



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter May 2020



Ellen X. Silverberg photo

Contents

[Online Talk May 19: Birds of Wheaton Branch Ponds](#)

[Online Talk June 23: Parks' New Vegetation Plan](#)

[New Webmaster Joins FOSC](#)

[FOSC Submits Testimony on Artificial Turf](#)

[New Website: "Eye on Sligo Creek"](#)

[Spring Nature Sightings](#)

[Need to Reach Us?](#)

Live-stream Talk on Birds of Wheaton Branch Ponds May 19

Join Sligo's most prolific nature photographer, Stephen Davies, for an online slide show and talk on Tuesday, May 19, about the incredible diversity of birds that he has documented at the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds.

The program starts at 7:30 pm and will be live-streamed on Zoom. All recipients of this newsletter will receive an "invitation" to the talk with the link necessary to attend.

The platform allows you to submit written questions, which Stephen will answer as the talk goes on or at the end.

An astonishing 168 bird species have been reported at these ponds over the last few years on eBird. Twenty-eight species were reported on April 25 by Manoli Strecker, Robert Cantor, Nathan Tea, and Stephen Davies. The total number of species there places this site at number 24 among the top 100 "hot spots" on the eBird list for all of Montgomery County.



A pair of Eastern Bluebirds on a river birch tree at the Wheaton Branch ponds this spring (S. Davies photo)



Sligo resident Stephen Davies in the Andean highlands

The ponds are located along Wheaton Branch (a tributary of Sligo Creek) just south of Dennis Avenue. They were built in the mid-1990s to mitigate the stormwater runoff from downtown Wheaton (including half of Wheaton Plaza) and improve water quality and stream habitat below the ponds.

Despite the frequent mowing required by state regulators (because the berms are classified as dams), the ponds have proven to be an irresistible magnet for a tremendous range of birds, from tiny kinglets to Osprey and Bald Eagles.

For more information on this event, email naturalhistory@fosc.org.

Learn about Parks' New Vegetation Management Plan June 23



The new plant ecologist at Montgomery Parks, Ryan Colliton, will give a live-streamed talk on Tuesday, June 23, at 7:30 pm, joined by Weed Warrior Coordinator Corinne Stephens. They will discuss proposed updates to the Parks' vegetation management plan and the Weed Warrior program.

The event is co-hosted by Friends of Sligo Creek and the Neighbors of Northwest Branch. We will probably use Zoom as the platform for this event, but final details will be included in the June newsletter and promoted through the listservs of both organizations.

Ryan Colliton is the program manager for the Vegetation Ecology and Management program, which is housed (along with Wildlife Ecology and Management) within the Division of Planning and Stewardship. He came to Montgomery County from Michigan, where he was chief of natural resources and regulatory compliance for Huron-Clinton Metroparks.

The existing Montgomery Parks plan was published in 2009 and titled "Comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan for M-NCPPC Parkland in Montgomery County, Maryland," with author credits to Mary Bradford, Mike Riley, John Hench, Rob Gibbs, and Carole Bergmann; all have since retired except Mike, who is now head of Parks. You can read or download the plan here: [2009 Vegetation Management Plan](#).

The new plan will update the 2009 plan based on new field data regarding the spread of invasive species and the arrival of new invasive species, and the status of rare, threatened, and endangered species, among other factors. The new plan is likely to add a system for prioritizing management units based on the status of their important ecological characteristics.

The 2009 plan was followed in 2013 by the broader "Natural Resources Management Plan for Natural Areas in M-NCPPC Parkland in Montgomery County," which you can read or download here: [2013 Natural Resources Management Plan](#). It describes all the major habitats in the county and lists links to all the management plans (for deer and streams, for example).



Ryan Colliton during a prescribed burn at his previous work in Michigan (photo courtesy of Montgomery Parks)

New Webmaster Joins FOSC



A brand-new website and improvements to our database are coming soon, now that FOSC has hired a part-time contractor for its digital work. Christine Dunathan comes to us from the Friends Community School, located in College Park, where she served as director of IT and then as director of advancement from 2005 to 2019. She lives in the Sligo watershed.

Christine will finish our long hard transition from an HTML-based website (created and managed for many years by Clair Garman) to a new one based on WordPress.

She will work with each of our committees (litter, invasives, water quality, stormwater, and natural history) and our advocacy director to finish moving the committees' materials from the old site to the new one. She will then keep the site up-to-date and work with committees and the board to make the site more informative, inspiring, and interesting.

In addition to all her work on fundraising for the Friends Community School, Christine put her love of things green into an array of green programs: recycling, composting, integrated pest management (IPM) and tick management, and the Monarch Sister Schools program.

