



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter April 2022



Photo by Ellen X. Silverberg

Spring "Sweep the Creek" Is April 23 and 24

Join family, friends, neighbors, and other volunteers to get rid of trash in Sligo and Long Branch Parks on Saturday and Sunday, April 23 and 24.

Our annual spring "Sweep the Creek" typically draws hundreds of individuals and groups to help keep the creek and surrounding woodlands clear of trash so that our native plants and animals can thrive. While collecting trash, volunteers have a chance to experience and appreciate the wonders of these parks in new



Students from Sligo Middle School at the spring Sweep in 2019 (Ed Murtagh photo)

ways.



To find the date, time, and meeting location for the section where you want to work, look at [this schedule](#).

Volunteers don gloves, boots, and even waders to collect an amazing (though sobering) variety of plastic, metal, glass, paper, and other trash that finds its way into the length of Sligo Creek and Long Branch Parks.

On good years, enough volunteers come out that we can also tackle some invasive vines and other plants, cutting and pulling them under direction of a Certified Weed Warrior Supervisor and alongside volunteers from our Remove Invasives Program.

Volunteer during the spring Sweep in 2016

We hope you'll take a few photos of yourself or your team and some of the litter you've collected and send them to webmaster@fosc.org and/or tagged them on Facebook or Instagram with #FOSC Sweep the Creek.

Special thanks to FOSC Steward Coordinator and Social Media maven Ed Murtagh who is organizing the Spring 2022 Sweep with Bruce Sidwell. Ed also organized the Fall 2021 Sweep and the two-week-long Spring 2021 Sweep during COVID.

For questions, contact litter@fosc.org.

FOSC Lends Support to County and State Bills

Friends of Sligo Creek has been very active of late in providing letters and written testimony regarding a range of issues at the federal, state, and county levels.

Last month, FOSC President Mike Smith submitted letters to State Senators Brian Feldman and Ben Kramer, asking them to support SB 292, "Producer Responsibility in Packaging," which would establish incentives to reduce packaging and increase the recyclability of packaging.



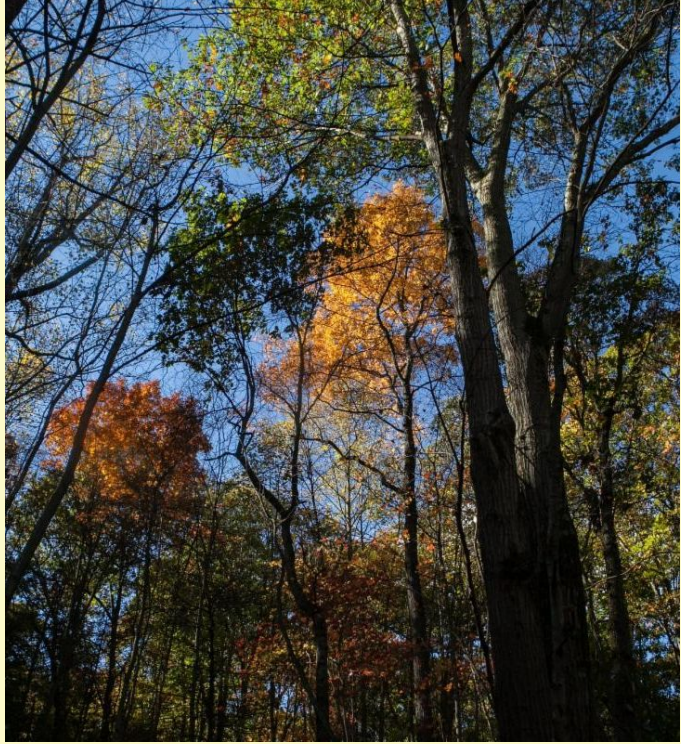
Maryland General Assembly in 2019 (photo from marylandnonprofits.org)

Also in March, our Advocacy Director Kit Gage provided comment to the federal Department of the Interior (DOI) in "strong opposition to any DOI or interagency effort to include synthetic turf as part of the America the Beautiful initiative."

