



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter November 2023



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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LITTER/STEWARDS

Litter Hot Spots with Hotshot Nick Clements

In the October issue of this newsletter, I noted some of the litter hotspots in our watershed, and that we will be planning targeted cleanups (between the Sweep the Creek events) at each of

them.

I am pleased to report that Nick Clements will lead the FOOSC initiative to clean up these hotspots in the new year. Nick has been a clean up powerhouse working behind the scenes in the Sligo Creek/Long Branch watershed and elsewhere in the region. We couldn't be more pleased that he is leading FOOSC in "Operation Hotspot". Thank you, Nick!

The ecological health of our watershed depends on many hands. I encourage all of you to lend your support to Nick on this important initiative.

We are also looking for partner groups to pitch in with cleanups and to help get the word out about them. If your group is interested, I can be reached at either email address below.

- Ed Murtagh
Vice President of FOOSC & Litter Coordinator
vicepresident@fosc.org or litter@fosc.org



Nick Clements

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 litter@fosc.org.

From Nick:

Dear FOOSC members,

I'm looking forward to working with you to clean up some of the challenging trash spots in the Sligo watershed. I'm a veteran of cleanups all over the area. We can do this!

On my cleanups I occasionally discover an archeological treasure trove of trash. At the WSSC Rocky Gorge Reservoir, I found a huge cache of plastic water bottles accumulated in a cove - a natural trash trap! It took quite a bit of disentangling to get them out. When they drained the reservoir, an historic collection of Budweiser cans with pull tabs was exposed on the bottom. Once I found old enameled cookware from many decades ago. I call this "legacy trash", a term coined by Frank Sprtel who

was active in NW Branch clean ups. Who knows what awaits us in the Sligo watershed.

On my morning cleanup in the Four Corners business district I once saw a particularly enticing piece of trash across Colesville Road. Hastening to retrieve it before it blew away, I tripped on the curb, highly amusing to the people at the bus stop! No one came to my rescue... but I didn't need it. My Apple watch offered to call 911 but I didn't need that either. What I did need was a salve for my injured dignity!

- Nick Clements

NATURAL HISTORY/ADVOCACY

Kiosks in Long Branch, Lower Sligo Creek

Those of you who use the paved trail in Sligo have probably stopped by one of the nine FOSC kiosks, acquired 10+ years ago with a Chesapeake Bay Foundation grant. They're filled with FOSC posters, maps, and brochures about Sligo flora, fauna, and water quality, and ways to get involved in stewardship of the Creek and park.

But until two weeks ago, if you walked along Long Branch, you wouldn't have seen any kiosks. Earlier this year, Boy Scout Evans Keitl (who grew up around Long Branch) was casting around for an Eagle Scout project that would benefit people in Long Branch. In consultation with Montgomery Parks and FOSC, Evans settled on getting a kiosk for Long Branch. He spearheaded a fundraiser to purchase a kiosk and install it at the Community Center along Long Branch trail.

FOSC decided to fundraise last summer as well to add two more kiosks along Long Branch and one along Sligo Creek in lower Section 1 in Prince George's County. Though we were short the full cost we went out on a limb and decided to order all three, plus the Scout kiosk, to gain significant bulk order savings for FOSC and the Scouts. Fortunately, Prince George's Parks agreed to install the kiosk in Section 1 along the Sligo trail next to the powerline meadow, a meadow which FOSC helped create and protect from frequent mowing (see story in the [July/Aug newsletter](#)). In Long Branch, Montgomery Parks vetted the proposed siting and very helpfully bored the holes for the posts and stored the kiosks until installation day. And very fortunately, the Scouts agreed to install all three kiosks for Long Branch as well.

So that makes 4 new kiosks!



Evans Keitl and Troop Leader Andrew Streagle putting together the first kiosk



Making sure it is trued up is a team effort



Pouring concrete after getting the kiosk into position



At the team sharing circle - Andy giving a shout out to Evans

After the usual delays (wrong parts sent, etc.), on Saturday, Nov. 11, Evans and Troop 97, plus some sisters and brothers and troop leader Andy Streagle, completed installation of the 3 Long Branch kiosks: at Upper Long Branch Park, at the Community Center, and off Clayborn Ave., near the bridge crossing the creek just south of Rolling Terrace Elementary School. Prince George's Parks installed the kiosk at the PEPCO meadow on Nov. 3, and provided an already much-loved bench for passersby.

