



# Friends of West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park

## e-cology Newsletter

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### The Drought at West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park

What a summer it has been! Like most parks in the area, West 11<sup>th</sup> Street has lost a good number of trees, including a lot of the tallest Loblolly Pines. The City of Houston has embarked on a tree removal program to take out dead trees from parks and medians across the city. In forested parks like West 11<sup>th</sup> Street, they will be trying to leave as many of the dead trees as possible to serve as habitat for woodpeckers, owls, and flying squirrels. But many of the dead trees on the perimeter, largely the towering Loblolly pines, will probably be taken down.

If you go for a walk through the park these days and take a careful look around, you will notice that, although a lot of the pines are dying or have died, most of the large oaks seem to have survived, as have the majority of the small- to mid-sized trees. Loblolly pines take a double hit when exposed to this kind of environmental pressure. They certainly become stressed from the heat and lack of water, but when stressed, they also attract pine bark beetles, which kill even more trees.

As sad as it is to witness the loss of these majestic trees, the pines here at West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park are already 60 to 80 years old. Although Loblollys can live longer under ideal circumstances (average is about 120 years), here in the urban environment they are nearing the end of their expected life span. If you lived in Timbergrove back in the 90's, you know that the entire park used to be mowed, and it was largely a single species (pine) forest with grass underneath. State Foresters told us back then that if we didn't allow a normal understory to grow back, we would probably lose the entire forest within the foreseeable future. That is why HISD and later the City of Houston agreed with our suggestion to stop mowing the interior of the park.

And the understory has grown back, so that now, although we will lose many of the pines, there are thousands of new trees growing out there, including a mix of oaks, elms, sweet gum, hickory, wild persimmon, mulberry, sycamore, and many others. This diverse mix of trees may actually do better with some of the pines gone. Pine trees use a strategy called "allelopathy" to discourage anything else from growing around them and competing for the available resources. (If your kids have taken the *Wireless Wilderness* cell phone tour, they will have visited stop #9, and can explain this to you!) As pine needles decompose, they increase the acidity of the soil, making it difficult for many plants to grow. The needles, as well as pinecones from the tree, may also trigger additional chemical reactions to discourage competition. When the pine trees grow taller, less light can reach the ground, further limiting the growth of competing plants. So, with the departure of the pines, we should see some interesting changes out in the park over the coming years (including more woodpeckers!).

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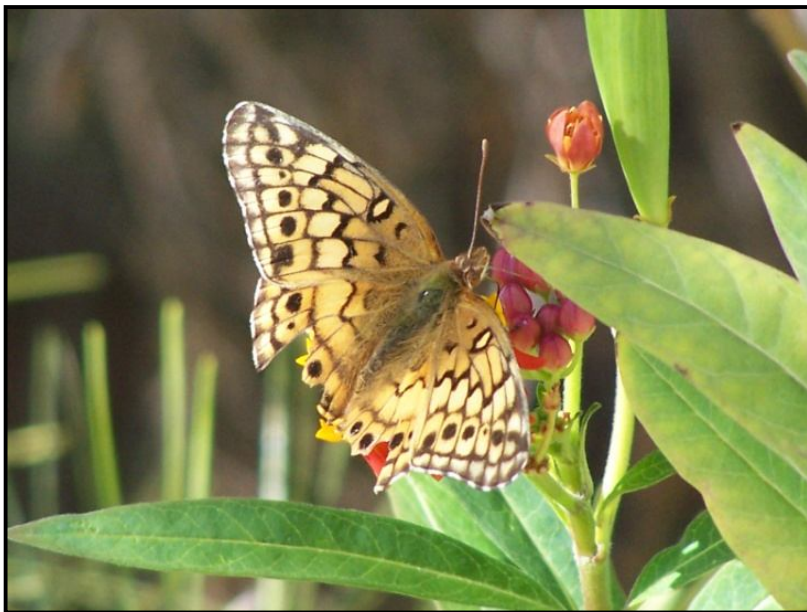
***As the dry weather continues, please be extra careful at West 11th Street and at all of our beautiful parks:***

1. By order of the mayor, all smoking and all use of barbecue grills is banned in city parks until further notice.
2. Avoid driving onto park areas. It is against the law even under normal conditions, and your exhaust system may come into contact with dry grass or leaves and start a fire.

