



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter April 2023

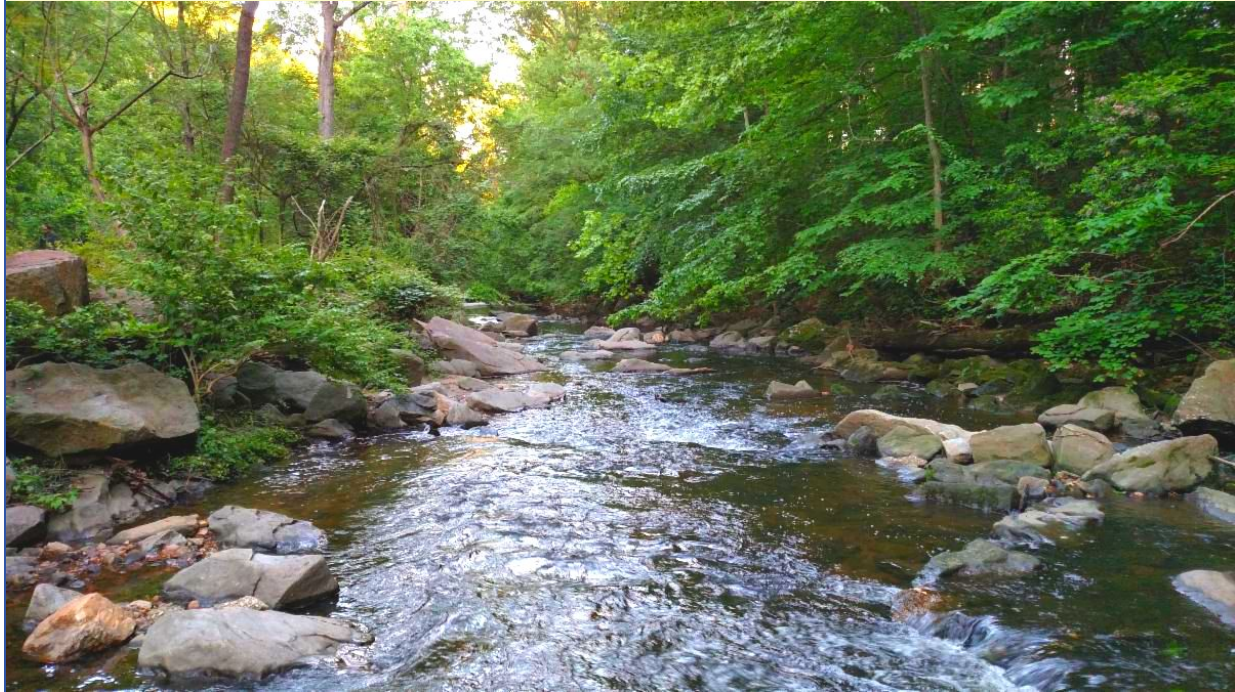


Photo by Xavier Courouble

Note: After a few months off, we're back with a longer-than-usual Newsletter. Your email provider may truncate it; most provide a "view in your browser" option to view the entire newsletter, including an extensive nature photo section.

LITTER

Sweep the Creek

On April 22 and 23 throughout Sligo, join volunteers up and down the Sligo Creek watershed, including Long Branch, Wheaton Branch, and Takoma Branch picking up litter along the creek and park. This semi-annual event prevents many hundreds of bottles and cans, discarded furniture, scrap metal and wood, appliances, auto parts, and other trash from polluting the creek and heading into the Anacostia river. (See the [Sweep Photo page](#) for memorable finds from recent Sweeps.)



Cub scout pack 2093 with their find - a looong pipe - in Section 6

This spring, we're starting a new feature of the Sweep: sorting, counting and weighing the bottles, cans, plastic containers, and plastic grocery-type bags. We'll start with three sites, at the Section 7/8 and 9 sweep sites, and at the Wheaton Branch Stormwater ponds. The data will be included in the [MD Trash Survey](#) to gain insight into the prevalence of these trash types statewide and to advocate for trash reduction policies such as the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging. Maryland could become the fifth state in the nation to adopt it. Read more at [Trash Free Maryland](#).

FOSC volunteers will be giving out bags and gloves in each creek section according to the schedule below. (Click on it to see a larger version.) **We'll post any changes to the schedule on the [Sweep the Creek](#) page of the [FOSC website](#). No pre-registration is needed to participate!**

Sweep the Creek Spring 2023

Supply Pick Up Times & Locations By Section

Section 1 Upper: Downstream of New Hampshire Ave, *Saturday April 22, 9-11:00 am:* at Hillwood Manor Park.

Section 1 Lower: Sligo Creek at the ~~Kestral~~ Meadow at the Pepco powerline, *Saturday April 22, 10:00 am-12:00 pm:* meet at 7100 16th Place, Hyattsville. Organized by Anacostia Watershed Society and co-sponsored by FOSC. Register at: <https://earthday.anacostiaws.org/earthday2023/>

Section 2: Maple Ave to NH Ave, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* Flower Ave. & Garland Ave.

