



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist by Jim Anderson

Of hummingbird and butterflies

While you were in the teeth-rattling -10 temperatures last week, Sue and I were basking in the balmy warmth of Las Vegas, Nevada.

We had a wonderful Thanksgiving time with my son Ross, his wife Doni, grandson, Connor, our daughter, Miriam and her family, and friends of Ross and Doni's, the McDonald family from Phoenix. Their daughter Stephanie with her violin and mom, Sherrie with her flute performed beautiful Christmas music.

My grandson, Connor, also entertained us with his unbelievable dexterity while flying his Vortex drone. His breath-taking snap rolls, instant climb to 400 feet AGL, and then split-second drop to ground level was an education in aerobatics. I have no problem seeing him following his dad's skills at flying an F-16.

And all week long a territorial Costa's chased every hummingbird that had the nerve to invade its territory

scurrying for cover; he was relentless. As those of us know who have feeders up for hummers here in summer, our resident rufus, calliope and occasional Allen's are of the same frame of mind, chasing one another around like the fighter jets my son Ross watches over.

Even with the down-below-freezing nights, that hardy Costa's lad was back to watch over HIS feeders by 11 a.m. Hummingbirds have that awesome ability to go into a stupor when the temperature drops to freezing and below. Some, like Allen's, calliope, Costa's, rufus and a few others, can lower their body temperature, heartbeat and breathing rate below normal and literally go to sleep — some for as long as three days — to avoid suffering in the cold.

Then there were the monarch butterflies, alive and well in the 2,900 acre Clark County Wetlands Park. What a wonderful surprise that was! As we were pulling into the parking lot, Sue surprised us all when she almost shouted, "Hey! There's a monarch butterfly!" Sure enough, when we all got to looking, there it was, a fine adult monarch bouncing through the sky like it was the middle of summer.

Little did I know what was coming next...

As we walked up into the

Nature Preserve we were greeted by a museum that was perfect for getting to know what the park was all about. It was there that I met and had a great chin-wag with Sheila Glennie, program assistant for the park, who, when I asked about the Monarch we saw flitting by was not at all surprised. She added, "I can show you some caterpillars if you like to see them."

Did I ever! I had it in my head that ALL the monarchs of the western flyway were basking in the warmth of the preserves in California by now, safe from winter, and slurping nectar from the various flowers along the coast.

Not so, as I discovered when Sheila took me down the elevator of the museum and out into a small demonstration garden. "There's our milkweed" she said, pointing, "and right at the top there's a caterpillar feeding on a clump of blossoms."

To begin with, I thought she was imaging things. All I could see was a clump of green stalks sticking up about knee high, but without a single leaf, and a small lump of white at the top. "That's milkweed?" I asked, incredulous.

With that, Sheila stepped off the trail and pointed to the obvious monarch caterpillar chomping away at the bundle of blossoms atop



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Male Costa's hummingbird all dressed up and no place to go.

the stalk. "Yep, here's the caterpillar."

What an education I got from there on out! Not only did we see one caterpillar, but as we searched more of those so-called milkweed things we found several more caterpillars in different ages, all alive, healthy and stuffing milkweed blossoms down their gullet.

The Clark County Wetlands Park provides lush habitats for over 300 species of plants and animals while improving the quality of the water supply. Recycled sewage water keeps it all going, and there's so much to do there you could spend a week and not see it all. On

one of the (many) nature trails in the park, Sue spotted a soft-shelled turtle sunning itself.

Like the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, Clark County Wetlands Park's award-winning education programs teach youngsters and adults alike about local wildlife and the ecology of the Las Vegas Wash through engaging, interactive programs that promote a sense of place and a connection to nature.

And then there's another magnificent place to explore, The Valley of Fire, a geological wonderland. But you'll have to go and see that one for yourself...

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