Nextdoor Victoria Park

Series of…
Environmental articles
written by John Serrao

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Environmental articles written by John Serrao in **NextDoor Victoria Park**

Nextdoor

November 2020

TO MY FELLOW RESIDENTS OF VICTORIA PARK

As a member of the Victoria Park Environmental Advisory Committee, I've been encouraged to offer in NextDoor Victoria Park this first in a series of monthly articles about our nature, wildlife, and environmental conditions. The topics will be broader and more general than the "Wildlife Of Victoria Park" articles that I've been writing for our Newsletters since 2016. We live in a community with the unique, enviable distinction of having more than 500 acres – fully 27% of our total land mass – permanently protected as "conservation areas" or, as termed in Victoria Park's original 1999 Development Plan, "ecological preservation areas." And this doesn't even include our Golf Course. As residents, we regularly enjoy the benefits of these vast upland and wetland preserves when we encounter their wildlife: a bald eagle perched in a tall pine, a swallow-tailed kite gracefully soaring overhead, a gopher tortoise grazing in the grass, a family of wild turkeys or sandhill cranes, or even a bobcat or Florida black bear. These and so many other iconic Florida animals call Victoria Park home. 145 species of birds have been recorded here, as well as 23 mammals and 61 kinds of reptiles and amphibians, including 11 different turtles and 16 frogs (see the Victoria Park website for our complete "Wildlife Lists"). We can all be thankful that one of the main concerns in planning Victoria Park more than 20 years ago was to "insure a continuous and connected open space system which supports the diverse ecosystems and wildlife that exists within the development." Our original plans also mandated "the protection of listed threatened and endangered species and their habitats." To fulfill this goal, Victoria Park hires professional biologists to maintain our conservations lands as a mosaic of pine-oak forests and open scrub so that gopher tortoises, Florida scrub jays, sandhill cranes and other rare species continue to have the habitats they require to survive. And, to "provide our residents with the educational opportunities" to learn about this diverse wildlife, a system of trails and nature programs have been successfully implemented for more than a decade in Victoria Gardens, and there are plans to soon do the same in the conservation lands adjoining Victoria Trails and Victoria Commons. These were lofty goals that guided the development of Victoria Park 2 decades ago, and they resulted in the distinctive place in which we take pride today.

John Serrao, Naturalist, M.S., Cornell University

Nextdoor

December 2020

THE NATURE OF VICTORIA PARK – PART II :

"OUR CONSERVATION AREAS"

In November, I wrote for NextDoor Victoria Park the first monthly article about our community's natural environment and wildlife. I reported that 27% of Victoria Park's 1,859 acres were set aside as "Conservation Areas" in our original development plan of 1999. Also mentioned were the rich assemblages of wildlife recorded here over the past 2 decades (lists are available on the Victoria Park website under "Conservation and Wildlife"). Future articles in this series will cover Victoria Park's ponds, rare and endangered wildlife, alien and invasive species, use of pesticides, and other topics – all within the context of the original goals and principles set forth by our founders.

Most of Victoria Park's 500+ acres of Conservation Areas consists of sandy upland habitat, dominated by 3 species of pines (longleaf, sand, and slash pines), 7 species of oaks, 3 species of shrubby Lyonias, and palmettos. However, there are also more than 100 acres of wetlands – natural "sinkhole" ponds, marshes, and ephemeral (temporary) wet grasslands. When Victoria Park was planned in the late 1990s, these "ecological preservation areas" were recognized as valuable, and were set aside and put under the jurisdiction of several agencies, including the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, and St. Johns River Water Management District, to be preserved, managed, and protected. It was decided 2 decades ago, in the words of our Community Covenant, that this large acreage, representing more than a quarter of our land, would remain "in perpetuity for the preservation and conservation of the identified species and wetlands that exist within" -- in other words, "forever wild".

Victoria Park developed a "Site Mitigation and Management Plan" in 2000, which describes how these conservation areas would be protected and managed. (I'll refer to this plan in future articles in order to demonstrate our Community's adherence – or not – to our original goals). To manage these lands for the continued survival of several wildlife species of special concern – Florida scrub jay, gopher tortoise, Florida sandhill crane – a biological consulting company was hired to periodically control the growth of trees, shrubs, and palmettos that naturally, in the absence of fire, overgrow the openings required by these vulnerable species to survive. Miller Legg is the company that mows and brush-cuts specific sections of our conservation areas under a scientific management plan designed to preserve the habitat of these and other species. Their annual reports are available on Victoria Park's website.