As a member organization of the Stormwater Partners Network of Montgomery County, our Advocacy Committee also provided substantial feedback on March 1 to the County's capital improvement budget for fiscal years 2023 through 2028. The Network advocates for clean water, protecting and improving our watersheds, improving community resilience to stormwater impacts such as storm-driven flooding, and connecting communities to their backyard waterways.

Meanwhile, the Forest Conservation Coalition, of which FOSC is a member, has been working hard to draft important amendments to Montgomery County's Forest Conservation Act so that it requires no net loss of forests from new development. A hearing on the law is scheduled for April 28 before the County Planning Commission.

In February, Kit sent a letter to the County Council supporting full funding for Montgomery Parks' proposed budget, objecting to the county's plan to cut \$19 million.



The letter specifically calls out the need for their budget to enable Parks to replace synthetic turf with grass on two fields at Blair High School and to continue the acquisition of new parkland under Legacy Open Space, along with critical repairs, maintenance, and improvements to the parks.

In January, Kit provided written testimony to the State Legislature in support of House Bill 131, which would require transparency and accountability in disposal of synthetic turf (a "chain of custody" to include reuse, recycling, and disposal).

To learn more about our Advocacy Committee, especially if you're interested in helping with this demanding work, contact Kit Gage at advocacy@fosc.org.

Trash Cleanup in Kestrel Meadow

Twenty-two hearty souls spent Saturday, April 2, hauling a mass of trash and large debris from the powerline meadow that crosses Sligo Creek between Riggs Road and East-West Highway. This 13-acre habitat is fondly known as the Kestrel Meadow to honor a pair that has nested there the last ten years.

It was the second annual meadow cleanup organized by the Carole Highlands Neighborhood Association (CHNA) Green Team, headed by CHNA president Jason Clayton



Some of the 50 bags of trash pulled from the meadow

and Green Team leader Kristin Zimmer.

(photos above and below by K. Zimmer)

Aiding their efforts were Phong Trieu and Aubin Maynard of the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments (COG), who arranged for trash pickup with Tiaa Rutherford, litter reduction program manager with the Prince George's County Department of the Environment. Thanks also to Emmanuel Pressley of Turner Memorial AME Church for allowing access to the church's parking lot.



Velvet Palencia



Hector Mejia



Jason Clayton, CHNA president

The enthusiastic crew filled 50 bags of trash and hauled up 16 tires, a sofa, two beds, a BBQ grill, lawn mower, two doors, a nearly intact car exhaust system, other auto parts, an ancient TV, an ancient computer, and a tear-drop glass coffee table, among other items.

Thanks to COG, the county DOE, and Turner Memorial AME Church for their assistance in making this second annual cleanup a success. To learn more or find out how you can help with Kestrel Meadow, contact chnagreen@gmail.com.



Left to right: Koraleen Stavish, Keith Marshall, Brian Stavish, Kristin Zimmer, Jesse Swanson, Velvet Palencia, Phong Trieu (COG), Hector Mejia, and Tom Chiancone on April 2

Celebrate Trees at Historic Takoma

Local artist graphic designer Marty Ittner, former Section 2 Steward for FOSC, will celebrate Earth Day and Arbor Day with her third window display at Historic Takoma, titled "Trees of Takoma."

On display April 22–June 13, her art-centered installation will feature antique photographs of trees in Takoma Park (circa 1890), four cyanotype "luminaries" reflecting the forest's complex organic network, and prints honoring fallen giants in the Japanese paper marbling style called *suminagashi*.