## Beautiful Bugs: New Butterflies Seen in the Park



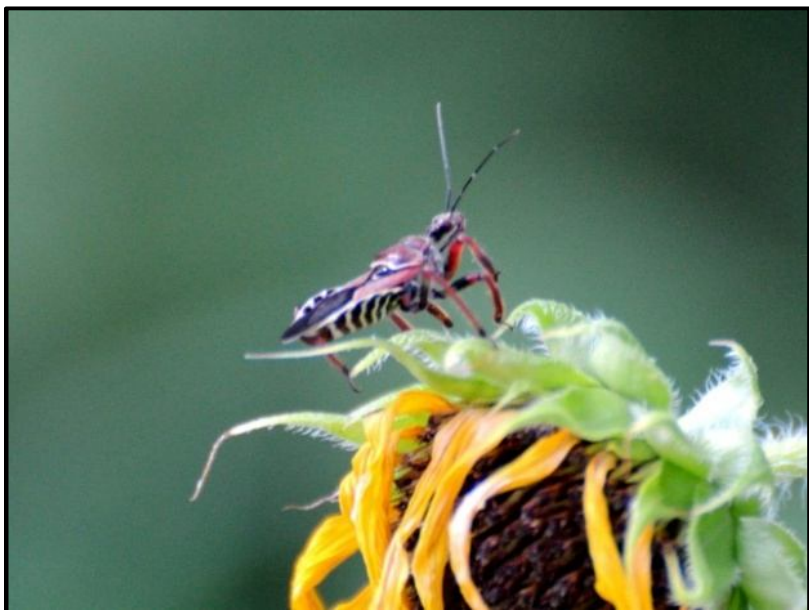
This butterfly, photographed at West 11th Street Park by Jeff Crandall, is a Checkered White. Although Checkered Whites are found throughout most of the United States, this is the first one that has been seen at West 11th Street Park. The wings have a checkered pattern of white and light brown, and can vary greatly. Unlike most butterflies, the males do not produce a pheromone for mating. The male's wing pattern absorbs ultraviolet light, which attracts the females. Checkered Whites lay their eggs on the leaves and stems of plants in the mustard family.



This butterfly, a little the worse for wear, is a Variegated Fritillary. It is a relative of the more common Gulf Fritillary usually seen in the park, but lacks the prominent silver spots on the hind wings seen on that species. Although the Variegated Fritillary can be found throughout the wider Houston area in open sunny fields, they are less common in the inner city, and this is the first one seen at West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park. Like their cousins, they tend to lay their eggs on the leaves of purple and yellow passion flowers.

## Not So Beautiful Bugs: Everyone has a role to play!

Timbergrove Manor neighbor Jeff Crandall is out and about at West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park all the time, and his persistence rewards him with terrific photos of some interesting insects:



This exotic looking bug with its pink and black wings and stunningly striped abdomen is an assassin bug. Insect expert Professor Chris Sansone from Texas A&M identifies it as belonging to the genus *Apiomerus*. Assassin bugs are generally thought of as “good guys” in the garden, because they prey on a broad range of insect pests, including aphids and boll weevils. However, members of this particular genus are known as bee assassins, because of their habit of lying in wait at flowers. Sticky hairs on the front legs help them to grab their prey. They use a long rostrum, or “beak,” to inject a lethal saliva that liquefies the insides of the prey, which are then sucked out. That same saliva can make for a nasty bite if you handle one of these carelessly. Nobody ever said that Nature was always nice!

This large, rather sinister looking insect is a Mydas Fly. It is one of the largest flies, with some tropical species reaching up to 2 inches long. It is sometime mistaken for a spider wasp or a robber fly, but this species is not so aggressive. Its larvae live in decaying wood and feed on beetle grubs, while the adults appear to be nectar feeders. If you look closely, you will see that it has an orange-red ring around its midsection, and orange tips to its legs



#### Reminders while visiting West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park

You are welcome to bring your dog to West 11th Street Park, but city ordinances specify that **THE DOG MUST BE ON A LEASH** and **YOU MUST CLEAN UP AFTER YOUR DOG**. There have been many complaints received from other park users about dog owners who violate these ordinances. Even if you do not care to display common courtesy to your neighbors, you should be aware that park rangers are stepping up their enforcement, and that you can be fined up to \$500 for each violation.

To reach the Park Rangers to report suspicious or illegal activities, please call **832-395-7100** or **832-395-7003**.

## Awards to West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park



We're proud to announce that the *Wireless Wilderness* Cell Phone Tour at West 11th Street Park has been selected to receive the Mayor's Proud Partners award. These annual awards, sponsored by Keep Houston Beautiful, go to individuals or groups that have played an important role in bettering the environment, building community pride, and enhancing the quality of life for Houstonians. For more information about the tour, go to:

[www.wirelesswilderness.org](http://www.wirelesswilderness.org) .

The annual "Best of Houston" issue of the Houston Press has named West 11th Street Park as the "best urban nature spot" in Houston. To read more, go to: <http://www.houstonpress.com/bestof/2011/section/sports-and-recreation-28913/>

### An easy way to support West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park!

Friends of West 11th Street Park invites you to support the park by participating in the Krogers Neighbor to Neighbor Program. Krogers donates money to the park from a special fund every time you go shopping, at no cost to you. Go to this site for instructions and FAQ:

<http://www.krogerneighbortoneighbor.com/pdf/10000090299.pdf>

### Visit our Website and Facebook Page

We post park news, additional information about the sites on the *Wireless Wilderness* tour, slide shows, park history, interesting links, and much more on our website. Go to: [www.wirelesswilderness.org](http://www.wirelesswilderness.org)

We post new park information, sightings of interesting plants, birds, and animals, and other news of interest on our Facebook page. To visit, go to the link below, click on "like," and you can start getting the latest news.

<https://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/West-11th-Street-Park/155095004522289>

Until next time, see you in the park!

## Friends of West 11<sup>th</sup> Street Park

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**Our vision: "This land shall be preserved forever as a natural habitat.  
Future amenities and improvements will be designed to promote  
conservation and the appreciation and enjoyment of nature."**

[west\\_11<sup>th</sup> st park@earthlink.net](mailto:west_11th_st_park@earthlink.net)  
[www.wirelesswilderness.org](http://www.wirelesswilderness.org)