So, where exactly are these Conservation Areas? The bulk of this acreage is in Victoria Gardens, extending for one mile along Martin Luther King northward from Orange Camp Road to Taylor Road (the "South Preserve"), and then for another ½ mile northward from Taylor Road (the "North Preserve"). Another section is directly across MLK from this North Preserve and also extends for ½ mile northward. And there is another Conservation Area running eastward from the entrance to Victoria Commons along Orange Camp Road toward I-4. In the near future, Miller Legg will clear "fire-breaks" in these sections that can be used as walking/ nature trails, and Nature Walks will be scheduled there just as they have for the past 15 years in Victoria Gardens' conservation areas (conducting education programs was another item stipulated in the original plans for Victoria Park).

Knowing the principles under which our community was founded, and why these goals continue to be pursued, can only increase our appreciation of this special place we call Victoria Park.

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January 2021

PART III – ENDANGERED SPECIES

In 1973, President Nixon signed into law our nation's – and the world's – most important wildlife-protection measures, the Endangered Species Act, to prevent the extinction of our country's imperiled wildlife and to restore their numbers until their protection was no longer needed. Restoration measures included captive-breeding, the banning of hunting and collecting these animals, and, especially the protection of their habitats. The ESA has been remarkably successful, as evidenced by the recovery of iconic American animals that were once on the edge of extinction: bison, bald eagle, alligator, peregrine falcon, California condor, and many others.

The federal government maintains an inventory – the Endangered Species List – with 2 major categories: "Endangered", or in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its geographic range; and "Threatened", or likely to become Endangered if protective measures aren't taken. Individual states also maintain their own lists, with the added category of "Species of Special Concern". An animal may be listed in a particular state if it's rare or endangered there even though it may be common in other parts of the country. An example is the black bear, which is common in many states but, until recently, was listed as Threatened in Florida.

Sandhill Crane

Gopher Tortoise

Florida Scrub Jay

Sherman Fox Squirrel

Eastern Indigo Snake

Victoria Park harbors several animals on Florida's Endangered Species List, and the biological consulting company, Miller-Legg, is contracted to manage our conservation areas in order to protect some of them. The Florida Scrub Jay is "Threatened" at the federal level and, unfortunately, the population in Victoria Gardens seems to have disappeared after successfully breeding in the conservation areas for many years. Scrub Jays require open, sandy scrub, a habitat that grows into oak and pine forest unless it's periodically subject to fire. Miller-Legg biologists mow and cut sections of our conservation areas to mimic the effects of fire, but apparently this practice hasn't been successful in keeping the Scrub Jays here.

Another federally "Threatened" species that appears to have disappeared from Victoria Park is North America's largest native snake – the Eastern Indigo Snake. From 2011 to 2013, I found at least 6 different Indigo Snakes in our conservation areas, ranging from 3 feet to an amazing 8 feet. But the continued development of Victoria Gardens by Kolter since 2013 has driven out this beautiful reptile, which requires large expanses of undisturbed habitat to survive.

A third victim of development is the Sherman Fox Squirrel. Twice the size of the common gray squirrel, it was a Florida "Species of Special Concern" until 2018 when it was upgraded and removed from the list. In Victoria Park, however, they have not been seen in their former places around the golf course since the large tract of woods was clear-cut in Kolter's latest phase in Victoria Hills.

Another large reptile, the Florida Pine Snake (listed as "Threatened" in Florida) was recently photographed by a Miller-Legg biologist along the Power Line right-of-way at the edge of the golf course. The status of this very secretive, burrowing snake in Victoria Park is unknown. A third state-"Threatened" snake, however, the tiny Florida Brown Snake, seems to be doing well here. I often find them on our roads at night.

Also listed as "Threatened" in Florida is the Gopher Tortoise. Miller-Legg's periodic brush-cutting and mowing in our conservation areas benefits these terrestrial turtles by creating fresh groundcover and grass for them to graze. They also are commonly seen along the Power Line in the Hills. And our Sandhill Cranes (also state-"Threatened") continue to breed in good numbers in our wetlands as evidenced by the half-dozen or so families that were successfully reared last year.

Finally, there are a few birds listed as "Threatened" in Florida that don't breed in Victoria Park but often visit our ponds to catch fish. The Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Wood Stork, and – very rarely – the incomparably beautiful Roseate Spoonbill have all been recorded here. Look for them along the shores of Lake Victoria and the many ponds in Victoria Park – the subject of a future article in this series.

