



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter September 2024



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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STEWARDSHIP

Sligo Stewardship Weekend
Sweep the Creek & Weed Warrior Events
Sat, Sept. 28 and Sun, Sept. 29

Sweep the Creek is coming! This year we'll also be adding invasive weed removal at two sites. Check out the site schedule below and on the [Sweep the Creek page](#) and invite some friends and neighbors to help clean up Sligo Creek/ Long Branch/Wheaton Branch/Takoma Branch.

- **No registration is required for the Sweep the Creek events.**
- **Participation in the Weed Warrior events does require pre-registration - see the links in the schedule below.**

So dress in clothing you don't mind getting dirty, bring your work gloves and any trash grabbers you have, and come on out. FOSC will supply trash and recycling bags, and lend gloves for those who need them. Some trash grabbers should be available for use. SSL hours are available; students, please bring your forms.

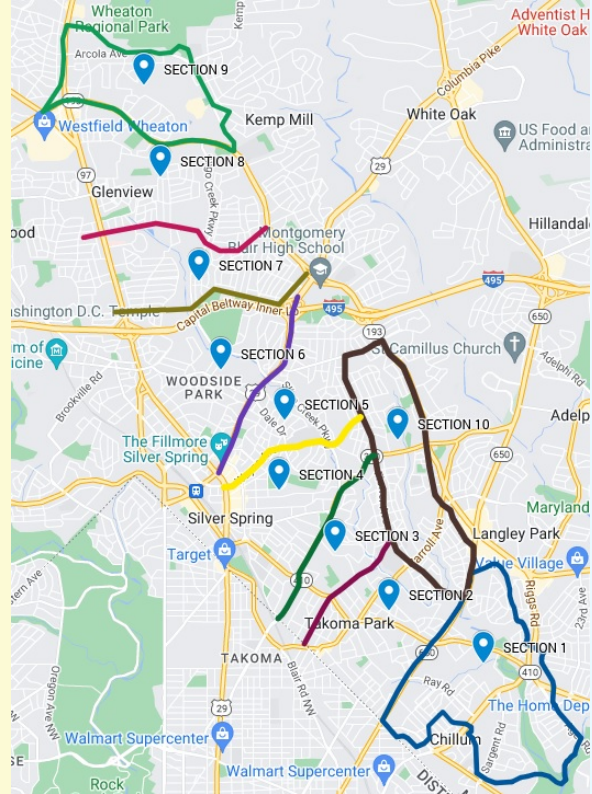
If you have questions, please email litter@fosc.org. See you there!





Sligo Stewardship Weekend Sweep the Creek / Weed Warrior Events Sat, Sept. 28 and Sun, Sept. 29, 2024

- Section 1 Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at Hillwood Manor Park 13th Ave. and Elson St.
- Section 1 Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at East/West Highway and Sligo Creek trail.
- Section 3 Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at the parking lot near the intersection of Sligo Parkway and Kennebec Rd.
- Section 4 Sunday, Sept. 29, 1-3:00pm** at the parking lot by the tennis courts just upstream from Piney Branch Rd.
- Section 5 Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at the parking lot along Sligo Parkway just upstream (north) from Three Oaks Drive.
- Section 6 Parkway.** **Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at the Dallas Ave. parking lot along Sligo Creek
- Section 7 Saturday Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at the Wheaton Branch Stormwater Ponds on Dennis Ave. at Hemley Lane.
- Sections 7 & 8 Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at Dennis Ave. Recreation Center and Sligo Creek Parkway.
- Sections 7 & 8 Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** Weed Warrior event open to non-weed warriors 16 years old over with prerequisite required [at this link](#). At Sligo Creek Parkway north of Dennis Ave. Recreation Center. Location details will be on the FOSC home page.
- Section 9 Sunday, Sept. 29, from 1-3:00pm** at Kemp Mill Shopping Center at the intersection of Arcola Ave. and Lamberton Dr. Go to the back of the shopping center where the park trail starts.
- Section 10 Upper Long Branch Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am** at the corner of Wayne Ave. and Long Branch Parkway (the northwest corner of Long Branch-Wayne Local Park).
- Section 10 Middle Long Branch Saturday, Sept. 28, 10am-noon** Weed Warrior event open to non-weed warriors with prerequisite [at this link](#). At the Long Branch Community Center at 8700 Piney Branch Rd. Note: A cleanup event will be held here on Oct. 5, see website for details closer to the date.
- Section 10 Middle Long Branch Sunday, Sept. 29, 1-3:00am** At Rolling Terrace Elementary School, at Clayborn St. and the Long Branch trail.
- [possible: Section 10 Lower Long Branch Saturday, Sept. 28, 9-11:00am at Becca Lilly Park.]
- Please check the FOSC website for updates to this schedule: www.friendsofsligocreek.org



