Franwall and Naim on June 11 (maragay)



Right: Banded Hairstreak near Elson & 16th Place on June 7 (Kristin Zimmer)



Green Heron on the hunt at the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds

at top on June 11; at bottom with a frog on June 10 (D. Treadwell)



Dragonfly and damselfly at the Beltway ponds on June 5 (lauriedkr)
Above: Eastern Pondhawk
Right: Ebony Jewelwing damselfly



American Beaver along Sligo Creek near Crosby Road at the south end of the soccer fields on June 16 (camerashychris)



Above: Globe Snail (*Mesodon*) in the powerline corridor near Ray Rd. on June 10 (Adrienne van dem Beemt)



Right: Jelly Ear mushroom near Hamilton & Wire on May 29 (jsharper)



Smooth Earth snake near Hillwood Manor Park on June 11 (marsrevolt)



Marsh Fly (*Euthycera flavescens*) in the powerline meadow near Ray Rd on June 10 (A. van dem Beemt)



Giant Leopard Moth near Wayne & Fenton on June 7 (Daniil Davydoff)



Left: Common Eastern Bumblebee on Butterfly Milkweed near Elson & 16th Place on June 7 (K. Zimmer)

Above: Abrupt Digger Bees on Common Milkweed in the powerline meadow June 12 (M. Wilpers)



American Bullfrog at the Beltway ponds on June 8 (D. Treadwell)

Photo selection by Michael Wilpers, FOSC chair of natural history. 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.

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You can give via [this Donate button](#) - it's simple and secure.

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**Or send a check to the address at the very bottom of this email.
Thank you!**

Need to Reach Us?

President (Elaine Lamirande): [**president@fosc.org**](mailto:president@fosc.org)

Invasive Plants/RIP (Walter Mulbry): [**invasives@fosc.org**](mailto:invasives@fosc.org)

Litter/Sweep the Creek (Tanya DeKona / Ed Murtagh): [**litter@fosc.org**](mailto:litter@fosc.org)

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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.



[Join FOOSC](#)

Friends of Sligo Creek | P.O. Box 11572, Takoma Park, MD 20913

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