"I love trees!" says Marty. "Now is the time to replant with conscious choices and continuing



One of Marty Ittner's suminagashi prints based on the

care."

ring pattern of a giant tree stump in Sligo Creek Park

Complementing the display's opening will be three programs on Saturday, April 23: a guided tree walk with Takoma Park arborist Marty Frye, 10 am–12 noon (register on Eventbrite [here](#) and meet at 31 Oswego Ave., Silver Spring); "Make Your Own Cyanotypes," 11 am–3 pm (at Historic Takoma); and a meet-the-authors opportunity with the writers behind the new "Takoma Native Tree Guide," 11 am–3 pm (Takoma Junction parking lot, 201 Ethan Allen Ave.).

The use of cyanotype for natural history dates to 1843 when British botanist Anna Atkins used it to produce the first book illustrated with photographic images, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (see it [here](#).) To create them, objects are placed directly on photosensitive paper, exposed to sunlight, and dried in the dark, producing full-size images in a vivid blue color.

For more information on the installation or "Make Your Own Cyanotypes," email Marty at this [address](#). For the tree tour, submit questions through the Eventbrite link [here](#).



New Vernal Pools in Kemp Mill



Local frogs and salamanders are expected to benefit from two habitat improvements in upper Sligo that are being carried out by Montgomery Parks.

These projects include newly dug ephemeral wetlands called vernal pools that play a crucial role in the reproductive life cycle of frogs and salamanders.

Both sites are located between the creek and the main paved trail in Kemp Mill. One is on the north side of the connector trail that enters the Park from Ladd Street. The other is just north of there at the split in the trail.

Newly constructed vernal pool at the split in the paved trail in Kemp Mill (Wilpers photo)

Frogs and salamanders visit vernal pools to mate because these waterbodies—detached from the creek and not wet year-round—harbor no fish or other aquatic predators that might eat the eggs. After hatching and maturing, the next generation leaves these pools to forage as adults the rest of the year in the surrounding woodlands.

At an existing vernal pool in Kemp Mill, located between these sites and the headwaters, Wood Frogs have often visited to reproduce.

On the south side of the connector trail, American Toads almost immediately arrived and left copious eggs in a short streamlet after it was restored by Parks in 2017.



Wood Frog in a constructed vernal pool in Northwest Branch Park on March 16, 2022 (Ron Wertz photo)

Along Wheaton Branch, two vernal pools constructed in the 1990s drew Spotted Salamanders this spring, where they left numerous egg masses (see Nature Photos at the end of this newsletter). FOSC's Ed Murtagh produced this introductory video about vernal pools that you can view [here](#).

At the new site this spring, Montgomery Parks will plant water-loving trees and shrubs such as American Sycamore, River Birch, Pawpaw, Ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*), Swamp Mallow, Serviceberry, and Smooth Alder, and herbaceous species such as Soft Rush, Northern Sea Oats, Deer-tongue Grass, bullrushes (*Scirpus*), and sedges (*Carex*). The herbaceous plants are propagated at Parks's own Pope Farm Nursery from seeds collected in the County's parks.

Before planting at the site along the connector trail, Parks removed two giant concrete slabs (each one half the size of a car) that had been in place for many decades. No trees or shrubs were lost. Soil excavated for the vernal pools was placed elsewhere on the sites and seeded with the native mix; they will be planted with trees and shrubs as well.

For more information or questions, contact Montgomery Parks at this [email address](#).



Newly constructed vernal pool along the north side of the connector trail from Ladd St. into the Park in Kemp Mill (Wilpers photo)

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Nature Photos from Sligo

A selection of recent observations from the iNaturalist public project titled "Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed"

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/fauna-and-flora-of-the-sligo-creek-watershed>

Photographers' names are those provided to iNaturalist.

Send comments or questions to Michael Wilpers via vianaturalhistory@fosc.org.