Any changes to the schedule will be posted on the [Sweep the Creek page](#) of the [FOSC website](#).

Map of the Sligo Watershed

FOSC OUTREACH

Thanks to FOSC volunteers at the Takoma Park Folk Festival



Thank you to the volunteers - Sergio, Bruce, Rhonda, Elaine, Kit, Steve, Kris, Kristin, Walter, Christine, Nuala, Anne, and Michael - who came out to help at the FOSC table and made it the place to be! We appreciate your time and enthusiasm.

NATURAL HISTORY

There's No Place Like Home

By Susan DeFord, FOSC Board member & Section 7 Steward

On a warm May afternoon, amid a sprinkle of rain, I approached the nestbox just beyond a stand of trees. There were no flashes of a bluebird nearby as there had been a few days before, and I wondered whether adult bluebirds were discreetly keeping watch.

When I slowly lifted the hinged wooden door to peer inside, there was a nestling, out of the nest, clinging to a rough area on the interior wall. He was the lone survivor of a clutch of four eggs. Now he was fully feathered, getting ready to launch on his own.



Bluebird eggs in late April



Bluebird nestling in late May

Elated, and anxious that I might scare him into a hasty, ill-fated departure, I quickly closed the nestbox door before he could flee. I wished him luck, and four days later when I returned to the nestbox, it was empty.

That experience was part of my memorable introduction to what the North American Bluebird Society calls “bluebirding,” the practice of installing specifically designed nestboxes in promising habitat and monitoring the nestboxes’ use by bluebirds. Since the 1960s, the effort has been key to reversing a steep decline of bluebirds due to habitat loss and competition from invasive species such as house sparrows and European starlings.

The nestbox strategy has expanded to assist other small cavity-nesting species such as chickadees, tree swallows and house wrens. Ideally, all those species take turns using the nestboxes through spring and summer.

I was part of a group of volunteers that signed on to monitor four nestboxes installed last fall around the stormwater ponds as part of an initiative of Friends of Sligo Creek. The county-owned pond property, bordering the south side of Dennis Avenue and near the Forest Estates subdivision, hadn’t had nest boxes in years.

Montgomery County’s Dept. of Environmental Protection granted permission, providing that the nestboxes weren’t

in areas slated for construction next year to ease upstream flooding along Wheaton Branch, a tributary of Sligo Creek.



Tree swallow perching on a nestbox at the stormwater ponds

Emily Huang, president of the Montgomery Bird Club, was the FOSC initiative's valuable mentor, guiding us in selecting sites, conducting a fall training for volunteer nestbox monitors, and answering our questions during nesting season. Longtime FOSC member Walter Mulbry got busy in his home workshop to construct 3 of the 4 nestboxes, complete with poles and aluminum predator baffles. Volunteer Craig Wilsey set up a shared Google spreadsheet for fellow monitors to record details of nestbox visits.

"Substantial chickadee nest built up, probably near completion," Wilsey wrote in a mid-April report. "Did not see activity on the box, but both adults near the nest." That same busy month, volunteer Laura Donnelly Smith reported, with some sense of mystery, that at her nestbox, "nest is now too tall for me to see into it. Hissing sound from within the box when I opened the hatch."



Chickadee inspecting nestbox in spring

Monitors were instructed to promptly remove the messy nests of invasive house sparrows that tried to move in.

If native birds abandoned a nest attempt, monitors cleaned out the nestbox after a waiting period to encourage another attempt.

After I removed the vacant bluebird nest in June, house wrens quickly built a high-walled twiggy nest, festooned with cottony spider egg sacs. Soon after, my nestbox visits were interrupted by two adult wrens who loudly and unceasingly told me to get lost.



