

THE VILLAGE BIRDING LIFE

“Butterfly Royalty”

by HSV Audubon

If you've followed this series you know that Audubon members are distracted easily by Nature's wonders. This time of the year it's often butterflies, specifically, the species Diana Fritillary. As Arkansas' official state butterfly, you might say that the Diana are the king and queen of butterflies.

Butterfly experts report that over 150 species of butterflies have been observed in Arkansas. As you recall from your high school biology class, all plants and animals are scientifically categorized. For sake of simplicity let's just say that the species Diana are Insects under the order of Lepidoptera and part of a family of butterflies called Brushfoots. (Moths are also in the order Lepidoptera but are in a separate group. There also are at least 150 moth species in Arkansas.) The most well known of all N. American butterflies, the Monarch, is also a Brushfoot. The name Brushfoot refers to this family's habit of using their bristly front legs to clean their mouth parts.

Diana are large, beautiful butterflies. What makes them really special is that they are rare enough to be considered an endangered species. Diana are typically found in the mountainous areas of the southern U.S. ranging from eastern Oklahoma to portions of the southern Appalachians. West central and northwest Arkansas, including our Village, are areas that offer a good chance of seeing one of these beauties.

Diana are dimorphic, that is, the male and female are distinctly different in appearance. Diana are associated with rich woodlands where they require Violet plants to survive. As with all butterflies, they have a life cycle of egg, caterpillar or larva, pupa or chrysalis and adult. The bright orange and dark brown male Diana adults begin flying in mid May. The iridescent blue females start flying a couple of weeks later. Although dependent on the forest, both adults venture out to field and prairie edges in search of rich, nectar bearing flowers. The adults fly throughout the summer. As fall approaches the female Diana will have laid her eggs near violet plants. The hatched caterpillars burrow into the ground where they will remain throughout the winter. In the spring the caterpillars emerge to feed on the violet plants, form a chrysalis and then reemerge as adults butterflies- one of Nature's true miracles.

As always HSVBIRDS.ORG has a lot of information about everything you'd like to know about birds and some of Nature's other wonders. HSV Audubon meets the 2nd Friday of each month, except July/August, at 10:00 at the Coronado Center. Guests are always welcome.

Photos by Vic Prislipsky