Spotted Salamanders Return

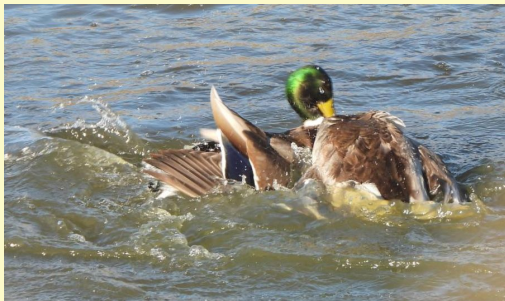
It's been many years since Spotted Salamanders have been reported in Sligo, but this egg mass and several others were noticed by Ron Wertz on March 21 in the constructed vernal pools along Wheaton Branch between Woodman and the confluence with Sligo. (R. Wertz photo)



Rites of Spring

Above: Female Eastern Bluebird with nesting materials on March 25 at the stormwater ponds in Kemp Mill. At right, she's joined on the perch by a Cowbird, which cannot build nests but instead deposits its eggs in the nests of other species, though not usually in Bluebird nests. (R. Wertz photos)

Below: Mating pair of Common Snapping Turtles at the constructed wetlands above Forest Glen Road on April 1 (Dan Treadwell photo)



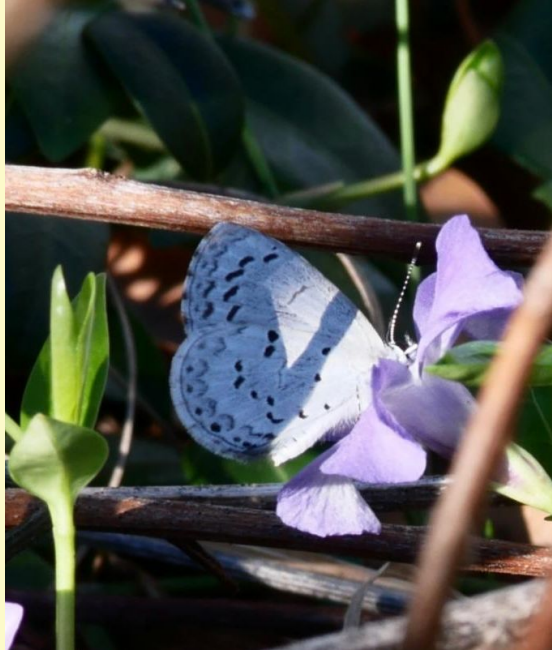
Even after Mallards establish pair bonds for the season, other males can attempt to mate with the female, as probably happened here at the pond on the WTOP property on University Blvd on March 11 (Treadwell photos).



Early Spring Butterflies

A few butterfly species overwinter as adults, such as the Eastern Comma and the Mourning Cloak seen here in Sligo. Others spend the cold months as eggs or larvae, which can mature quickly once warmer weather arrives, such as Spring Azure, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, and Juvenal's Duskywing, all photographed recently in Sligo.





Clockwise from top left: Spring Azure in Carole Highlands on March 20 (K. Zimmer); Eastern Tiger Swallowtail just below Dennis on March 25 (D. Treadwell); Mourning Cloak near the Sligo headwaters on March 25 (R. Wertz); Eastern Comma near Forest Glen Rd. on April 2 (kferger); Juvenal's Duskywing near Jackson on April 2 (K. Schulz)





Virginia Spring Beauty near the Sligo headwaters on March 25 (Ron Wertz)



Left: Eastern Painted Turtle at the Beltway ponds on March 14 (both photos D. Treadwell)

Right: A Common Slider with two Eastern Painted Turtles at the Forest Glen wetlands on April 1

Below: Northern Watersnake and its reflection in Wheaton Branch along Woodman on Mar 21 (R. Wertz)