Section 3: Piney Branch to Maple Ave, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* Parking lot near the intersection of Sligo Parkway and Kennebec Rd.

Section 4: Wayne Ave to Piney Branch, *Sunday, April 23, from 1-3:00 pm:* Parking lot by the tennis courts just upstream from Piney Branch Rd.

Section 5: Colesville Rd to Wayne Ave, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* In the parking lot along Sligo Parkway just upstream (north) from Three Oaks Drive.

Section 6: Forest Glen to Colesville Road, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* In the Dallas Avenue parking lot.

Sections 7 & 8: University to Forest Glen Road, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* Dennis Ave Recreation Center.

Section 9: Upstream from University, *Sunday, April 23, from 1-3:00 pm:* Kemp Mill Shopping Center at the intersection of Arcola Ave. and Lamberton Dr.

Section 10 Upper Long Branch: Upstream of Wayne at Long Branch Village, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* the corner of Wayne Ave. and Long Branch Parkway (the northwest corner of Long Branch-Wayne Local Park); and

Section 10 Upper Long Branch: 8700 Piney Branch Ave, *Saturday, April 22 9:30am – noon:* meet at Long Branch Community Center near the trail to the Long Branch library. Organized and led by the Montgomery Housing Partnership.

Section 10 Middle Long Branch: Carroll Ave and Piney Branch Ave, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* at Rolling Terrace Elementary School

Section 10 Lower Long Branch: downstream from Carroll Ave, *Saturday, April 22, 9-11:00 am:* At Becca Lilly Park.

Wheaton Branch Stormwater Ponds on Dennis Ave, *Saturday April 22, 9-11:00 am.*

WATER QUALITY

Monitor Water Quality this Summer in Sligo Creek & Long Branch

With supplies in hand, Sligo and Long Branch volunteers will head out this spring and summer to test the waters, literally, at 3 sites in Sligo Creek and one in Long Branch.

For the 3rd year, Anacostia Riverkeeper (ARK) is partnering with FOSC to track the health of these two urban waterways. ARK runs this project region-wide, at 19 sites across DC, Montgomery, and Prince Georges counties, through partnerships with many local environmental groups, funded by the Chesapeake Bay Trust, and those three local governments.

This program offers experience in water quality field work. After a mandatory training session (see details, below right), volunteers are ready to measure water temperature, air temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, and turbidity. They will also collect water samples to be analyzed for bacteria, a key indicator of stream health, at the Anacostia Riverkeeper lab.

The results help ARK, FOOSC, their partners, and the County get a better sense of Sligo Creek's health during the summer, and help build the scientific database for the Chesapeake Bay region's waters.

Sampling is conducted twice a month on Wednesday mornings, from late May through the end of September. Testing takes about 15 minutes per site. Sampling time is between 8am and 10:30am on these mornings, with volunteers dropping off their equipment and samples at Takoma Piney Branch Park.

Volunteers can sign up for as many or as few days as they like, and are free to sample at a variety of sites. Some go out just once while others monitor throughout the summer. There is plenty of flexibility to work around summer camps and vacations.

In Sligo Creek, the 3 sites are: just upstream of Wayne Ave; at Fleetwood Terrace downstream of Wayne Ave; and near Maple Ave. In Long Branch, the site is at Rolling Terrace Elementary school.

We look forward to a great summer and hope we'll see you along the Creek.

- FOOSC Water Quality Team

If you have questions about the program, please contact FOOSC at:

waterquality@fosc.org

or ARK at:

monitor@anacostiariverkeeper.org.

WHAT'S IN THE WATER?
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
COMMUNITY SCIENCE WATER
QUALITY MONITORING

What?
Learn about the water quality in the Anacostia River and gain hands-on experience collecting data and water samples. Anyone can help! No experience necessary!

When?
Monitoring occurs Wednesday mornings (7-11am), bi-weekly from May 17 to September 20th.

Where?
Five sites across Montgomery County! See map to the right.

Why monitor?
We aim to provide up-to-date, accurate water quality data for the Anacostia and its tributaries to not only ensure the health of its waters, but to provide recreators with the information they need to enjoy the Anacostia in a fun and safe environment. We collect data on bacteria, turbidity, pH, dissolved oxygen, and specific conductivity.

Questions? Email us at monitor@anacostiariverkeeper.org

Ready to Learn More?
[Sign up for a training!](#)
April 29th at 2pm
Long Branch Library

Site Location Key:
[A] 1. Upstream of Wayne Ave
[B] 2. Fleetwood Terrace downstream of Wayne Ave
[C] 3. Near Maple Ave
[D] 4. Rolling Terrace Elementary School
[E] 5. Sligo Creek above Wayne Ave

Logos: ANACOSTIA RIVERKEEPER, Chesapeake Bay Trust, and others.