Posted in **General** to **Victoria Park**

Nextdoor

January 2021

John Serrao
Victoria Park •

The Nature Of Victoria Park. THE NATURE OF VICTORIA PARK

by John Serrao

PART IV – INVASIVE SPECIES

Last month's article for NextDoor Victoria Park featured our "rare and endangered animals" – the species that are being protected and managed at both the state and federal levels to ensure their continued survival and recovery (e.g., Gopher Tortoise, Scrub Jay). This month we'll look at a group that is treated and characterized in the opposite manner – invasive, alien species. Florida has become famous as the state that possesses the largest number of invasive plants and animals, many of which (Brazilian Pepper Tree, Burmese Python, for example) are wreaking havoc on our ecosystems. Measures are being taken throughout our state to eradicate, or at least control, these species in order to restore the health and balance of the native, natural communities that have been overrun and disturbed by them.

Victoria Park has so far managed to escape the invasions of most of these alien species, but there have been sightings of pythons in Volusia County, and the continued warming of our climate may increase their dispersal from southern Florida. The destructive, toxic Cane Toad is also moving northward from the Okeechobee region. Victoria Park already has a major problem with another invasive amphibian, the Cuban Tree Frog. This large frog has become very common around our homes where it hides by day beneath roof overhangs, window shutters, rain gutters, and other shelters, and then emerges at night to prey on insects and our smaller defenseless species of native tree frogs. They have been responsible for drastic declines of Florida's native tree frogs in many parts of the state, including Victoria Park.

Cuban Tree Frog

Tropical House Gecko

Brown Anole

Muscovy Duck

Wild Boar

Not all alien species are considered invasive. Some have occupied niches in the environment that were largely vacant, so they didn't replace any of our native species. For example, the tiny Greenhouse Frog that lives under our outdoor flower pots, floor mats, and other objects, comes from the tropics and is our only species of frog that doesn't have an aquatic tadpole stage – its eggs are deposited on land and hatch directly into tiny frogs. It apparently hasn't negatively disrupted any native frogs. And three species of alien geckos have become resident in Victoria Park on the outsides of our houses, clubhouses, and other buildings: the Mediterranean Gecko, the Indo-Pacific Gecko, and the Tropical House Gecko. These small lizards with huge, lidless eyes and sticky, wide toe pads are our only nocturnal lizards and thus have occupied a niche that was available and vacant.

This is not true for another of our alien lizards – the Brown Anole (mistakenly called "gecko" by many people). Every home has several, if not dozens, of these small, dark lizards on the walls, tree trunks, in yards and driveways. They are more aggressive than Florida's native Green Anole and may not only be causing this beautiful lizard to retreat higher up in the trees but also to decline in numbers as it is replaced by its invasive cousin.

I wrote about Muscovy Ducks in a recent Victoria Park newsletter and discussed how this large, invasive bird is not only devouring expensive aquatic plantings around our ponds but also fouling the waters and shorelines with its droppings. These prolific ducks must be removed before their numbers explode and our ponds turn brown and lifeless. In a more recent newsletter I wrote about 2 other invasive, alien animals – the Norway Rat and the Black, or Roof, Rat. Although these rodents are much more problematic in urban and farm situations, several homes in Victoria Park have called exterminators to have rats removed from attics.

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NextDoor MyVictoriaPark March 21st 2021

THE NATURE OF VICTORIA PARK

Part V — OUR PONDS

by John Serrao

Have you ever wondered why there are so many ponds in Victoria Park? Are you fortunate enough to live around one of these waterbodies? With a 6-month rainy season, and 70 or more inches of rain per year, Florida is blessed with an abundance of ponds, lakes, streams, swamps, and other wetlands. However, this same abundance of rainfall causes many problems when our state is gaining 1000 residents every day and so much of our land is being cleared of trees, paved over, and developed into residential communities. Instead of soaking into, being absorbed, and filtered by plants, soil, and leaf litter, or being held by natural spongy wetlands and bodies of water, the rain now falls on hard pavement, buildings, and other impervious surfaces and quickly runs off. This runoff picks up silt, pollutants, pesticides, and other chemicals, and there is the potential danger of the water overwhelming these paved areas and causing downstream flooding. That's why Florida requires the construction of stormwater ponds and/or swales (ditches) with new developments, roads, and parking lots. These "artificial", manmade bodies of water function to retain the runoff, remove the pollutants, prevent erosion, and slowly release it to replenish our groundwater (90% of Florida's drinking water is supplied by groundwater!), reducing its downstream impact and, at the same time, creating habitat for wildlife.