We are deeply grateful to Evans Keitl and all Troop 97 for their diligence and hard work – not to mention kick-starting us to add kiosks to Long Branch and Section 1. It's a fantastic project. As the Scouts were finishing the kiosk in Upper Long Branch park, a woman came up to us and exclaimed with delight how great a positive impact the kiosk will have in her neighborhood. That's what we think as well.

- Kit Gage, FOSC Board member

With thanks to Lynne Vismara, Orlando Martinez, and Carl Heerlal at Montgomery Parks; Andy Streagle, Boy Scout Troop 97 Leader; Carol Summers, Landon Sellers and Jack Flynt at Prince George's Parks; and FOSC Board member Kristin Zimmer.



Evans Keitl

"The Creek is dear to me. I grew up walking through Long Branch. In my middle school years I would hang around the Long Branch Community Center to play or attend a party. In the summer time, I cooled down and took swim lessons in the outdoor pool. Recently, I would go through the Long Branch trail for my tutoring job at Rolling Terrace Elementary and pick up my siblings later.

Every opportunity I get to help clean the Creek makes me happy. Long Branch has been very important to my life and I am thankful for the opportunity to help clean it up as part of my Eagle Project and to add the kiosk to spread the message of being environmentally friendly."

Gratefully,
Evans

WATER QUALITY

Faring Well?

Sligo and Long Branch Water Quality and Implications for the Future

Are Sligo Creek and Long Branch getting healthier or more degraded? Is it safe to dip a toe in the water? Both streams run through urban areas and have a history of "Poor" and "Impaired" ratings.

FOSC hosted a webinar last month to hear the conclusions of the **Anacostia Riverkeeper** (ARK) Summer Water Quality Testing program. We also invited Montgomery Parks to share the results of biological surveys in Sligo

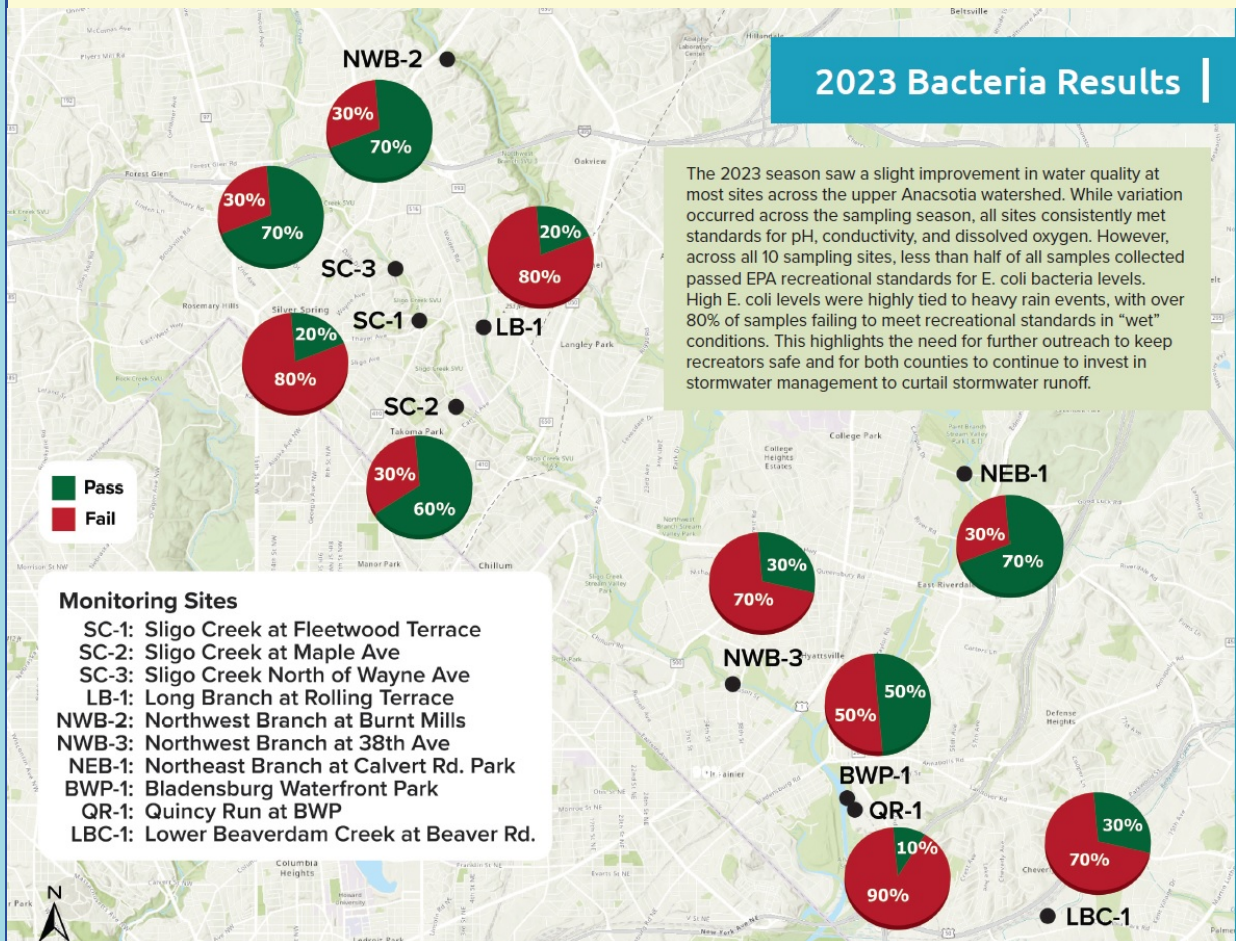
Among the many findings are:

2023 Water Quality Monitoring in Sligo Creek & Northwest Branch

Sligo Creek: Had high sediment levels in mid-summer, plus the typical **surfactant** peaks in May/June. In the hot dry weather, salts also measured very high as did nitrate and phosphorus levels. These stress fish and other aquatic organisms in the creek. Total coliform trended downward through the summer, but **E. coli** reached highs of >2,420 **MPN** in late June (safe levels are below 410 MPN). Surprisingly, site SC-3 (see chart below) had a 70% passing rate for E. coli levels (that is, at or below the safe contact level of 410 MPN 70% of the time.)

Long Branch: Long Branch had the highest average conductivity and lowest dissolved oxygen of all sites monitored, making it difficult for aquatic life to survive. E. coli measured over 1,000 MPN for six of nine samplings. This site (at the Community Center) had a passing rate for E. coli of 20%.

Northwest Branch: This neighboring watershed continued the trend of good E. coli passing rates - 70% - at the northern test site.



From the Anacostia Riverkeeper Upper Anacostia Water Quality Report 2023

Anacostia Riverkeeper (ARK) concluded that much of the variation in water quality was due to

the weather - when rainfall and associated stormwater runoff occurred in the 72 hours leading up to sampling, and when it was extremely hot and dry. Stormwater sweeps pet waste, sewer leakage, oil and other street pollutants in these streams. Hot, dry weather increased salt concentrations and E. coli levels.

ARK has begun a partnership with the University of Maryland to initiate microbial source tracking (MST) which will identify the specific types of E. coli in the upper Anacostia watershed - pet and other animal waste and human waste can be discerned with this very specialized testing. The results may help guide the Counties' efforts to reduce sources of E. coli pollution.

The ARK summary charts can be viewed on this [Friends of Sligo Creek Water Quality page](#). Full data can be found on the [Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative's Data Explorer](#).

Montgomery Parks' biological survey of fish identified, weighed, and examined fish for anomalies in Sligo Creek below the Carroll Avenue bridge. Results show species consistent with a stressed system, though there is an upward, encouraging trend in the Index of Biological Integrity which shows a modest gain in specialist species. These are more vulnerable to pollution than generalist species such as white nose dace and creek chubs. Benthic sampling in Long Branch showed a preponderance of macroinvertebrates that thrive in polluted waters.

Conclusion: Sligo Creek and Long Branch support a more diverse fish and aquatics population than in 2015, but face many challenges and need greater stormwater and pollution reduction measures to continue improving and to thrive.