Click on the image for a larger view

Training for **new volunteers** is mandatory and will be held in-person on **Saturday, April 29, 2:00pm - 3:30pm** at Long Branch Library, 8800 Garland Ave in Silver Spring.

[Register for the April 29th training on this ARK calendar page.](#)

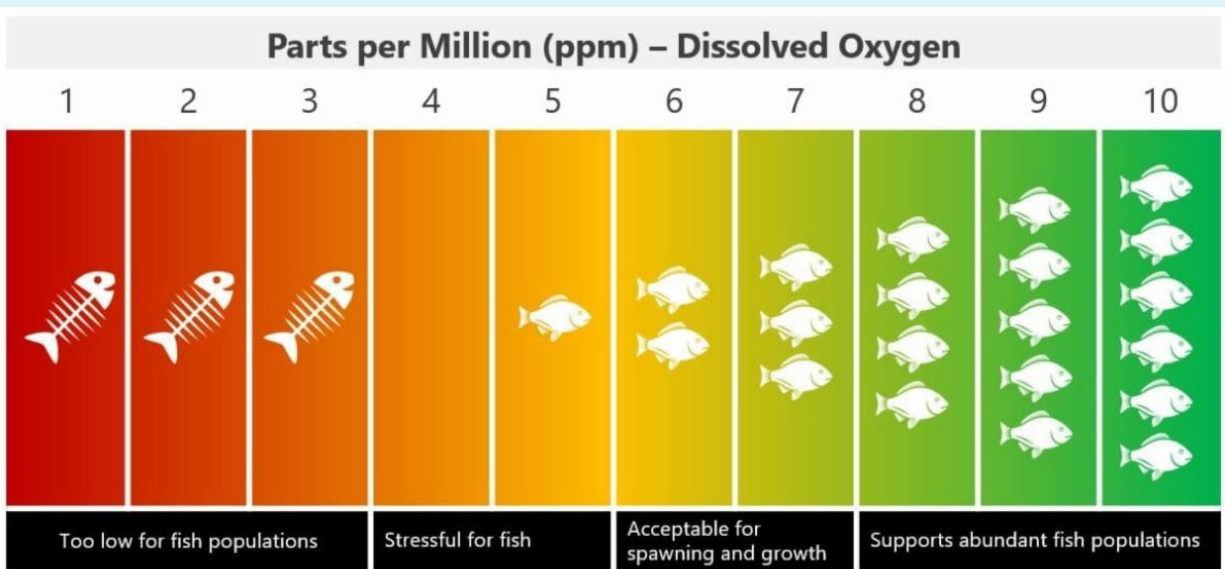
An earlier training is also taking place virtually on **Wednesday, April 26, 10am - noon** via the PG County program.

[Register for the April 26th training on this ARK calendar page.](#) Note-

those who attend virtually will need to schedule an in-person sampling demo before being invited to monitor.

No experience is necessary! Open to

ages 18 and up, or younger with a parent or guardian.




2022 MONTGOMERY COUNTY WATER QUALITY SUMMARY REPORT

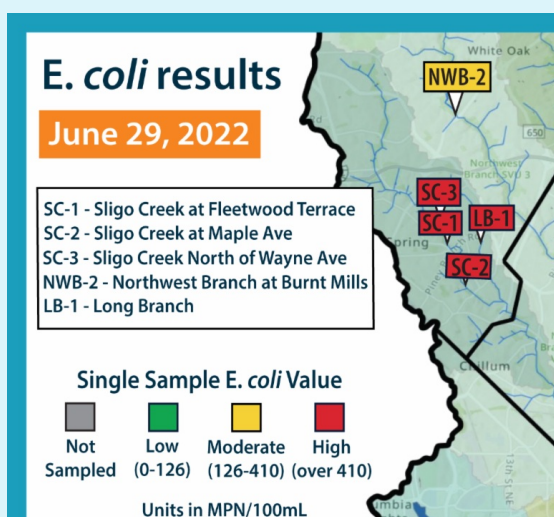
The Anacostia watershed has always been central to the growth and prosperity of those who live on its banks. Flowing through the densely populated Washington DC metropolitan area, the Anacostia watershed provides recreation opportunities and natural respite within an ever more urban landscape. In the past, the health of the watershed has languished in part because of this growth, resulting in the proliferation of pollution, damaged ecosystems, and lost biodiversity in our rivers and streams. In recent decades, however, the watershed and its streams have undergone a surprising resurgence, due to the combined efforts of residents, local stakeholders, and the government. Montgomery County's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has made significant investments in restoration efforts to curb stormwater inputs to the river and its tributaries, in addition to educating County residents about the impacts of stormwater and how they can help. These efforts are impactful as 35 percent of the Anacostia watershed lies within Montgomery County.