Victoria Park has 41 of these ponds, mostly in the Gardens (18) and Trails (13), with one in Victoria Oaks, 8 in the Hills (mostly on the golf course), and the single large "Lake Victoria" in the Commons (see attached map). As I've mentioned in previous "The Nature of Victoria Park" articles for NextDoor Victoria Park (let me know if you'd like me to e-mail these to you if you've missed them), when our 1900-acre development was originally planned in 1999, it was decided to leave almost one-third of this land undeveloped as "Open Space", including more than 500 acres as "conservation areas" which would be permanently reserved for ecological preservation. What about the ponds that were also planned for construction? Victoria Park's Site Mitigation and Management Plan of 1999 states that these bodies of water should be augmented with aquatic vegetation, and that "vegetated littoral edges around the lakes will, in most instances, attract native wildlife and enhance water quality". Sadly, for many years, this practice was not followed and the ponds were all mowed right to their shoreline edges and appeared sterile, "naked", and unattractive to wildlife. Furthermore, with nothing along the pond edges to stop them, the grass clippings fell into the water where they decayed, used up precious oxygen, and formed growths of algae.

A few years ago, however, after much pleading and advising, it was decided to begin purchasing native flowering plants to add around the shorelines of several ponds each year. So far, about 8 ponds have now been completed in Victoria Park, mostly with beautiful aquatic plants from Beeman's Nursery, which specializes in managing and improving ponds. Not only has this increased the ponds' aesthetic appeal, but their attraction to wildlife has increased immeasurably (see accompanying photos by Al LeBoeuf). Turtles, frogs, herons, egrets, anhingas, and even an occasional wood stork have all been seen taking advantage of the cover provided by these plants. These ponds not only look more natural, but they have become healthier. The shoreline plants stop grass clippings and other organic debris from falling into the water, thus preventing the growth of harmful algae and bacteria, which has been a problem in some of our "sterile" ponds. The addition of these native aquatic plants will be expanded to other ponds in our community over the next few years. None of these plantings will grow taller than 2 or 3 feet, so viewscapes of the water will be unimpeded, and none of the plants spread uncontrollably or become invasive like some species of alien plants.

It must be emphasized that such plantings shouldn't be undertaken by individual homeowners who live around these ponds. The species of plants must be carefully chosen to avoid the introduction of invasive, alien plants that would quickly spread and choke the ponds. In addition, the ponds and their shorelines are not privately owned, but are common ground to our entire community. Plantings will be carried out by a licensed aquatics firm versed in the Florida Friendly landscaping we are working to achieve. Hopefully, our ponds will continue to be planted with native vegetation around their shorelines so that Victoria Park will finally meet the goals of our founders.

other reptiles. And they represent the one alien species that is capable of affecting us immediately in a very direct, painful way. Standing on one of their mounds of soil, which hides thousands of ants living in colonies below the surface, results in hordes of attackers swarming out and delivering painful stings and welts.

Posted in **General** to **Victoria Park**

Nextdoor

March 21st 2021

THE NATURE OF VICTORIA PARK

Part V — OUR PONDS

by John Serrao

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Victoria Park Ponds
Victoria Trails
Lake Moore
Victoria Gardens
Victoria Oaks
Victoria Tails
Victoria Commons
Victoria Hills
Dr Martin Luther King Jr Parkway
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John Serrao
Victoria Park

April 2021

Nature & Wildlife. THE NATURE OF VICTORIA PARK

By John Serrao

Part VI - “Dangerous” Wildlife?”

PART VI –“DANGEROUS” WILDLIFE?

This wasn’t going to be the topic for my penultimate entry in “The Nature of Victoria Park” series. But a few recent posts in NextDoor prompted me to pen this response. One post simply announced that “the only good snake is a dead snake” in response to the sighting of a magnificent eastern diamondback rattlesnake in the Victoria Gardens conservation area. And another post advised the readers to beware of the tons of spiders, scorpions, snakes, and alligators that infest our state (in response to a neighbor’s question about fishing in our ponds).