Cleaning out a nestbox



Scolding wren atop its nestbox

At another nestbox on my route, a pair of tree swallows that hatched a clutch of eggs swooped and dive-bombed at my approach. Their unrelenting protectiveness was fierce, and impressive.



A tree swallow nest with eggs shielded by a protective layer of feathers



Tree swallow swooping overhead to protect its nestbox

Over the months, there were nesting attempts at every box, but activity slowed, then ended during August's persistent heat. Volunteers cleaned out the nestboxes and spoke of "next season."

"I'm personally enthusiastic about sharing our work with the wider community" Donnelly Smith wrote in an email. "Maybe it'll encourage more nestbox projects elsewhere!"

RESOURCES:

North American Bluebird Society:

[North American Bluebird Society \(nabluebirdsociety.org\)](http://nabluebirdsociety.org)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology NestWatch:

[NestWatch](#) | [NestWatch - Where Birds Come to Life](#)

Sialis.org:

Sialis.org - [Information on bluebirds and other birdhouse birds](#)

National Audubon Society:

[How to Keep Nest Boxes From Turning Lethal in Extreme Heat](#) | Audubon

FOSC OUTREACH

FOSC at MOM's Organic Market



MOM's Organic Market
SILVER SPRING, MD
GRAND OPENING SEPT 20-22!

5% OF OUR SALES WILL GO TO ...



What is FOSC doing at a grocery store grand opening? Talking to shoppers about the creek and upcoming FOSC events, of course!

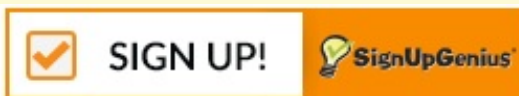
FOSC was invited to be one of three non-profits taking part in the festivities at My Organic Market/MOM's Grand Opening weekend at the corner of Georgia and Spring Street in downtown Silver Spring. FOSC will be splitting 5% of the proceeds from the weekend.

If you can join us at the FOSC table for an hour or so, we'd greatly appreciate your help. (And, you can get some grocery shopping done, with your purchases going toward the 5% total too.) An experienced FOSC member will be at the table as well.

We'll be there on:

Fri. Sept. 20: 1:30pm - 6:00pm
Sat. Sept. 21: 10:30am - 6:00pm
Sun. Sept. 22: 9:00am - 1:00pm

[Signup here:](#)



Thank you!

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

NATURAL HISTORY

Mosquitoes Enjoy an Extended Season

Dawn and dusk can be beautiful times of the day along the trails in Sligo Creek Park, but they are times when mosquitoes are active. We all know to take care to avoid being bitten by these pests. In the DMV reports of mosquito-borne Eastern Equine Encephalitis ('Triple E'), West Nile Virus, Zika, and even Dengue fever have increased. Though still very low in number, the global warming trend means a lengthier mosquito season, April through October, and more opportunity for bites.

Obvious steps such as wearing protective clothing and using bug repellent help reduce bites. Keeping the mosquito population down at home is important too. As is cleaning gutters regularly so they function well, of course, but also because even very small amounts of pooled water with a bonus of damp, decaying leaves are very attractive egg-laying sites to pregnant female mosquitoes. Many homes and apartment buildings use corrugated plastic downspout extenders which make a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes. Foil their attempts by placing fine netting over the end of the extender, or replacing it with a non-corrugated version.



Aedes Albopictus

Aka "tiger mosquito", prefers human inhabited areas, active in daytime as well as at dusk and dawn, can live in cooler as well as hot weather.



Aedes Aegypti

The genus name Aedes is from the Greek *αηδής*: "hateful" or "odious". Aegypti eggs can live through winter in a dry state. Bites in cloudy weather too.



The thorax of Albopictus, at left with one stripe; Aegypti at right, with lyre-shaped markings. Both species have white bands on their legs. (Mosquitoalert.com)

Homemade or commercial "GAT" traps (gravid Aedes traps), aka "lethal ovitraps", mimic the breeding site of container-breeding mosquitoes, tricking the females into laying eggs near but not actually touching water, depriving them of the bacteria they need to develop, and/or that is laced with a common soil-dwelling bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* ("Bt") which is harmless to humans, pets, pollinators, and other insects but which spells doom for mosquitoes, black flies and fungus gnats. It is applied to water (as a liquid or through mosquito dunks or bits).