This project was awarded to Anacostia Riverkeeper (ARK) in 2022 through the Montgomery County Watershed Restoration and Outreach Grant program funded through the Montgomery County Water Quality Protection Fund and in partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Trust. Anacostia Riverkeeper worked with Friends of Sligo Creek and Neighbors of Northwest Branch to recruit and train volunteers to collect and disseminate up-to-date, bi-weekly recreational water quality data to residents and visitors alike.

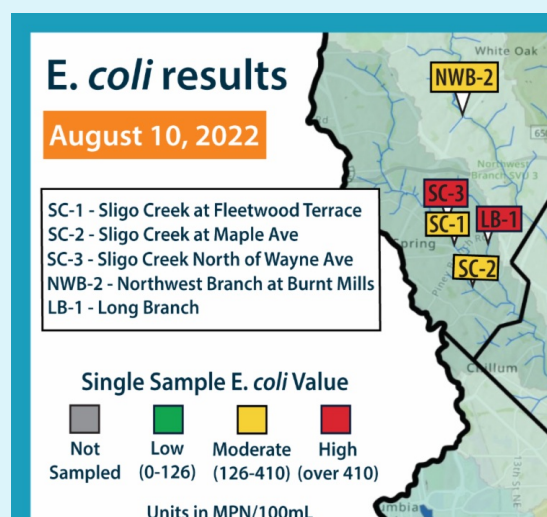
The Anacostia watershed encompasses 76 square miles across the District of Columbia, Prince George's County, MD, and Montgomery County, MD. The watershed is one of the most urbanized watersheds in the United States with 70% of the land designated as urban/developed. "Residential" is the primary land use encompassing 45% of the watershed.



Last year's testing in Sligo (see [the ARK 2022 Moco Summary Report](#) at left) revealed high levels of bacteria that present risks to humans, even while parameters for aquatic wildlife, such as dissolved oxygen and pH and were fairly healthy.

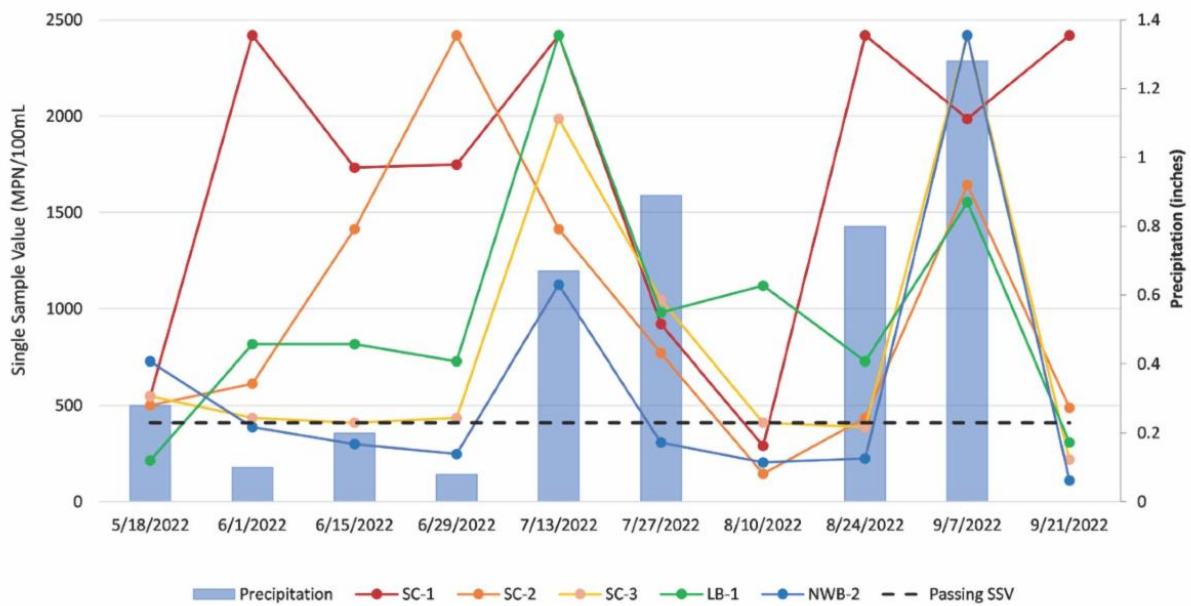


Late June results of water quality testing for *E. coli* in Sligo Creek and Long Branch



Surprisingly, water quality improved at 2 sites in early Aug., only to return to high *E. coli* levels later in Aug. and Sept.

2022 Montgomery County Single Sample Values and Precipitation



*Note: The values represented are “Most Probable Number of Colony Forming Units” or MPN/100mL (comparable to Colony Forming Units) of **E. coli** bacteria.*



The Sligo Creek monitoring site for the Anacostia Riverkeeper/FOSC testing program just downstream from Wayne Avenue at Fleetwood Terrace (Pat Ratkowski photo)

FOSC BOARD

Meet Elaine Lamirande, FOSC President

Meet newly elected FOSC Board President Elaine Lamirande. She is a seasoned leader who is passionate about our local environment and about Sligo Creek, with particular interest in stormwater management.

