



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter December 2023



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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LITTER/STEWARDS

First Litter Hot Spot Events

We will hold our first Litter Hotspot Cleanup event over the MLK, Jr. Weekend of Service, Jan. 13-15, 2024.

Two cleanup events are planned thus far, in Long Branch Park and at the Wheaton Branch Stormwater ponds. We hope to add another

locations too. Litter not only affects the aesthetics of a community, sending a "cue-to-non-caring" message, it quickly releases pollutants into the water and land that animals and humans depend on.

Come out and help us tackle litter hotspots! Details will be on the FOSC website in a couple of weeks.

Long Branch

When: MLK, Jr. Day - Jan 15, 1pm-3pm

Where: Long Branch - details coming

Register: with Parks (see QR code) so they know how many gloves, bags, etc. to bring.

Wheaton Branch

When: MLK, Jr. Day - Jan 15, time TBD

Where: Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds

Register: No pre-registration required.

--Nick Clements

Litter Hot Spot Coordinator

litterhotspots@fosc.org

The current list of litter hot spots includes:

- Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds
- Long Branch around Piney Branch Recreation Center
- Long Branch at Garland Park
- Sligo Mill Park at Sheridan St.
- Sligo Creek at East/West Highway

Do you know of others? Contact Nick at litterhotspots@fosc.org.



Someone's idea of fun: emptying Park trash cans into the Creek last Sunday near Sligo Creek at Dennis Avenue (N.Clements photo)

Link to the Parks registration page:



The QR code takes users to the Parks online registration page for all cleanups. From there, click on the schedule tab, scroll to find the event on 1/15/2024 at Long Branch Stream Valley Park co-hosted with FOSC.

If you want to register as a family, register one person and email Ilisa.Tawney@montgomeryparks.org with the total number of people coming.

NATURAL HISTORY

Building for New Residences at

Wheaton Branch Ponds

A housing project at the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds aims to draw growing families - of native birds, that is.

Scattered around these county-owned ponds are four newly-installed nest boxes to lure bluebirds and tree swallows searching for prime real estate to raise their young.

Standing several feet off the ground on metal poles, protected by metal baffles, the nest boxes feature a special amenity: a group of human volunteers that will monitor and record activity at the boxes during the 2024 nesting season. While bird boxes have come and gone at the ponds over the years, this initiative emphasizes nest monitoring by volunteers to help native birds nest successfully.



Emily Huang, VP of the Montgomery Bird Club, discussing monitoring protocols with some of the volunteers (All photos by S. DeFord)

In November, FOSC-recruited volunteers trained with Emily Huang, vice president of the Montgomery Bird Club. Their monitoring work will begin in late February, when bluebirds and tree swallows scout locations to nest. Each volunteer will visit their assigned boxes regularly to check for signs of nest building, keep out wasps, discourage non-native birds such as house sparrows, and chronicle nesting by native birds, including chickadees and wrens as well as bluebirds and tree swallows.



(Above) Emily pointing out the shape of the holes, a key aspect of nest box appeal to bluebirds and tree swallows



Walter Mulbry (at left) and Ken Klein installing the base of a nest box



Walter inspecting the finished nest box before adding the baffle

After the Dept. of Environmental Protection approved FOSC's nest box proposal, longtime FOSC volunteer and Invasive Plant Committee chair Walter Mulbry constructed and installed three of the four boxes, and new volunteer Brittany Strong donated a nest box she used as a novice birder a few years ago.

Keeping an eye on the boxes already has had an impact. Volunteers Craig Wilsey and Lindsay Luke reported one of the nest boxes in standing water after a recent hard rain. Their discovery prompted us to relocate that box to higher ground. Boxes in standing water are not appealing to "our" birds who prefer open ground in their immediate vicinity. Also, standing water can pose a danger to fledgling birds who may fall out of the nest as they attempt their first flights. The parent can't reach them and the fledglings drown.

-- Susan DeFord, Bird Box Initiative leader and FOSC Board Member



Eastern bluebird pair (Ron Wertz photo)

Bluebirds rapidly declined in the early to mid 1900's, facing intense competition from starlings and house sparrows - imported species - for nest cavities in old trees created by wood-peckers and other birds. The bluebirds' ability to adapt to nest boxes has helped stem their decline. Tree swallows also are cavity nesters who can adapt to nest boxes; while still common, their numbers have declined since the 1960s. Both species are native and are primarily insect eaters.

Tree swallows prefer to live near bodies of water where they chase, twist and turn after flying insects. In winter, they can eat seeds, particularly bayberries, when insects are scarce. In breeding season, in May-June, they seek eggshells, fish, crayfish bones, and other high calcium sources for egg laying and feeding their chicks.