For my entire adult life, both as a professional Naturalist and Outdoor Writer for 39 years and during most of the waking hours in my “off time,” I’ve explored the outdoors. Biology, wildlife, and conservation were what I studied in college at Cornell University’s graduate school. My specialties were insects, spiders, reptiles, and amphibians at first and later birds, mammals, and plants. In addition to conducting as many as 400 programs per year and writing a weekly nature column for a newspaper for 22 years, I performed many wildlife inventories for state parks and other natural areas and wrote checklists and comprehensive Field Guides (“75 Spiders of Central Florida,” a color ID guide created for Stetson University 2 years ago, is available from their Gillespie Museum which receives 100% of the proceeds). Throughout all these endeavors, and continuing into my “retirement,” I’ve never been afraid to explore the outdoors, and my wife, Felicia, and I raised our 3 children to love and appreciate nature.

I can assure you there is no reason to fear walking a trail or boardwalk, canoeing or kayaking a waterway, or bicycling a path in Florida. Sure, there are a few animals that are potentially dangerous to humans, but the chances of encountering them, much less being attacked or bitten, are very small. The scorpion species that is found in this part of Florida – the striped or Hentz’s scorpion – hides beneath loose bark or fallen logs. Its sting is no worse than that of a bee (our country’s few dangerous scorpions are found in the southwest). There are 3 species of widow spiders in central Florida – the black, brown (an alien from Africa), and red (a very rare endemic). They all possess venom that is potentially dangerous to humans but there exists an anti-

venom, and hardly anyone ever gets bitten because these spiders are extremely reclusive and hide in dark crevices, corners, or beneath trash and logs. I studied and wrote a thesis about the black widow in college and was never in danger. Our country's other dangerous spider – the brown recluse – isn't even native to Florida. 99% of so-called "spider bites,"according to scientists, aren't even caused by spider, but rather by biting flies, bugs, or, most commonly, infections by microscopic germs.

Four of Florida's 6 venomous snakes are found in central Florida (the copperhead occurs only in the northern Panhandle and the timber or canebrake rattlesnake in very northern Florida). Of these 4 species, the pygmy rattlesnake and the water moccasin, or cottonmouth, although found often enough in wild areas outside of Victoria Park, have never been seen in our community. Every time, without exception, that I've been called to remove one of these 2 species (or to see one that's already been killed), it's been some other species of snake. That leaves the coral snake and the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, both of which definitely occur in Victoria Park, and I've relocated them from people's properties about 2 or 3 times a year without mishap. These snakes will only bite if handled or (in the case of the rattlesnake) cornered and trying to defend themselves. So, if you see one traveling through your yard, just let it go and consider yourself lucky to have seen an exceptional member of our natural community and heritage (or call me to remove it from your yard if it represents a danger). Victoria Park also has more than 15 other species of harmless, inoffensive snakes that deserve to pursue undisturbed lives.

Finally, there's that icon of Florida – the American alligator. A few, generally small to medium-sized, 'gators are seen every year in our community's many ponds. That's why it's important to keep small pets on a leash when they're outdoors, and away from the shorelines of our ponds just in case. The same goes for small children, who shouldn't be allowed near the edges of Florida's ponds and lakes unaccompanied by an adult anyway. Older kids and adults can safely fish in our ponds if they're residents.

In conclusion, the nature of Victoria Park should be enjoyed without fear of being attacked or bitten. We're very fortunate to have more than 500 acres preserved from development forever. Let's take advantage of this unusual amenity.

Diane Schwarz • Victoria Park
Thank you, John for your response. But what about the bears here?
John Serrao • Victoria Park
Hi Diane;

Nextdoor

You're right! I completely forgot about bears, bobcats, and coyotes. Coyotes will almost always avoid people and never attack (unless in the rare case of rabid animals). The same with bobcats -- in all my years in PA , I saw one bobcat. Since moving to FL 10 years ago, I've seen 45!! And never has one made any move to attack or show aggression, even though I got within a few feet on several occasions to take photos by slowly advancing and not making eye contact. Bears are also very shy and almost always run away. I've actually been inside bear dens in winter in PA to assist Bear Biologists, and held cubs while they studied the tranquilized mother! Here in Florida I've seen bears and they always run away. The danger is when people feed bears -- then they lose all fear of people and can be dangerous. Thanks for bringing it up!