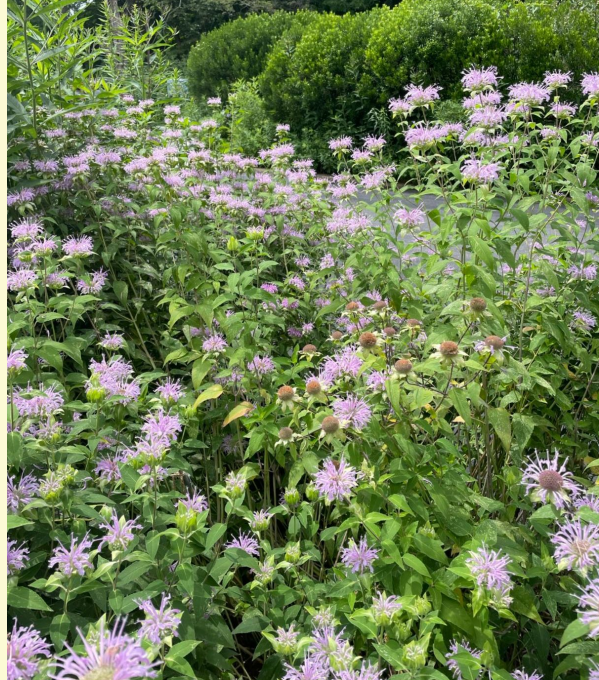
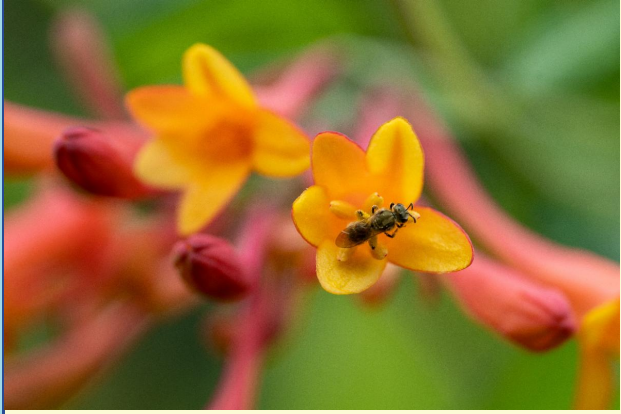
The ARK summary charts can be viewed on this [Friends of Sligo Creek Water Quality page](#). Full data can be found on the [Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative's Data Explorer](#). FOSC will join the 2024 testing. Check the FOSC website in April for the training schedule.

STORMWATER/NATURAL HISTORY

SLIGO GARDEN PROGRAM

Reopening soon

The Sligo Garden Program - Spring 2024



Friends of Sligo Creek will once again be partnering with Nature Forward to provide low-cost native plants and garden plans exclusively for residents of the Sligo Creek watershed. The program is funded through a generous grant.

(Ben Israel photos)

This program encourages Sligo watershed residents to convert at least 50 square feet of lawn into native plant gardens. The plants used in the gardens support local pollinators and increase soil permeability which slows stormwater runoff and improves the health of Sligo Creek, Long Branch, and their tributaries.

There are 2 options. Each cost \$25:

- **Garden Kits** of plants and templates for those with 50 square feet of lawn to convert to a native plant garden;
- **Conservation Landscape Design Consultations** for those who have at least 250 square feet of lawn/non-natives available to convert to a native plant garden with significant conservation benefits.

You can do one or the other, or both. Quantities are limited. We will email FOSC members when ordering opens for Spring 2024.

Visit the [Sligo Garden Program](#) page (under the Stormwater tab of the [FOSC website](#)) to learn more about the program and how to participate. Last Spring, the garden kits and design consultations sold out in 24 hours.

We look forward to working together to improve our watershed!

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

FOSC Winter Saltwatch 2023-24 Volunteer Program

It's getting to be time for wintry weather

The FOSC Winter SaltWatch program is about to launch the third year of winter salt testing in Sligo Creek and Long Branch in conjunction with the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA), which started the nationwide SaltWatch program in 2018.

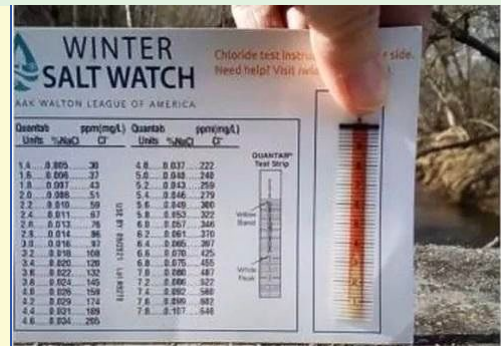
This crowdsourced community science program helps scientists, environmental agencies, and transportation departments get a clearer picture of the extent, patterns, and concentrations of the salt dumped on our roadways. In the U.S., that amounts to 10-20 million tons of salt – largely from road salting – applied each year.