Welcome, Christine, to the Friends of Sligo Creek!

FOSC Submits Testimony Opposing Plastic Surface for Ellsworth Mall

The Friends of Sligo Creek submitted written testimony to the Montgomery County Planning Board in opposition to a developer's proposal to install artificial turf on Ellsworth Drive as part of the county's plan to reconfigure the pedestrian mall.

You can access the complete eleven-page document (letter with



Diagram from SYNLawn.com. The "grass fiber" contains petroleum products and the "plant-based backing" is of unknown material.

appendices) from our website's home page: fosc.org.

The letter, signed by President Mike Smith, Advocacy Director Kit Gage, and the Water Quality Committee, lays out a number of reasons for objecting to the proposed surface.

Among their points are the health risks of so-called PFAS chemicals and petroleum-derived products in the turf. The letter also points to the harmful constituents of the manufacturer SYNLawn's plastic carpets including heavy metals, color stabilizers, ultra-violet light inhibitors, plasticizers, non-stick chemicals, and flame retardant.

Appendices to the letter emphasize the lack of sufficient data in the manufacturer's product specifications

making it impossible to evaluate their claims as to the ingredients of the turf and their potential effects on people, plants, and wildlife.

The FOSC letter urges the Planning Board to remove the asphalt on Ellsworth and replace it with pervious pavement. For additional information or for questions, email waterquality@fosc.org.

New "Eye on Sligo Creek" Website

Check out a new independent website devoted to exploring the natural and human communities of our park, created by Christopher Lancette and Wonok Kim, who live in the Kemp Mill area. It's called "Eye on Sligo Creek" and can be visited here: eyeonsligocreek.com.

The site includes a growing library of video interviews with users of the park and volunteers who make it better, along with videos of commentary and perspective by Chris.

He is a career journalist who has applied his knowledge of interviewing, video documenting,

and storytelling to create insightful glimpses into the experiences of neighbors who love the park and the plants and animals who live there. His wife Wonok is a health data analyst who has also been photographing sports and nature for the last ten years.

Chris was managing editor of Atlanta's leading bilingual newspaper, *Mundo Hispanico*, and has authored pieces in more than 40 magazines and newspapers. He has also worked in public affairs at the Trust for Public Land and the Wilderness Society.

For more information, go to eyeonsligocreek.com/contact-us/.



Great Blue Heron with its catch of fish at the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds, one of many photos on the Eye on Sligo Creek website (copyright Wonok Kim)

Spring Nature Sightings in Sligo



Enjoy this selection of photos taken in the Sligo Creek watershed and that appeared on eBird or iNaturalist in April and early May.

The eBird photos were posted on the "hotspot" for the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds.

The iNaturalist photos appeared in the "project" called "Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed."

At left is the first posted sighting this year of our cherished Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, taken on April 24 at the Wheaton Branch ponds. This species, and the Black-crowned Night-Heron, have both nested in Sligo Creek Park since at least 2005, returning here from their wintering grounds along the coasts and islands of the Caribbean. They are considered uncommon in Montgomery County.



Above left: Dwarf cinquefoil near Fenton and New York Ave. on May 3 (A. Browne)

Above right: Pileated Woodpecker near the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds on April 17 (by D. Treadwell)





Above top left: Bibio femoratis at the Golf Course on April 19

Above top right: Northern water snake at the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds on April 13

Right: Osprey with catfish prey, Wheaton Branch ponds, May 2 (S. Davies)

Above lower left: Clouded sulphur (butterfly) at Wheaton Branch ponds on April 19 (S. Davies)



Above left: *New York fern near the confluence of Wheaton Branch and Sligo Creek (M. Wilpers)*

Above right: *Black Vulture near Wheaton Branch ponds on April 16 (D. Treadwell)*

Below left: *Red fox near the Wheaton Branch ponds (S. Davies)*

Below right: *Blackhaw viburnum near Maple Avenue (M. Wilpers)*



Need to Reach Us?

President (Mike Smith): president@fosc.org

Invasive Plants (Jim Anderson): invasives@fosc.org

Litter (Patton Stephens): litter@fosc.org

Advocacy (Kit Gage): advocacy@fosc.org

Natural History (Bruce Sidwell): naturalhistory@fosc.org

Stormwater (Elaine Lamirande): stormwater@fosc.org

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

Outreach (Sarah Jane Marcus): outreach@fosc.org

Treasurer (Dee Clarkin): treasurer@fosc.org

Webmaster (vacant): webmaster@fosc.org

Newsletter Editor (Michael Wilpers): editor@fosc.org



Find us on Facebook!



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.