



# Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter

November 2020



*Photo by Ellen X. Silverberg*

## Leave Your Leaves & Help Nature: Zoom Talk Nov. 18

Learn the value of leaving your leaves in place in the yard -- and the many options for doing so -- in our next Zoom talk, featuring Kit Gage, a long-time member of the Takoma Horticultural Club and Friends of Sligo Creek.

The event takes place on Wednesday, November 18, at 7:30 pm. Everyone on this newsletter list will receive a Zoom invite link a day or two before the talk.

Kit will discuss the many advantages of not having your leaves trucked away, such as the reduced expense and effort; less fertilizer or paid landscape work; nutrients and

microorganisms from leaves enriching the soil; weed growth discouraged; using leaves as mulch and compost; and providing habitat for butterflies and other insects that overwinter in leaf litter as eggs, pupae, or larvae.



*Kit with her leaf mulching equipment*

She'll also show us where to place fallen leaves in yards and gardens or in storage for use in the spring, as well as ways to chop up leaves so they can work more quickly as fertilizer.

For more information, email [advocacy@fosc.org](mailto:advocacy@fosc.org).

To join FOSC, visit the **Get Involved** tab of the website. Your name will automatically be added to the Newsletter mailing list.

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## Bennington Tributary Restored

Bennington Tributary is one of the many small streams that feed into Sligo Creek. It enters Sligo about two blocks downstream from Colesville Road and draws stormwater runoff from downtown Silver Spring and its adjacent neighborhoods.

For most of its length, Bennington is buried in pipes but it surfaces above ground along Bennington Drive for about one city block before it empties into Sligo. Over the years, the banks of the open-air portion became increasingly compacted and eroded by cars parked along its flank. As a result, the stream was dying.



*Planting and landscape work on Bennington Drive above the tributary (MD DOT photo)*

About a year ago, after years of pleading from neighbors to stop erosion on the side of the Creek (which was starting to affect the road), the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (DOT) and Montgomery Parks developed a plan to perform restoration work along the stream bank and remove some of the parking pads. After the initial project was completed last December, neighbors were alarmed because the work seemed to have inflicted even more damage to this sensitive area.

Now, nearly a year later, neighbors and members of FOSC are happy to report that Bennington Tributary has mostly recovered from this "major surgery" to repair the stream bank and the adjacent roadway. The newly planted willow saplings blossomed last summer, a large parking pad has been removed and replaced with shrubbery, and Bennington Tributary is looking better than it has in many years.

Our thanks to Daniel Sheridan at Montgomery County DOT and Matthew Harper and Douglas Stephens at Montgomery Parks for coordinating the rehabilitation of Bennington Tributary.

-- Terry Anderson

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## **FOSC Joins Anacostia Riverkeeper to Monitor Sligo's Water Quality**

September saw the successful conclusion of last summer's new citizen science water-quality monitoring program. Friends of Sligo Creek partnered with Anacostia Riverkeeper (ARK), the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Corazon Latino, and the Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek in a volunteer-centric program funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. COVID-

19 shortened this year's monitoring season, but it nevertheless ran from late June through late September.

Every other Wednesday morning, volunteers measured water temperature, air temperature, pH (acidity), and dissolved oxygen at two sites along Sligo Creek: one located just downstream from Wayne Avenue near the parking pull-off along Sligo Creek Parkway and the other just upstream from the confluence of Brashear's Run and Sligo Creek, near Maple Avenue.

Volunteers also collected and delivered water samples to Anacostia Riverkeeper for further bacterial and turbidity analysis at its lab. Our hearty volunteers at the Sligo Creek sites included Elinor Colbourn, Alan Abrams, Gwen Sletten, Eliza Reed, Jacob Konick, and Ally Ratkowski-Howe.



*Monitoring site in Sligo Creek between Maple Avenue and Brashear's Run (P. Ratkowski photo)*

To see this summer's data from all of the sites in ARKs' Upper Anacostia summer program, visit:

<https://www.anacostiariverkeeper.org/md-water-quality/>.

To see all the data from Sligo Creek's two monitoring sites, visit:

<https://www.theswimguide.org/beach/9615> and

<https://www.theswimguide.org/beach/9616>.