(from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology)



Winter wren at Wheaton Branch ponds (S. Davies photo)

Chickadees and wrens are native birds protected by the Migratory Bird Act. Chickadees aren't much of a threat to bluebirds because they nest very early in the season, before bluebirds. Wrens do compete with bluebirds for nesting sites, though the nest box volunteers won't evict them.

Overall, the numbers of even common North American bird species declined by the billions since the 1970's, according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



Tree swallow at the Kemp Mill ponds (Dan Treadwell photo)

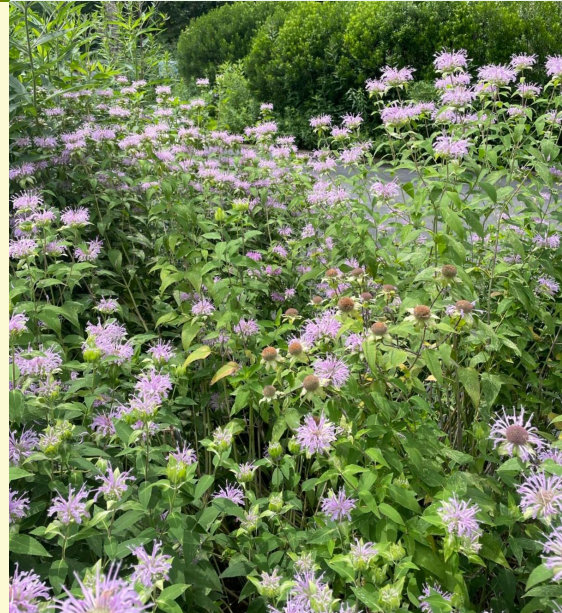
Sligo Garden Program: A few plant kits still available



The Sligo Garden Program Spring 2024

For residents of the Sligo Watershed, we have a few more Garden Kits available for \$25. Each kit includes plants and templates for converting 50 square feet of lawn to a native plant garden. Native plants are key for biodiversity, climate resilience, and preserving the local ecosystem.

Visit the [Sligo Garden Program](#) page of the Stormwater tab on the [FOSC website](#) to order your kit. If it is sold out, take heart - ordering for the Fall 2024 garden kits and garden design consultations will open in late summer; we'll email a heads up to FOSC members.



(Ben Israel photos)

SUPPORT FOSC

We could use some more weed wrenches!



FOSC has more than 100 dedicated Weed Warriors such as the group above in Long Branch who had just finished tackling invasive multiflora rose and Japanese barberry with weed wrenches and loppers. (Laura Flicker photo)

Weed warriors are active all year around because we care about the watershed. There is so much that needs to be done.

Your gift helps us do this work and many other projects - reducing stormwater, testing water quality, kiosks and natural history, advocating for the streams, and reaching out to more communities.

We can't do it without you! Please donate to FOSC.

-- Ed Murtagh, FOSC Vice President and Weed Warrior

Make your gift to FOSC using [this link](#) or the [Donate button](#) below.

It's simple and secure.

Donate



Thank you.

**If you've already given to FOSC, thank you very much.
Your gift is greatly appreciated!**

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

FOSC's Winter Saltwatch Teams to start testing this week

Wintry weather: salty or not?

More than two dozen FOSC SaltWatch Team members will be heading out this week to take baseline salt readings from the headwaters to the lower reaches of Sligo Creek and Long Branch in preparation for the winter salting season. Even in the summer months, FOSC's water quality team data show a trend of increased levels of salt in our streams, mirroring the regional (and national) trend.

Long term, this spells saltier water for all of us. WSSC explains:

WSSC Water closely monitors the water entering our Patuxent and Potomac Water Filtration Plants and we've noticed that over the last 30 years, the average salt levels (sodium and chloride are the two components of salt) have been steadily increasing. The levels peak in the winter months and are higher in years that see more winter weather events. Once sodium or chloride enters our drinking water sources, we cannot remove it during the water filtration process.

What's the Solution?

Start at home by:

Be Salt-Wise - Use optimal levels of salt for the job. Not more than 12 oz (1 mug) of rock salt per 20ft of driveway or 10 sidewalk squares, if needed. Shovel snow as soon as possible to prevent ice from forming.

Sweep – At the end of a winter storm, sweep and collect any sand, salt, or undissolved de-icer.

Reduce travel - In snowy weather, don't expect to travel as usual. Travel only if really needed.



Salt levels (sodium and chloride) from 1992 - 2022 in the Patuxent River Reservoir (above) and in the Potomac River (below).