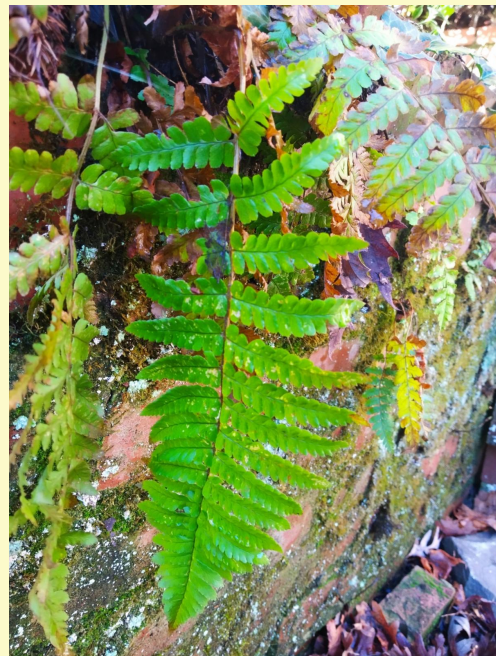


*Above: Male Wood Duck confronts a Hooded Merganser at the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds on March 22 (D. Treadwell)
Right: Barred Owl near Ashford and Windsor on March 27 (balazsdrarazs)*



Female Belted Kingfisher manipulates a Sunfish

before swallowing it whole at
the Wheaton Branch ponds
on March 10 (Stephen
Davies)



Above left: Striped Wintergreen near Maple and the Parkway on Jan. 22 (M. Wilpers)

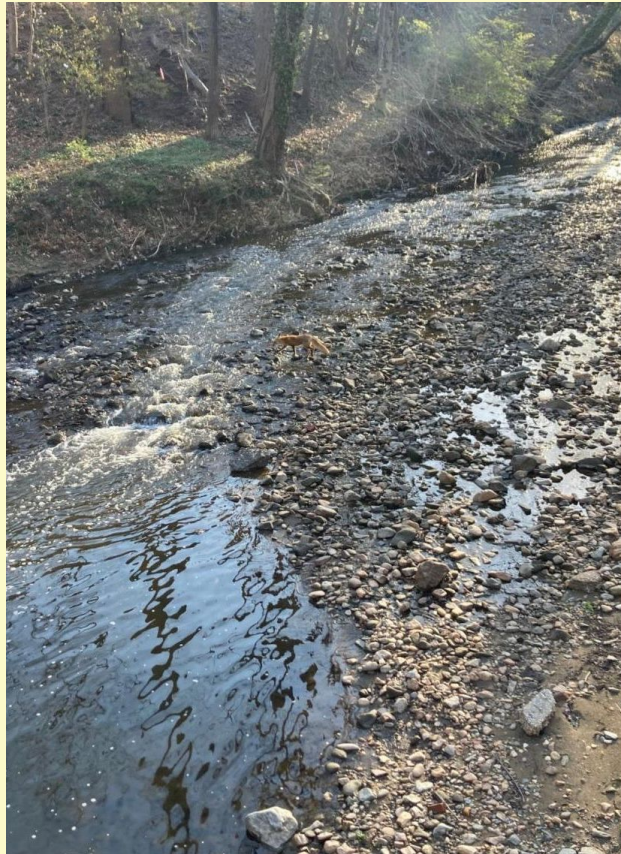
Above right: Wood Fern near Boston and Alfred on March 25 (J. Renoult)

Below left: Ebony Spleenwort near Boston and Alfred on March 25 (J. Renoult)

*Below right: Bloodwort flowers, not yet opened, near the Flower Ave. playground March 27
(droidwrestler)*



Above: Eastern Gray Squirrel on Nov. 21 near Tulip and Holly (Katja Schulz)
Right: Red Fox crossing Sligo Creek in Hillwood Manor April 2 (basti1926)





*Left: Hairy-eyed Crane fly on Skunk Cabbage
Right: Arachnid in the Ghost Spider family on Skunk Cabbage
Both photos taken April 2 along Sligo near Jackson (Katja Schulz)*



Our first report of a Black-crowned Night-Heron's return to Sligo this year was on March 15 by Stephen Davies at the Wheaton Branch ponds. Above is one he photographed there on March 24.

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.

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