

## Identifying Dinner

By Anna Wiker

It was summer, late afternoon. When the Green Frogs were uttering a few discordant twangs from the Pond across the road and the robins added their constant background chorus, when the Wood Thrushes in the wooded hills were just tuning up to their evening singing that would bring the sun down, and the bees were still humming lazily in the roadside flowers. There were other things in the roadside flora as well-butterflies. My younger sister Faith is the butterflyer. She was there, pointing them out as we walked down the road.

I was watching birds, of course. I didn't know many butterflies.

"Pearl Crescent," said Faith as something smallish and orangeish went past.

"Oh," I said, lowering my binoculars, which had been focused on a wheeling shape, high above us in the azure sky and barely distinguishable through the heat waves (and the dirt on my binocular lenses). Just a Red-tail. *Red-shouldered* would have been a month bird. . .

Just then a large red and black butterfly flew past.

"Was that a Monarch?" I inquired.

"Great Spangled Fritillary," Faith replied, focusing her binoculars on another-different-large red and black butterfly.

"Is *that* a Monarch?" I asked again, eyeing the creature that she was watching.

My sister examined it. "Actually, I think it's a Viceroy."

Close. If I don't know what a butterfly is then I just assume that it's a Monarch or some sort of weird little skipper thingy.

A grackle, being rather ferociously dive-bombed by an insane kingbird, swooped overhead, croaking its frustration at the circumstances in which it found itself. I guess, I mused, they don't call them "tyrant flycatchers" for nothing. The mobber's mate was hawking at the edge of the Pond, perched on an overhanging snag. I'd always suspected that they nested around here. . .

"Hey," said Faith suddenly, leaning forward. "What's that?"

"You mean that thing singing up on the hill? It's a Field Sparrow."

"No, the butterfly."

"Which butterfly? There're a bunch of them."

"That one," Faith replied somewhat impatiently.

"Ooohh, " I said, much enlightened. "Maybe it's a Monarch."

Faith ignored this possibility, probably on the grounds that the butterfly in question was about a third the size of a Monarch and sort of grayish, and plunged after her quarry. Having little else to do and not finding it a good idea to stand in the middle of the road instead, I followed. The thing flitted casually across the road and towards the Pond. Faith-checking, of course, for cars, trucks, tractors, opossums and all other manner of thing that could run into someone crossing a country road-darted after it. I followed. I hate crossing roads. I always have the feeling that if I pause on the median to make sure that no Ivory-Billed Woodpeckers are flying over without me noticing then I'll get hit by an enormous and rusty Ford F-150.

The butterfly that Faith was pursuing dipped out of view for a second (causing my sister to panic) and then returned, landing nonchalantly on a teasel near the edge of the Pond.

"Gotcha, " Faith whispered in relish as she focused her binoculars on the momentarily still butterfly. "It's a...wait, no it's not. I don't think I've ever seen a butterfly like this before."

"You have too seen Monarchs," I said.

"I know," said Faith through gritted teeth. "But this is *not* a Monarch."

The kingbird in the tree above us flew out and captured some hapless mosquito, then returned to the same perch to eat.

"I think, "said Faith, "that it *could* be some sort of- "

I never did learn what sort of thing it was, for at that moment the kingbird swooped off its perch and caught the very butterfly that Faith had been watching. I can only imagine how it must have looked to my sister, whose binoculars were

on the butterfly, when a relatively enormous bird swooped into her field of view and left with the object of interest.

The kingbird, presumably satisfied, soon left. We headed to the house for supper, and all the way back Faith cursed the kingbird roundly. "Dumb bird! I didn't even get to identify the butterfly before it got eaten! I don't think I've ever seen one that *looked* like that! So it could have been a *lifer!*"

"You've seen Monarchs before," I reminded her.