Last year we had more than twenty- five volunteers testing for salt in Sligo and Long Branch. Despite the mild winter, our volunteers found interesting results.

1. Sligo Creek is very vulnerable to winter road salt because it is bound by major roadways that drain directly and immediately into the Creek.
2. Last year, Montgomery Dept. of Transportation inaugurated its program to reduce salt usage by residents and businesses, and within its own operations. The mild winter did not require salt as much as the previous year and salt piles were not as prevalent. Its restraint was laudable.
3. The high proportion of hardscape surfaces in our watershed means that salt drains into the Creek from private, non-MCDOT salting, such as commercial, residential, and public building parking lots, and front walkway and driveways.
4. The “private guys” did not hold back and salted when MCDOT did not.

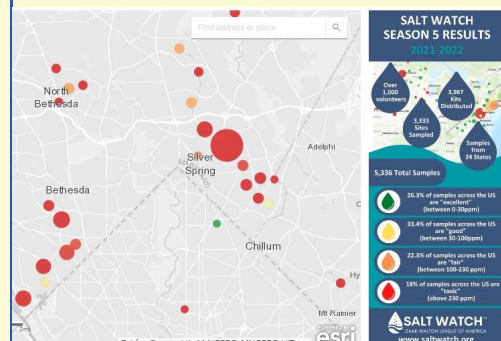
Keep an eye out for an email coming soon with more information.

**Please email the FOSC SaltWatch team at wq@fosc.org to let us know of your interest!
Thank you.**



Interested in getting involved? Become a salt tester along Sligo Creek and Long Branch!

- **No experience is necessary.**
- **We provide training and the materials you need (testing strips and cards).**
- **Testing takes just a few minutes.**



The biggest red circle is Sligo Creek, based on our 2021-22 salt test reporting. (Courtesy of IWLA)



*In a private parking lot in Woodmoor in Dec 2022
(Photo: Elaine Lamirande)*

SUPPORT FOSC ON GIVING TUESDAY & THIS GIVING SEASON

Turn your environmental concern into action!

Please make a gift to support FOSC programs here in our local streams and parks.

You can make your gift to FOSC via [this Donate button](#)
It's simple and secure.



If you prefer, you can send a check to the address at the very bottom of this email.

Thank you very much!

STORMWATER/NATURAL HISTORY

FOSC Fall Native Plant Sale with Howard EcoWorks

FOSC's fall native plant sale featured a broad selection of straight species native plants from Howard EcoWorks. FOSC supporters placed more

than 50 orders during the two week sale, most within the last three days, which totaled over 400 plants, Howard EcoWorks' largest single order in 2023.

FOSC initially planned to receive a portion of the proceeds and pick up the plants ourselves, but with the great number to transport we had to opt at the last minute for free delivery. We'll be prepared next year with many volunteers!

Butterfly weed, cardinal flower, and golden alexander were clear favorites among the orders.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the sale! We plan to repeat it in 2024.

Special thanks to Walter Mulbry, chair of the FOSC Invasives Removal committee, who worked to make the sale a success, matched orders with plants, and provided his front porch for convenient plant pickup.



The EcoWorks nursery at Jessup Corrections facility, emptied out after the sale (Howard Ecoworks photo)

Howard EcoWorks runs the "Seeds of Change" program which grows plants within a areas the size of two tennis courts adjacent to the Howard County Corrections facility in Jessup, MD. Inmates learn about nursery operations and plant propagation to promote their transition back into society.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Upcoming Events /Volunteer Opportunities

Watch the [FOSC Home page](#) and the [FOSC Calendar of Events page](#) for upcoming FOSC Weed Warrior and other volunteer events. See the Salt article above for the FOSC Saltwatch volunteer opportunity.