Over the last 20 years, Elaine has led many efforts to address stormwater in the Sligo watershed with local watershed groups and in her Four Corners neighborhood. She served on the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch (NNWB) board from 2006 - 2011. A long time member of FOSC, Elaine has worked on stormwater issues since 2009 as part of the Stormwater committee, assuming the chairperson role in 2014. She joined the FOSC Advocacy committee in 2019, and the FOSC board in 2022.



Elaine Lamirande with her chow Darcy.

In her Four Corners neighborhood, Elaine organized several rain garden and conservation landscaping projects on homeowner and public properties with support from the Department of Environmental Protection's RainScapes program. A member of the Woodmoor Garden Club since 2008, Elaine was Garden Club president from 2012-2016. She has been the chair of the Woodmoor Green Teams since 2009. Elaine is also a level 1 Weed Warrior.

In her professional life, Elaine is a biologist, developing dengue and Zika virus vaccines at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda.

Elaine's vision: "I'd like to continue the work that Kit [Gage, the interim president] started and invite groups that have not been previously represented into the FOSC community. We have lots of dedicated volunteers contributing to FOSC in many ways, so hopefully there is something for everyone. Let us know if you have an idea for FOSC! I'd like to bring new people and new ideas to the table and help us grow." You can reach Elaine at president@fosc.org.

ADVOCACY

Proposed Gas Station on Sligo Creek Defeated

A proposal for a 16-pump gas station right next to Sligo Creek Park at Riggs Rd. has been defeated, thanks to the combined efforts of the Carole Highlands Neighborhood Association (CHNA) and Friends of Sligo Creek, among others.

On June 25, 2022, CHNA member Jeff Cronin discovered that Royal Farms had submitted a proposal to build a gas station and convenience store at the site. He was alarmed to learn that a

public hearing on the proposal was scheduled, but not advertised, for just a few weeks later, on August 2.



CHNA members quickly researched the company's negotiations with Prince George's Parks and Recreation. Then Jeff, along with CHNA president Jason Clayton and CHNA members Paul Rowe and Lisa Entzminger, organized testimony from a host of residents for the hearing, opposite a lawyer from Royal Farms.

At the August 2022 hearing, Friends of Sligo Creek, represented by Michael Wilpers, stressed in testimony the dangers that carcinogenic benzene fumes (from gas pumps) pose to plant and animal life in the adjoining parkland. The gas vapors are

brought to earth as a dissolved gas by rain, snow, or ice storms, polluting waterways like Sligo creek.

Above: Neighbor Alvarez Powell (center) and CHNA members Jeff Cronin and Paul Rowe at the playground that Royal Farms proposed to remove to make the adjoining site legal for a gas station (Anthony Tilghman/Washington Informer photo)

These threats risked compromising a multi-million-dollar investment by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to remove barriers in Sligo Creek to migratory fish, which historically spawned up to the powerline meadow.

Witnesses from the neighborhood pointed out that the presence of a playground in the adjoining park meant that the gas station was illegal by the county's own zoning regulations, which require a 300-foot distance between gas stations and playgrounds.

Incredibly, the county had agreed to allow Royal Farms to remove the playground in order to facilitate approval of the gas station. Neighbors testified also about the lack of transparency and resident input in the process, the poor quality of food offered by Royal Farms convenience stores (in the context of obesity and diabetes), and the existing proliferation of active and abandoned gas stations nearby.

Two months after the day-long hearing, the Zoning Hearing Examiner issued a 43-page decision approving the gas station. Members of CHNA got to work preparing an appeal before the Prince George's County District Council.

For assistance, CHNA member Paul Rowe recruited the Environmental Law Clinic at the

University of Maryland Law School as well as the legal office of the Chesapeake Bay Trust. Together they crafted a lengthy, detailed appeal and submitted it to the District Council on November 7.

The hard-hitting document pointed out, among other infractions, that the Hearing Examiner failed to provide the required legal representation by the People's Zoning Counsel, who is empowered to represent the citizens and residents of Prince George's County at all hearings on zoning matters.

On January 23, 2023, three weeks before the scheduled February 13 hearing on the appeal, Royal Farms abruptly withdrew its application for the gas station and convenience store, constituting a major victory for the neighborhood and the environment. Read the [press coverage of the story](#).



A 16-pump gas station would have been built on the lot at right, along the north edge of Sligo Creek and Park on the left. (Photo: View from Riggs Rd by MWilpers).

Thanks are due to CHNA president Jason Clayton and CHNA members Paul Rowe, Jeff Cronin, Lisa Entzminger, Doris Kuehn, Carlos Manjarrez, Chris Watling, and Mila Antova; Donna Nelms and Alvarez Powell, neighbors of the site on East-West Highway; Paula Posas, Deputy Director, Sierra Club MD Chapter, for directing us to excellent legal assistance; the Prince George's County group of the MD Sierra Club; and State Senator Malcolm Augustine and County Council Member Wanika Fisher.