There is still time to join the FOSC SaltWatch Team. Email the FOSC Water Quality Committee at wq@fosc.org as soon as possible if you're interested in becoming a salt tester in Sligo Creek or

Request responsible road salt use - Ask your city manager to reduce salt use. MCDOT trains their salt truck operators to follow responsible use guidelines for street salting. It can be done - the MD State Highway Administration has cut its road salt use by 50% while maintaining safe roads. Montgomery Parks has been upping its training for snow removers and salt applicators.

Long Branch. We particularly need weekly and winter event testers from University south to Forest Glen (sections 7 and 8), just south of the Beltway on Sligo Creek, and in mid-Long Branch (section 10M).



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.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Updates & Volunteer Opportunities

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

MLK, Jr. Day Mini-Sweep at Litter Hot Spots -- Long Branch Community Center, 1-3pm. See article above for details on registration. Co-sponsored with Montgomery Parks. The Wheaton Branch Ponds Mini-Sweep will be scheduled shortly.

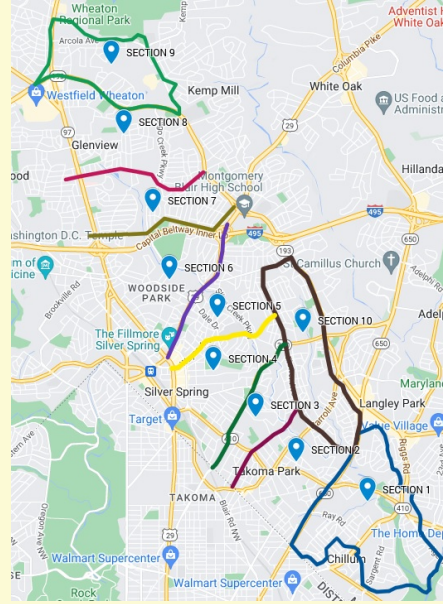
SaltWatch volunteers needed --

We need a few testers in:

- Section 6 near Sligo and the Beltway
- Section 7 (Forest Glen to Dennis)
- Section 8 (Dennis to University)
- Mid-Long Branch.

Contact wq@fosc.org if you can help out.

Thanks.



(click on the map for a larger version)

More salt: Salt Spotters!

If you see an excessive salt pile in the Sligo watershed, please report it along with photos and the location to salt@fosc.org. We will follow up and try to get it removed.



Kiosk posters now in Spanish too

The new kiosks in Long Branch and lower Sligo will get Spanish language autumn bird song posters shortly.

The English and Spanish version of the poster have QR codes linked to audio examples of each of 7 overwintering bird species' songs. Give them a listen while you are out in the park!

CANTOS DE AVES OTOÑALES

A pesar de no ser temporada de anidación, las aves continúan emitiendo sus distintivos cantos en el parque y en tu vecindario durante el otoño y el invierno.



CÁRABO NORTEAMERICANO
Raramente visto, pero frecuentemente escuchado, su canto suena como la frase en inglés "Who coos for you, who coos for you all." Cantan durante febrero y marzo, justo antes de que las hembras pongan sus huevos, y al final del verano y durante el otoño, cuando las polluelos dejan sus nidos. Nota como su plumaje se mezcla con el paisaje invernal.

En el kiosk del estero: Alex Marshall en OHM, diciembre 2022



RATONA CAROLINENSE
Esta diminuta ave defiende su territorio todo el año cantando. Su canto suena como la frase en inglés "tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle." Sólo los machos cantan—una serie de notas rápidas que asemejan un silbido, repetidas varias veces.

En los estanques de agua pluvial en Wheaton Branch, marzo 2023



SINSONTE NORTEÑO
El sinsonte norteño imita a muchas otras especies de aves y otros sonidos en su ambiente para producir un torrente constante de cantos variados, repitiendo cada variación tres veces. Es la única ave conocida por aprender cantos a través de toda su vida. Los machos cantan para establecer su territorio de septiembre a noviembre, y durante su temporada de apareamiento de febrero a agosto.

Canto de Flower y Franklin, febrero 2022



CHARA AZUL
La chara azul canta con más frecuencia durante el otoño y el invierno que durante el abril, cuando otras aves cantan durante su temporada de apareamiento. Su canto más común es un sonido rápido y áspero que asemeja la palabra en inglés "cheer." Sin embargo, también pueden armonizar consigo mismo (cantando dos tonos a la vez), creando una gran variedad de sonidos.

En los estanques de agua pluvial en Wheaton Branch, diciembre 2020



CUERVO
El canto más conocido del cuervo americano es el familiar "caw." Sin embargo, existen al menos ocho versiones, cada una con su propio significado, las cuales todavía no han sido decodificadas por la ciencia.