The Maryland Native Plant Society asked us to pass along this message about their survey:

"The Maryland Native Plant Society and other members of the Maryland Native Plant Coalition request that residents complete this short [Maryland Invasive Plant Survey](#). It's about the invasive plants Marylanders find most problematic. Respondents choose their top 25 invasive plants from a list of over 100 species seen in natural areas, home gardens, commercial landscapes, and farmland. You can also write in plant names. A link to the [Mid-Atlantic Invaders Tool](#) can assist you with plant identification if you aren't sure what you are seeing. We'd also appreciate your sharing the survey with others. The online submission deadline is **November 27**, and you can find the survey at: <https://shorturl.at/exSY7>

With the survey results, the Coalition can better educate Marylanders and help solve our invasive plant issues. Invasive plant populations are increasing dramatically and becoming more and more of a problem in Maryland. They damage natural ecosystems by smothering, strangling, and crowding

out native plants.

Let's all work together for our native plants and ecosystems!

Thank you,
The Board of the Maryland Native Plant Society"

FOSC STORE

The perfect gift for your family and friends

FOSC t-shirts, caps, mugs, and posters



The new FOSC ballcaps in a classic low profile style in slate blue and dark green. 100% cotton with the FOSC logo embroidered on the front.



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

Celebrate the season with FOSC items for family and friends, and help FOSC preserve and protect Sligo Creek, Long Branch and other streams throughout the watershed!

The tees are made of soft, organic cotton - with a great message! This is the one you will wear all the time. They come in short sleeve and long sleeve and are available in 5 sizes, small to XXL. The short sleeve tee prices range from \$22 - \$24. The long sleeved tees prices range from \$26 to \$28.

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

Posters are from the kiosks and are \$15 each.

You can order the tees, ballcaps, mugs and kiosk posters from the [FOSC store](#), and 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.

NATURAL HISTORY

Nature Sightings in Sligo



Good Eatin'

For Thanksgiving, a sampling of the buffet of options provided to our local fauna by the Sligo Creek watershed

An **American Beaver** (above) chows down on Primrose-Willow (*Ludwigia* species) at the Beltway ponds on July 6, 2023 (Dan Treadwell).

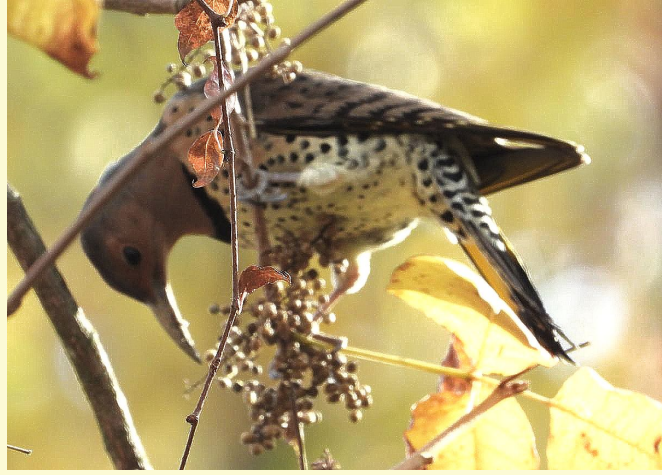


Belted Kingfisher (above) with sunfish-sized prey at the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds on October 23 (Dan Treadwell). At right, another maneuvers its catch in order to swallow it head first so the scales lie flat on its way down the gullet, at the Wheaton Branch ponds in March 2022 (Stephen Davies)



Eastern Gray Squirrels in Sligo dining on (clockwise from top left) Red Maple buds in Jan. 2022 near Dennis and Hayes (Ron Wertz), Black Walnut near Garland and Carroll in Aug. 2021 (Jim Della), and nuts at a bird feeder near Westmorland and 2nd in Mar. 2020 (Katja Schulz).