Spraying your property is not recommended by the Moco Dept. of Environmental Protection because, though sold as organic or naturally derived, they kill a broad spectrum of beneficial insects - bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, and more - that are essential to the ecosystem. Alternative services are available for placement of yard canisters attractive to both male and female mosquitoes. They contain a fungus and larvicide that they then spread to other mosquitoes (similar to the way some ant baits work), exposing only the target species - mosquitoes.

NATURAL HISTORY

Display and Talk on Early Botany in Sligo at Historic Takoma

Check out the great new window display at Historic Takoma on early botany in Takoma and Sligo!

The display is based on longtime FOSSC member Michael Wilpers' Zoom talk last March and covers the period 1876 to 1920. At least 40 professional botanists visited the watershed, collecting about 700 specimens for deposit at the herbariums of the Smithsonian and the University of Maryland.

New material in the display is inspired by the loan of two antique vasculums (metal containers used by plant collectors up to about 1920) from Washington Adventist Univ.

In conjunction with the display, Michael will give an illustrated talk on the subject on Wed, Oct. 9, at 7:00pm at Historic Takoma, adding insights about vasculums and the widespread popularity of plant collecting in the late 19th century.



Botanist Albert Spear Hitchcock in 1888 with his vasculum. He collected plants in Sligo in 1904 along with his colleague at the USDA, grasses expert Agnes Chase.

Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation via R. Simmons

The display is a joint project of FOSSC and Historic Takoma (special thanks to Jim and Janet Douglas), with additional credit to our board member Melinda Villanueva and her colleague at Washington Adventist University, Tony Fatcher, for loaning the vasculums and plant press.

Special thanks also to expert guidance of two professional field botanists with the Maryland Native Plant Society: Rod Simmons and our own John Parrish.

Historic Takoma is located at 7328 Carroll Ave. (across Carroll Ave. from the Co-op). The display will be up through early November.



Tree Hug

A tree appreciation event on Sat, Oct. 5 at 10:00am, led by FOSC master naturalists Bruce Sidwell and Ross Campbell. With the FOSC checklist of common local native woody plants in hand, participants will tour around the meadow and nearby with Bruce and Ross to talk about the 20 native woody species growing there. The trees will be temporarily labeled for a time, perhaps through mid-October. We're also working on getting two native trees to plant as well.

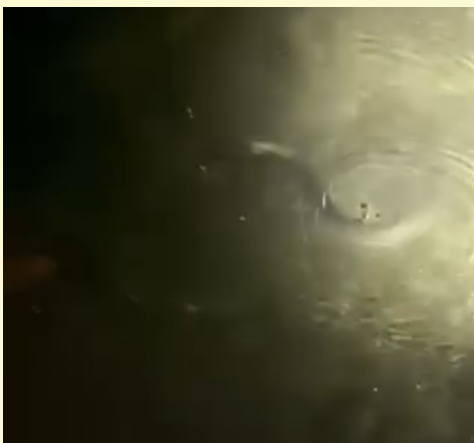
Come out to learn about our native trees and lend a hand planting. No registration needed. (Weed warriors can get work credit for assisting with the planting.)

Meet at Sligo Creek Parkway at Dallas Ave, across the footbridge just beyond the kiosk at the playground and small meadow. Look for the FOSC table. (M.Wilpers photo)



FOSC NOTES

American Eel, Weed Warriors @super speed, Trees need water, Porcelainberry



Video of an American eel seen in Sligo Creek from the FOSC facebook page. (courtesy of Justin Barrows)



What's is like to be a Weed Warrior? Check out this super-speed video from a



Please water your trees, they are stressed. While not as hot as summer, the drought is continuing this fall. Place a hose at the tree's drip line (where the branches extend farthest) and leave it on a gentle flow for an hour or more.



Porcelain berry vine - a scourge. Remove it by the roots now before the berries drop. Click image for a larger version. (Courtesy of Casey Trees)

Do you have an invasive plant challenge? Let us know what it is and we'll try to address it in a future newsletter. Email editor@fosc.org.