En los estanques de agua pluvial en Wheaton Branch, junio 2022



ESTORNINO EUROPEO
Al igual que la chara azul, el estornino europeo puede armonizar consigo mismo. Su canto es especialmente llamativo ruidoso cuando las aves se reúnen en grupos grandes al anochecer.

En Franklin y Flower, enero 2022



GORRIÓN COMÚN
El gorrion común usa unos 20 sonidos diferentes, incluyendo cuatro variaciones de su típico "chirp," un canto breve comúnmente escuchado en grupos ruidosos.

En Franklin y Flower, diciembre 2022

Tusky & Wilson, Photos by Stephen Dunne. Follow wildlife photography in Sligo in our National project, "Tours and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed." For more info, email naturalthatyoufosc.org.

Did you know that FOSC has a Facebook page (and an Instagram account and a YouTube channel)?

Check them out!

[facebook.com/friendsofsligocreek](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofsligocreek) has more than 1,400 followers!

[Instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com/friendsofsligocreek) has almost 500 followers!

Plus a [YouTube channel](#) with 70+ videos.



FOSC STORE

The perfect gift for your family and friends

FOSC t-shirts, caps, mugs, and posters



FOSC volunteer Ross Campbell at a holiday gift fair recently, modeling the tee shirt next to the clothing rack he cleverly crafted from repurposed home garden items. (S. Obadia photo)



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

Celebrate the season with FOSC items for family and friends, or yourself!

The tees are made of soft, organic cotton - with a great message! This is the one your beloved will wear all the time. Short and long sleeves in 5 sizes, small to XXL,

Ball caps are the latest addition to the store. They're adjustable, embroidered, made of 100% cotton, and can be had for \$18.

green and blue. The short sleeve tees are \$22 - \$24. The long sleeved tees are \$26 to \$28.

Kiosk Posters are \$15 each. Mugs and window clings (for a car or home window) are available too.

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



The new FOSC ballcaps in a classic low profile style in light blue and dark green. 100% cotton with the FOSC logo embroidered on the front. (S. Deford photo)

NATURAL HISTORY

Recent Nature Sightings in Sligo



An American Winter Ant near Circle and Poplar on
Nov. 29 (Adrienne van den Beemt)



Left: **Cooper's Hawk** shows off its flexible head rotation at the edge of the golf course on Dec. 7.
Above: A **Merlin** at the edge of the golf course on Dec. 3, seen also the day before (both by Dan Treadwell)



Three plants still blooming in late fall (Wilpers):

White Snakeroot between Flower and New Hampshire Nov. 20



Above: **Panicled Aster** along New Hampshire Ave. at Sligo Creek.

Right: **Small White Aster** in Long Branch near Piney Branch Rd., both on Dec. 8



Mapleleaf Viburnum
with fruits near Park
Valley Rd. and the
Parkway on Nov. 26
(Leaf Grabenstetter)



A kind of **dust lichen** (genus *Lapraria*) on the stump of a recently removed tree in Long Branch Park near Maplewood on Nov. 23 (redcedars)



Above: **Crane Fly** near Circle and Poplar on Nov. 19. Right: **Eastern Carpenter Bee** near the golf course on Oct. 25 (both by Adrienne van den Beemt)



Eastern Red-backed Salamander between Sligo Creek and Woodman Ave. on Nov. 22 (Ron Wertz)



Left: **Marbled Orbweaver** near Hudson and the Parkway on Dec. 2 (T. Torres)

Above: Two **Autumn Meadowhawk** dragonflies mating along the paved trail near the Forest Glen wetland Nov. 22 (Ron Wertz)



Spurred Woodland Funnelweaver with prey near Circle and Poplar on Nov. 19 (Adriene van den Beemt)



Trails of two **leaf-mining flies** on their host plants. The eggs hatched at the narrow end of each trail. As caterpillars, they ate their way through the leaf while growing. Finally, as adults, they flew off.

Above: *Aulagromyza cornigera* on native Coral Honeysuckle near Dennis and Hayes Dec. 13 (Ron Wertz) Right: *Phytomyza opacae* on American Holly near Circle and Poplar Nov. 19 (Arienne van den Beemt)



White-throated Sparrow at the Forest Glen wetlands on Dec. 13 (Ron Wertz). These birds reside in Sligo only from mid-Oct. to early May, when they depart for more northern latitudes to nest and breed.

Need to Reach Us?

President (Elaine Lamirande): president@fosc.org

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

Litter/Sweep the Creek (Ed Murtagh/Tanya DeKona): 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.

[Join FOCS](#)



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

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