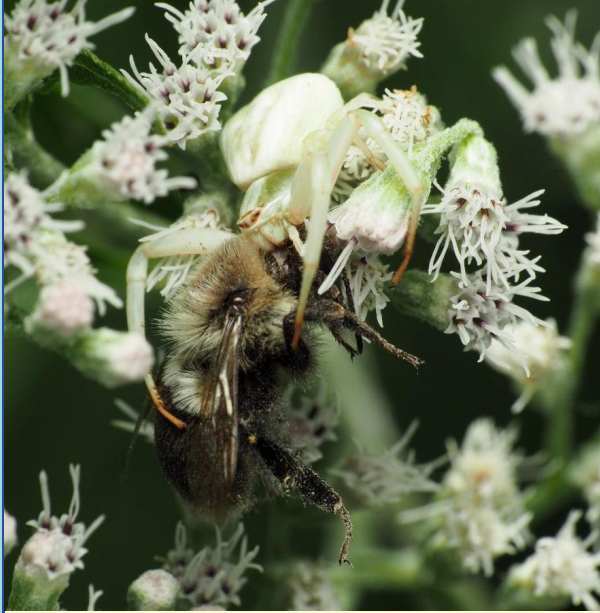




An **Eastern Phoebe** (left) with an insect (bee?) that it probably caught in mid-air (as fly catchers do) at the Wheaton Branch ponds on Oct. 23 (Brian Wee). A **Northern Flicker** (above) dines on the fruits of the native **Eastern Poison Ivy**, which are abundant in Sligo, at the Forest Glen wetland on October 26 (Dan Treadwell).



Above: A **Yellow-crowned Night Heron** captures a non-native **Red Swamp Crayfish** at the Beltway ponds in May 2022 (Dan Treadwell). When feeding inland, this bird's diet consists almost entirely of crayfish (while on the coasts they eat all kinds of crabs).



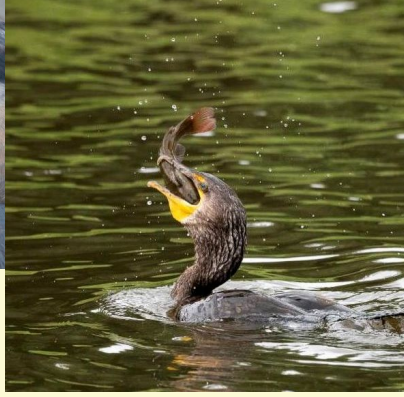
A **White-banded Crab Spider** (above) captures a **bumble bee** while hiding among boneset (*Eupatorium*) flowers in the powerline meadow in Sept. 2020 (Katja Schulz).



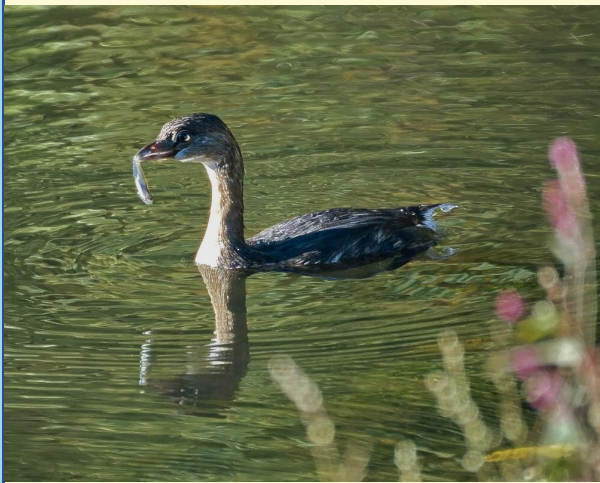
A **White-footed Mouse** (above) munches on fruits in the Kemp Mill woodland in July 2021 (Stephen Davies). These native mice spend most of their time above ground in trees and shrubs.



Black Vultures don't have the acute sense of smell possessed by Turkey Vultures so they usually soar higher (300-500 feet), watching for Turkey Vultures soaring below to detect a carcass. Here they make a meal from a road-kill **Common Raccoon** between Dennis and University in Feb. 2022 (Dan Treadwell).



Three ways to catch a **Brown Bullhead**, all displayed at the Wheaton Branch ponds: spear it with the lower bill from a standing position, like this **Great Blue Heron** (above) in Dec. 2020; grab it with your talons from the water's surface while in flight, like this **Osprey** (above center) in May 2020; or grab it between your bills while swimming, like this **Double-crested Cormorant** (above right) in Aug. 2020 (all by Stephen Davies).



Above left, a **Pie-billed Grebe** has snared a minnow-sized fish at the Wheaton Branch ponds on Oct. 23 (Brian Wee); above right, a **Black-crowned Night Heron** grabs an **American Bullfrog** at the Beltway ponds in June 2022 (Dan Treadwell). The Night Heron swallowed the frog whole, headfirst.



A male **Belted Kingfisher** (at right) offers an arthropod as a nuptial gift to its mate at the Wheaton Branch ponds in May 2020 (Stephen Davies).

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.

Need to Reach Us?

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

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

Stormwater (Elaine Lamirande): stormwater@fosc.org

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

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



organization dedicated to protecting, improving, and appreciating the ecological health of Sligo Creek Park and its surrounding watershed.

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