Do you have an artistic hand? FOSC has several hand-painted signs that need updates. We'll have the paint and brushes, you supply the talent. Contact info@fosc.org. Thanks!

See pollution in the creeks or heading into a storm drain?

**Be a Water WatchDog!
Report pollution asap to:**

Reportsligopollution@fosc.org



Photos, description, time, location and other details are invaluable to DEP's investigation team.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Upcoming Events & Volunteer Opportunities

Sept 19 - Green Streets Tour of Stormwater projects - 6:30-7:30pm

See a wide selection of the different kinds of green projects the county put in to capture stormwater from Sligo Park Hills streets, and a native plant 'specimen garden' with many different kinds of native plants in sun and shade. See what works where. *Part of a Nature Forward partner grant.* Contact tours@fosc.org for the meet-up address. The area is hilly, so wear walking shoes. Any questions, email Kit at the email address above.

Sept. 19 - Opening of the FOSC Native Plant Sale through Oct 3.

We'll post the ordering link on [the FOSC website](#) on Sept. 19th, and email it as well to FOSC members. Pick up in Takoma Park on the afternoon of Oct. 4, and during the day on the 5th and 6th.

Sept. 20, 21, 22 - FOSC at Mom's Grand Opening Weekend - Fri, Sat, Sun

Volunteer a bit of time for FOSC and grocery shop too! [Sign Up Here](#)

Sept. 28 and 29 - Sweep the Creek/Weed Warrior Sligo Stewardship weekend -

Sweep the Creek is a watershed-wide litter cleanup over weekends in Sept. and April. Join us and make a big difference to the parks and creeks. This Sweep we'll also have 2 Weed Warrior events which require pre-registration. See the schedule and details on the [Sweep the Creek page](#).

Oct. 5 - Tree appreciation tour and tree planting in Sligo Creek park, 10:00am

at the Edgevale Rd. Sligo Creek Playground - Sligo Creek Parkway near Dallas Ave. Learn about the shade trees that grace the park thanks to the foresight of earlier generations who planted them, and squirrels, of course. Details in the article above.

Oct. 5 - Litter HotSpot Cleanup at Long Branch Community Center - 1:30-3:30pm

Meet at the community Center at 8700 Piney Branch Rd, Silver Spring 20901 Gloves and bags provided.

Oct. 9 - FOSC talk at Historic Takoma on Early Botany in Sligo - 7:00pm

at Historic Takoma, 7328 Carroll Ave, Takoma Park, MD 20912 - Michael Wilpers, longtime FOSC member will give a talk on early botanists in Sligo and new information about what they found. No RSVP needed.

Watch the [FOSC Home page](#) and the [FOSC Calendar of Events page](#) for more upcoming FOSC programs and other volunteer events.

FOSC LISTSERV

Which Would You Choose: T-Shirt or Ball Cap?

The next drawing for a FOSC t-shirt or ball cap is coming up in October!

- If you are FOSC member, join the [main FOSC listserv](#) to be automatically entered for the

drawing.

- If you are not yet a FOSC member and are reading this newsletter from your neighbor's copy, please join FOSC [at this link](#)! You will also be entered in the drawing.



Ball cap or t-shirt: which would you choose?

Join the main FOSC listserv and you'll be entered into the next drawing.



Ross Campbell, longtime FOSC member, with FOSC t-shirt display.

Don't want to wait? Order from the [FOSC store](#), or through the link on the Support tab of the [FOSC homepage](#). You can have your order mailed to you or opt to pick it up locally. All sales support FOSC programs. Thank you.

Please consider donating to FOSC to keep our many projects going.

You can give anytime and in any way that suits you!

**Make a gift, set up a monthly gift, make a birthday gift,
a gift in honor of someone or a gift in memoriam.**

**Just use this link [Donate here](#) or the Donate button below.
It's simple and secure.**



Your gift is greatly appreciated - thank you!

**If you prefer to write a check, please send it to:
FOSC, P.O. Box 11572, Takoma Park, MD 20913**

If you'd like information about planned giving, please contact info@fosc.org.