-Michael Wilpers, FOSC Advocacy Committee (advocacy@fosc.org)

NATURAL HISTORY

Calling All iNaturalists: City Nature Challenge April 28 to May 1

The upcoming **City Nature Challenge (CNC)** is a great time to



(Renee Grebe photo/City Nature Challenge DC)

The website for the DC area CNC provides [instructional videos on iNaturalist](#), from a 90-second introductory video to a 50-minute in-depth tutorial.

get out into the Sligo watershed (including your back yard!) to photo-document plants and animals using your phone and the iNaturalist app. The CNC takes place over 4 days, from Friday, April 28 through Monday, May 1.

The City Nature Challenge is a worldwide event involving more than 450 urban areas worldwide when local residents document as many plants, mushrooms, lichens, insects, snails, worms, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, and other life forms as possible to create a four-day snapshot of a region's biodiversity. The final city stats and rankings are tabulated on May 8, so you have an additional five days to upload the photos you take April 28-May 1.

If you're new to the iNaturalist app, there are many online resources available to learn how to use it.

To get started, set up an iNaturalist account [here](#), then add the iNaturalist app to your smart phone. Snap photos with your phone (ideally, a few from different angles for plants). Open the app and tap the + to add an observation. (The location info is embedded in the image.) Tap the box with a question mark in it and the iNat system will offer a tentative ID. If the system says it's "pretty sure" the organism is in a particular family or genus, choose that. Other people will weigh in later to confirm, correct, or refine the ID.

Whether you're an ardent Sligo iNaturalist or a beginner, we are especially eager to have you to venture into areas that have received little coverage in the past. The most neglected are:

---In **lower Sligo**: the final 1.25 miles, from East-West Highway to the confluence with Northwest Branch at the 50-acre Kirkwood Neighborhood Park, half of which is in the Sligo watershed.

---In **upper Sligo**: the interior (off trail) portions of the woodlands bordered by Ladd, the paved trail, Colt Terrace Park, and the shopping mall, and the interior woodlands between Univ. Blvd. and the stormwater ponds.

---The woodlands along **Flora Lane tributary** that border the south side of the Beltway west of the paved trail.

---The nine-acre woodland bordered by **Elm, Larch, and New Hampshire Ave**. Access a footpath from Glangary (just uphill from the Parkway) and probably from Elm, Larch, or Heather.

---**Sligo Golf Course**, 50 acres. FOSC has contacted David DeGirolamo, Gen. Mgr., for

permission, at (301) 585-6006, ddegriolamo@mcggolf.com; a decision is pending.

A special CNC event in lower Sligo -- with guides who specialize in plants, insects, and aquatic organisms -- will take place at the powerline meadow on Friday, April 28, from 10:00am to 3:00pm. This event is co-organized by the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) and Carole Highlands Neighborhood Association. Sign up for this program when it appears on the AWS [calendar of events](#).



(Bridget Moynihan photo/City Nature Challenge DC)

The Washington metro area is one of 445 cities worldwide that took part in the CNC last year. The DC area logged 1,719 species at "research grade" (meaning confirmed by at least one second opinion) by 2,197 participants submitting 38,824 photos. Since the CNC was launched in 2016, cities with the top ten most participants, observations, and species have included Cape Town, La Paz, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Houston, Washington, DC, and San Francisco. See the full results [here](#).

- M. Wilpers, Chair of Natural History
naturalhistory@fosc.org

NATURAL HISTORY

Robin Researcher Returning to Takoma Park



American Robins hopping about Takoma Park yards may look like they're just eyeing the ground for worms or beetles, but some are also transmitting precise location and behavioral information to orbiting satellites.

That information is what wildlife researchers hope for as they delve into the intriguing habits of this common yet distinctive American songbird.

Photo: American Robin

Ornithologist Emily Williams, a PhD candidate at Georgetown University, is continuing her research in the Takoma Park yards she used in 2022 to band and tag robins with tiny lightweight chips designed to transmit data without harming the birds.

Williams told residents that she'd like to return to their yards as part of a three-year robin study across North America that includes fieldwork from researchers in Georgia, Indiana, Florida, and Nova Scotia. Her research, she says, "examines how various triggers determine whether robins migrate, when they migrate, and where they actually go if they do migrate, and how events during the breeding season influence those decisions."

Since the habits of robins in different regions vary dramatically, her research could illuminate "how animals cope with rapid environmental changes," Williams said in her email to residents.

For example, robins in Alaska are long-distance migrants. Many DC-area robins stay here year-round, but some fly as far south as Florida and North Carolina to overwinter.