Nextdoor

The Nature of Victoria Park. THE NATURE OF VICTORIA PARK
By John Serrao

Part VII – One Final Thing (19 May 2021)

Victoria Park is celebrating its 20th Anniversary, but our story actually began 2 years earlier when plans were being drawn up for a new, 1900-acre development in DeLand. Because this large tract of land contained several rare and endangered species of wildlife, as well as prime habitat for these animals, agencies such as the US Fish & Wildlife Service, FL Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, and St. John's River Water Management District were involved in these plans to ensure that these species survived. More than 500 acres of this tract were set aside in perpetuity, and it was decided that this acreage be scientifically managed for the preservation of Scrub Jays, Gopher Tortoises, Sandhill Cranes, and other vulnerable species.

In past chapters of this monthly "NextDoor" series, I've covered in detail Victoria Park's Conservation Areas, Endangered & Rare Species, Ponds, and Alien & Invasive Species. I've tried to emphasize the ways in which we've successfully followed the goals set forth in our original 2000 Site Mitigation & Management Plan, as well as our failures. Perhaps no other goals have been thoroughly ignored as the two that stipulated "minimum use of pesticides" and "use of native plants for landscaping". The SMM Plan specifically stated that Victoria Park's "use of pesticides and fertilizers should be minimized"; that "the area covered by turf that requires the application of fertilizers and pesticides" should be reduced; and that "75% of all landscaped portions" should use "xeriscape" or "drought-tolerant native plants".

I moved into Victoria Gardens in 2011, partly because of our large acreage of conservation lands, trails, wildlife, and proximity to so many State Forests, State Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, and Ocala National Forest. But once I became familiar with our development's original plans and goals, I realized that some weren't being met, to the detriment of our wildlife and our environmental quality. My first meetings with Victoria Park management about these concerns were met with complete apathy and outright scorn. However, in 2020 Michelle Saunders, our Community Manager, formed a Victoria Park Environmental Advisory Committee composed of expert scientists, foresters, naturalists, landscapers, and other residents. Despite offering several well-founded suggestions concerning pesticides, landscaping, and pond plantings, our Committee was disbanded within a year. (Currently there are plans to form a new Environmental/Landscaping Committee)

The reasons I started writing this column last November were to highlight Victoria Park's many positive qualities as well as its shortcomings. In my opinion, chief among these failures is our use of persistent, powerful pesticides, not only community-wide but also on an individual basis. It's impossible to drive around Victoria Park without seeing many trucks from various pesticide companies, applying their chemicals on a daily basis. The chemicals being used today are much longer-lasting, stronger, and deadlier than ever. They've been implicated in the worldwide declines of butterflies, bees and other pollinators, as well as caterpillars and insects of all kinds. And, indirectly, they've been responsible for the frightening decreases in populations of songbirds, most of which feed their young a diet of caterpillars and other insects. Several scientific studies have confirmed, to the horror of all those who value the beauty and wonder of nature, that the past few decades have seen a 75% reduction in insects worldwide and a 33% reduction in songbirds. These trends have coincided with the increased use of systemics (long-lasting pesticides that remain in the plants' tissues), glyphosate ("Roundup", which has also been implicated in human cancers), and neonicotenoids (strong pesticides that have been banned in many countries but are commonly used in the U.S., including Victoria Park). I've tried to raise several species of butterflies (monarch, giant swallowtail, zebra longwing) by feeding their caterpillars their specific plants located in Victoria Park, and they've all died!! Using these same plants taken from the wild, the caterpillars have thrived!

If we can't rely on the authorities to do the right thing and ban the use of the worst chemicals, or reduce the use of them all, as was originally intended 2 decades ago, then we have to act individually. Would you rather spray your yards with potentially dangerous chemicals that kill non-target butterflies and honey bees, just to have a perfectly green lawn and "save" your shrubs from pests that might never even arrive? I've never used pesticides in my yard and my plants are doing fine. Resist the urge to apply chemicals, do a bit of research into "natural", safe alternatives, and – most importantly – use native plants instead of exotic ones that require more care and do nothing to attract beneficial insects. Finally, if you live in Victoria Gardens, get on the "No Spray" list so that landscapers know that your property should remain free of their chemicals. (To get on this list, go to the Victoria Gardens Association Living spot on top of the Victoria Park website, click on "VG Landscape Services" on the left to connect to BrightView portal. Don't let them try to convince you that you're making a big mistake!)

Thank you for reading this series and for your kind comments. To receive past articles, send me your e-mail address. Posted in **General** to **Victoria Park**