NATURAL HISTORY

Recent Nature Sightings in Sligo



American Bullfrog and Eastern Painted Turtle share a log at the Forest Glen wetlands on September 5 (Dan Treadwell)



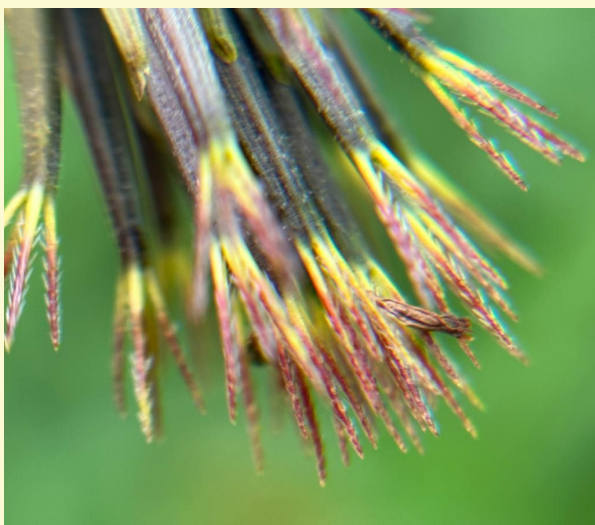
Meripilus mushroom near Dale and Hartford on Sept. 2 (egertoni)



Eastern American Jack-O'-Lantern mushroom near Jackson and Boyd on Sept. 9 (Chandan Hebbale)



Yellow-footed Ants extracts "honeydew" from *Periphyllus* aphids (whom the ants protect in return) near Wayne and Cedar on Sept. 1 (maragay)



Above: Spanish Needles seeds (which travel by latching onto animal fur -- and your pants) near Green Meadows Park on Sept 6 (jorbogmont)



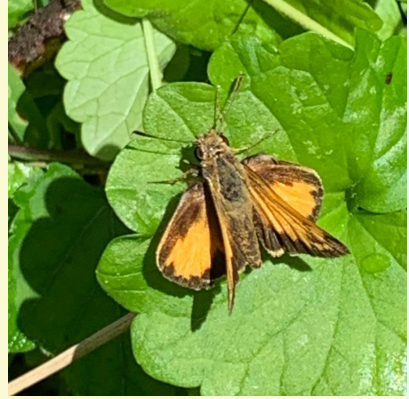
Right: Wild Potato Vine along the Parkway near Dormer on Sept. 7 (wilpersm)



Above and below: A pair of Common Snapping Turtles mating at the Forest Glen wetlands on Sept. 5 (Dan Treadwell)



Above (L-R): Sleepy Orange near Cedar & Pershing on Sept 5 (betsymendelsohn) Common Buckeye in the powerline near 16th Pl. on Sept 1 (tony-futcher) Red-banded Hairstreak near E. Melbourne & Sudbury (brettaugust)
Below (L-R): Silver-spotted Skipper near Elson & 16th Aug. 29 (kristin-marie) Monarch near Manor Circle on Sept. 1 (Chandan Hebbale) Zabulon Skipper near Takoma Park recycling center on Sept. 4 (vegmaint)



Goldenrod Soldier Beetle on Butterfly Milkweed in the powerline near Rt. 410 on Sept. 3 (wilpersm)



Predators at the ready

Above and below:

Reptilian-looking Jagged Ambush Bugs in the powerline near Sligo Creek on Aug. 20 (mmmmbugs)



Above: Dekay's Brown Snake near Franwall & Naim on Sept. 7 (wildlymistaken)

Below: Well-disguised *Mecaphesa* crab spider in the powerline near Sligo Creek on Aug 20 (mmmmbugs)





Above: Oak Rough Bulletgall Wasp gall (harboring wasp larvae) along Willow on Sept. 1 (Katja Schulz)

Right: Citronella Horse Balm (aka Richweed, a native mint) along the Parkway near Park Valley on Sept. 7 (wilpersm)



Great Blue Heron at the Beltway ponds on Sept. 1 (Dan Treadwell)

Photo selection and captions by Michael Wilpers (questions or comments, naturalhistory@fosc.org). 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?

President (Elaine Lamirande): president@fosc.org

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Litter/Sweep the Creek (Ed Murtagh): litter@fosc.org

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Natural History (Michael Wilpers): 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.

[**Join FOSC**](#)



Friends of Sligo Creek | P.O. Box 11572 | Takoma Park, MD 20913 US

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