Above: Emily Williams with an Eastern Towhee (photo courtesy of: emilyjwilliams.weebly.com)

A [2021 article](#) by the Associated Press reports that this robin study reflects a new level of sophistication in monitoring wildlife made possible through smaller tracking devices. Conservation scientist Ken Rosenberg is quoted as saying tracking birds this way may help answer the question, "Where in their annual cycles do migratory birds face the greatest threats?"

Other upcoming events of interest

Biomonitoring at Sligo Creek - Site 49

Sunday April 16, 4pm at 1400 Drexel St, Takoma Park, MD 20912

Come observe biomonitoring and learn what's involved from an experienced team of biomonitorers.

Tracking the Spotted Lanternfly: On the trail of this destructive insect

Tuesday April 25, 11am-12pm - Virtual [Register here](#) Registrants will receive the link to join the session the day before the event.

The spotted lanternfly is a non-native, invasive, sap-eating insect that can swarm on trees and structures in the thousands. It feeds on over 80 plant species including trees, fruits, vegetables, and ornamental plants. First found in Maryland in 2018 in Cecil County, it's now spread to 16 counties including Montgomery.



Kenton Sumpter, an entomologist with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, will discuss the spotted lanternfly, its impacts, and what the state of Maryland is doing to manage it. Attendees

will also learn about its migration strategies. *Part of the Moco Parks speakers series.* (Spotted Lanternfly photo courtesy of Montgomery Parks)

Turning neighborhood weeds into a pollinator haven

May 10 at 7pm on Zoom - Virtual -[Save the date](#)

Sligo Creek neighbors and friends Ross Campbell, Eric Cathcart, and Kyle Simpson will tell the tale of how residents of the North Hills of Sligo Creek neighborhood took advantage of a change in local street design to create two native wildflower gardens. They are an inspiration to other neighborhoods and residents looking for ways to create pollinator gardens in public and private spaces. In early May, check the [FOSC website homepage](#) for the link.



One of neighborhood pollinator gardens (this one at Guilford and Bristol) that will be discussed during the May 10 zoom talk (M. Wilpers photo)

April Events At-A-Glance

Saturday April 15, 8am Bird Walk *Registration full*

Sunday April 16, 4pm Biomonitoring at Site 49 - lower Sligo 1400 Drexel St, Takoma Park

Saturday April 22 and Sunday April 23, various times Sweep the Creek - in person, open participation

Tuesday April 25, 11am-12pm Spotted Lanternfly talk Parks Dept - virtual
[Register here.](#)

Wednesday April 26, 10am-12pm Summer Water Quality Tester training - virtual
[Register here.](#)

Friday April 28 to May 1 City Nature Challenge (CNC) region wide - in person, open participation

Friday April 28, 10am-3pm CNC project at the powerline meadow - Sligo Creek - in person. An AWS/CHNA event. Register when the event is added to this [Calendar of events.](#)

Saturday April 29, 2pm-3:30pm Summer Water Quality Tester training - in person
[Register here.](#)

Spring T-shirts to Wear with Pride

Celebrate Spring with a beautiful FOSC T-shirt for yourself, family, and friends!

The tees are made of organic cotton and come in short sleeve and long sleeve, in 5 sizes, small to XL. Prices range from \$22 to \$27.

You can order the tees directly from the [FOSC store](#), now on its own tab on the upper right of the FOSC [homepage](#).

Each T-shirt purchased helps support FOSC in its work on litter, non-native invasive plants, stormwater, water quality, natural history, and advocacy.



Above: Sligo resident Zia models the FOSC t-shirt (J. Kassovic photo)

Your support funds FOSC programs

Donate



You can give via this Donate button - it's simple and secure.
Or send a check to the address at the very bottom of this email.

Thank you!

Recent Nature Sightings in Sligo



A large flock of migrating **Snow Geese** heading north over the Wheaton Branch ponds on March 10 (stephen220).



Two butterflies that overwinter as adults and come out on warm sunny days in winter and early spring: **Eastern Comma** (left) near Long Branch Parkway and East Melbourne on March 23 (BRCEvans) and **Mourning Cloak** near the Carroll Ave. bridge on March 6 (mimsabdu).



Star Chickweed near Aspen
on Feb 28 (wilpersm)



Dutchman's Breeches near
Domer on Mar 31
(twmontgomery9)



Virginia Saxifrage
downstream of Carroll on Mar
27 (wilpersm)

Spring Wildflowers



Cut-leaved Toothwort near E. Silver
Spring Park on Apr. 3 (allenbrowne)



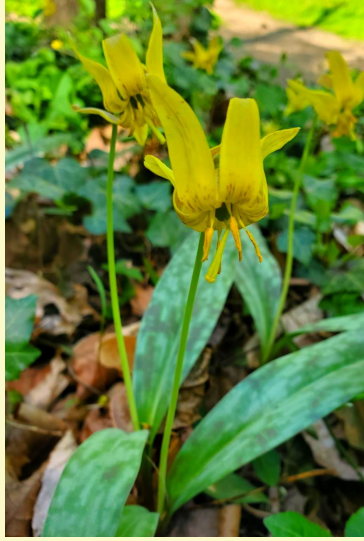
Azure Bluet in the
powerline meadow on
Apr. 1 (wilpersm)