The 2020 data indicate that, while Sligo Creek is well-oxygenated and usually quite clear (very little suspended sediment), its *coliform* bacteria levels usually do not meet levels deemed safe for human contact, and it carries a larger load of dissolved ions than most of the other waterways in the study.

It appears likely that the monitoring program with ARK will be renewed next summer, possibly expanding to new sites on Sligo Creek, Long Branch, and

Northwest Branch. If you'd like to learn more, please keep an eye on the Water Quality tab of the **FOSC website**, or contact anyone on the FOSC Water Quality team.

-- Pat Ratkowski, Water Quality Committee, [waterquality@fosc.org](mailto:waterquality@fosc.org)

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## Migrating Birds Rest & Refuel in Sligo



Fall migration is undoubtedly a highlight of the birding calendar. Every year, as late August rolls around, thoughts turn to the prospect of autumn warblers passing through on their way south to their wintering grounds.

While never reaching the numbers and diversity at other county hotspots, a respectable 23 warbler species were recorded at the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds this fall. Highlights included a **Mourning Warbler** on August 27, one of only three recorded in Montgomery County this fall and a first for the stormwater ponds (and possibly a first for the Sligo watershed too!).

*Cape May Warbler photographed at the Wheaton Branch ponds this fall*

For avid birders, another Holy Grail of fall warblers is **Connecticut Warbler** and one was found on September 23. Due to its elliptical migration route to and from its South American wintering grounds, this big plump warbler misses us completely in the spring, so fall is the only time we can hope to encounter this charismatic species.

Other scarce migrants included a **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** on September 15, again one of only three in the county this fall. Also on September 15, a **Black-billed Cuckoo** was the first occurrence of this species at the ponds since Maryland birding legend Jim Stasz reported one at this location eighteen years ago, on August 4, 2002! Another migrant



*Connecticut Warbler seen on Sept. 23*

flycatcher, **Olive-sided**, also usually scarce, was recorded on September 4. Also noteworthy was a **Marsh Wren** seen from October 18 to 22.



As the fall migration season progresses, attention turns to sparrows. Among the scarcer species, **Lincoln's Sparrow** (below) put in a strong early showing, with a maximum of three on October 14, but numbers fizzled after that. Other less common species included a **Vesper Sparrow** on October 13 and up to two **White-crowned Sparrows** from October 25 to 28.

*Left: Pine Siskins seen in October*

All the species mentioned above migrate only at night, so we encounter them as they pause to rest and refuel during the daytime.

But what of those birds who travel south by "visible migration" (VISMIG, in birding slang!), on the wing during daylight hours? September 19 was particularly noteworthy in this regard, when 118 **Broad-winged Hawks** (below right), four **Red-shouldered Hawks**, two **Red-tailed Hawks**, two **Bald Eagles**, a **Cooper's Hawk** and an **American Kestrel** were observed winging their way southward. **Merlins** were observed October 13 and 19.



*Above: One of three Lincoln's Sparrow seen in October. Below: One of 118 Broad-winged Hawks seen on Sept. 19 (All photos by Stephen Davies.)*

Migrant woodpeckers were also evident, with flyover **Red-headed Woodpeckers** on September 15 and 24. Perhaps most surprising was a steady procession of flyover **Red-bellied Woodpeckers** on October 1, reaching a final total of 28 for the morning!

**Blue Jay** migration was particularly obvious this year, from mid-September to mid-October, reaching a peak of 434 birds on the morning of September 29.

The developing story of the fall is the ongoing southward irruption (a sudden, temporary distribution well beyond normal range) of several northern species into our area. **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was first noted on August 31, with multiple observations since. **Pine Siskins** (photo above) appeared first on October 7 and were seen almost daily afterwards, with a maximum of 59 on October 25. **Purple Finch** was also well represented throughout October.



And fall migration isn't over yet! What other surprises might 2020 hold?! Evening Grosbeaks are apparently on the move in the biggest numbers for 20 years. We dare to dream!

-- Stephen Davies

All data sourced from eBird. 2020. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org>. (Accessed: October 30, 2020).

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## Need to Reach Us?

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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.