



**Tales from a Sisters Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**There's no such thing as a free lunch**

Just about everyone who reads, watches or listens to nature stories is familiar with the plight of monarch butterflies in the Western United States. Their numbers have dropped from millions to thousands in the last 20 years for a variety of reasons, most wrapped around habitat and their food plant, milkweed.

Well, there I was over at Clarno, on the banks of the John Day River, visiting and delighting in the large milkweed growing operation the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service have teamed up on. They were growing milkweed for replanting on their lands in hopes of producing hundreds of monarch butterflies.

Imagine my horror when I was photographing a very beautiful, fat and healthy caterpillar on the milkweed when suddenly a big paper wasp flew by, carrying one of the caterpillars off.

My first impulse was to knock the wasp out of the sky and save the caterpillar, but thank goodness I checked that action and just watched it go by, headed for its huge nest in a cottonwood right alongside the monarch garden.

As I watched the huge wasp nest I could see other wasps returning with their

prizes, so I got out my binocs, sat down in the edge of the monarch garden to watch the show. As I was observing it, a magpie suddenly came flying through my field of vision, and as I watched it snatched one of the fully-loaded wasps out of the air.

I thought of the old saying, "There's no such thing as a free lunch in the world of nature."

Sure, when things are going smoothly, the caterpillar will be getting a free lunch from the plant's life (and the plant may be getting fertilized by the caterpillar's frass/poop). But, then a wasp comes by, snatches up the caterpillar and hauls it off to feed its babies, and then along comes the magpie who grabs the wasp out of the sky and hauls it home as food for its babies.

The pages keep turning, and along comes a bird hawk/accipiter, who sees the magpie and decides it would be just the right thing to feed its young, and the tale goes on and on...

And, if a bird doesn't get the wasp, a fence lizard watching from a nearby rock may swallow the wasp, not bothered a bit by all the stinging going on — and then a kestrel comes along and grabs up the lizard to feed its hungry nestlings.

But let's go back to the wasp: The paper wasp is classified as a predatory wasp, in the vespidae family, known as killer wasps. They are very good at ridding a cash crop of insects that interfere with a farmer's trying to make a living, and way better than pesticides. And there's no chemical residue left lying around to kill everything else.

For a bigger caterpillar, wasps will use their stinger to subdue it and then after feeding on it themselves, roll it up into a ball and haul it back to their kids for breakfast, lunch

or evening meal. For harmful larvae, such as the cabbage butterfly, for example, that's an end to the farmer's problem.

I've been told it is possible to purchase parasitic wasps from a garden shop that sells insects, and use them to destroy caterpillars causing serious damages to a cash crop. The wasps lay their eggs in caterpillars, then when the caterpillar enters the chrysalis stage to become an adult insect, the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the developing butterfly, then metamorphose into an adult wasp then exit through a tiny hole and fly off.

My wife Sue and I saw the evidence of that phenomenon back in the 1980s when we brought 10 or so California tortoiseshell butterfly chrysalids home with us from a huge hatch near Tumalo Falls. We wanted to obtain emerging butterfly photos. However, we observed (and photographed) only jewel-like adult parasitic wasps emerging from the chrysalid cases, not the butterflies we hoped for.

I don't think anyone offers paper wasps for sale, as they can become a serious pest when they build their big paper-like bag nests near people. Any perceived threat to the wasps' welfare will cause a lot of buzzing and

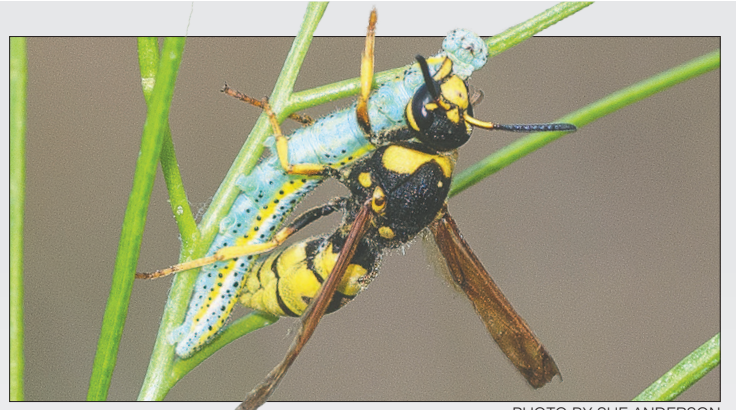


PHOTO BY SUE ANDERSON

Becker's White butterfly caterpillar about to become food for an Oregon Sand Wasp.

stinging on humans nearby and that makes everyone unhappy.

If you get bored with television, and the library hasn't got the book you want to read, take a hike out to the nearest tent caterpillars' nest, set your picnic chair and lunch close by and watch the action. But remember, when the wasps complain about your presence and snack on your peanut butter and jam sandwich, "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch in nature..."

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**AUG 6 THUR** **Paulina Springs Books Virtual Event Books In Common Regional Literary Event Series with Larry Watson** 6:30 p.m. The author will share from his new book "The Lives of Edie Pritchard." For more info call 541-549-0866 or go to [BooksInCommonNW.com](http://BooksInCommonNW.com).

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**The Suttle Lodge Thursday on the Deck Summer Wine Series** Seatings every 30 minutes from 1 to 4 p.m. Wine paired with small-plates from the chef. Reservations required at [www.thesuttlelodge.com/happenings](http://www.thesuttlelodge.com/happenings).

**Food Cart Garden at Eurosports Trivia Night** 5:30 to 6:15 p.m. Family-friendly trivia. Socially-distant. Free. For additional information call Eurosports at 541-549-2471.

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**Hardtails Bar & Grill Live Music with Juju Eyeball** 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Beatles tribute. Free. No cover! For more information call 541-549-6114 or go to [hardtailsoregon.com](http://hardtailsoregon.com).

**Food Cart Garden at Eurosports Friday Car Show** 5-6:30 p.m. Bring your cool or vintage car for the free Friday car show. For more information call Eurosports at 541-549-2471.

**AUG 8 SAT** **Hardtails Bar & Grill Live Music with Nightlife** 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Portland classic rock & more. Free. No cover! For more info call 541-549-6114 or go to [hardtailsoregon.com](http://hardtailsoregon.com).

**Chops Bistro Live Music with Bob Baker & Mark Barringer** 6 to 8 p.m. For information call 541-549-6015.

**AUG 9 SUN** **Fir Street Park Sisters Farmers Market** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Every Sunday: fresh local produce and more. Pre-order and details at [sistersfarmersmarket.com](http://sistersfarmersmarket.com).

**Chops Bistro Live Music with Bill Keale** 5 to 7 p.m. For information call 541-549-6015.

**AUG 12 WED** **Black Butte Ranch Live Music with Julie Southwell and Friends** 6 to 8 p.m. Socially distant on the lawn near The Lakeside Bistro. For information call 541-595-1282 or go online to [www.blackbutterranch.com](http://www.blackbutterranch.com).

Events Calendar listings are free to advertisers. Submit items by 5 p.m. Fridays to [lisa@nuggetnews.com](mailto:lisa@nuggetnews.com)