Bloodroot near Devon Ct. on
Mar. 31 (twmontgomery9)



Golden Ragwort near Carroll and Garland on Mar. 5 (jimdella)



Yellow Trout-lily near the Parkway and Three Oaks on April 12 (gabiwabi)



Cursed Crowfoot along the paved trail below the Carroll Ave. bridge on April 12 (wilpersm)

Painted in Red Accents



Red-eared Slider at the Beltway Ponds on an unseasonably warm and sunny Feb. 15 (dtread1). Both males and females sport red markings on their heads but the functions of the colors are not well understood.

"I'm a good mate and this is my territory."

This blackbird and woodpecker use red to signal to potential mates that they are healthy males -- it's thought that brighter reds indicate better health. The same markings intimidate rival males competing for the same territory.



Red-winged Blackbird at the Wheaton Branch
Ponds on March 13 (stephen220)



Red-bellied Woodpecker near Carland and
Carroll on March 6 (jimdella)

"I'm toxic, don't eat me."



A **Blood-winged Blister Beetle** on March 23 near Wayne and Cedar (maragay). The red wings signal to potential predators that the insect is highly toxic, an example of "warning coloration" first explained by Alfred Russel Wallace, co-discoverer of natural selection (with Darwin). Ladybugs and velvet mites are red for the same reason.

An **Eastern Red-backed Salamander** near Cockerille and Circle on March 9 (mmmmbugs). The red color warns potential predators that the salamander is mildly toxic. It also mimics the far more toxic Eastern or Red-spotted Newt, a kind of false signaling discovered by Walter Henry Bates, who collected in the Amazon, partly with Wallace.

Ripe and Ready to Eat

Partridge Berry at Colt Terrace Park on March 23 (ronwertz). The red color signals to mammals that it's ready to be eaten and spread its seeds. This fruit is consumed by Red Fox, Eastern Chipmunk, White-Footed Mouse, and Woodland Deer Mouse.



Amphibian Update

More than 100 **Wood Frogs** converged on the newly restored wetlands in the Kemp Mill area to mate in shallow waters safely isolated from the creek and its carnivorous fish. After mating, the adults return to the uplands, traveling up to 3/4 mile from their mating pond. Photo taken on Feb. 21 along the paved path heading to Ladd St. (ronwertz).



For the second year in a row, egg masses of **Spotted Salamander** appeared in the



constructed vernal pools along the Wheaton Branch, as seen here on March 23 (ronwertz).

On the Lookout: Two Approaches



Red-tailed Hawks survey their hunting grounds from a high perch on a radio tower about 200 feet above the Sligo Golf Course on March 1 (dtread1). Their eyes are estimated to see with the same magnification as a 200 mm camera lens or eight times that of human vision. They also have sensitive motion detectors and can see the yellow of urine more brightly than humans because of their ability to see in the ultraviolet range.





A **Great Blue Heron** at the Beltway Ponds on Mar. 4 (dtread1). These herons get a better view of potential prey by extending their necks straight up, which also warms their bodies through greater exposure to the sun in chilly weather.

"The Early Ant Gets the . . ."

Unlike most insects, the **American Winter Ant** (below) is active above ground mostly during winter and early spring. It's shown here at the powerline meadow on March 23 (mmmmbugs). Among other food sources, the ant drinks the "honeydew" produced by aphids and protects them in return, as they are doing at right in May 2020 near Cedar and Wayne (maragay). These ants also cultivate fungi underground as a food source.



This large **Winter Ant** queen has fallen prey to some industrious **Winnow Ants**, who are moving the carcass into their underground nest to serve as a food source. Found near Wayne and Cedar on Mar. 31 (maragay).



Above, a **Formicine Ant** hill at Becca Lilly Park on Feb. 28 (wilpersm).



A **Formicine Ant** carries off its prey, a **White-margined Burrower Bug**, on Mar. 4, near Wayne and Cedar Streets (maragay).



A **Common Striped Woodlouse**, under the natural magnification of a water droplet, near Loraine and Granville on Mar. 18 (evanvaughan).



Globose Dome Snail, a native gastropod known to be in only five counties in MD, between Park Valley and the creek on Mar. 20 (rutherp).



Killdeer at the Wheaton Branch ponds on March 6 (stephen220).

All photos taken from iNaturalist. Photo credits show the observers' handle on iNaturalist. Text by M. Wilpers (naturalhistory@fosc.org). Use the iNaturalist app or website to follow Sligo wildlife sightings in the project titled "Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed." For more info, email naturalhistory@fosc.org.

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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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