

The Critter Edition

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The Critters of the Potomac Highlands

By Jean A. Flanagan

The Potomac Highlands are home to an abundance of critters - from the white-tailed deer to the black bear and everything in between.

One evening, around dusk, I was driving home when I happened upon a black bear ambling down the middle of the road. It turned around and looked at me and proceeded to climb the nearest tree. I was impressed by its silky fur and the nimbleness of its climb. For a big critter, it moved up the tree pretty fast.

I stopped my vehicle and rummaged in my purse for my camera. It didn't seem to like me sitting there, so it climbed down that tree, walked about 10 feet and climbed another tree.

By that time, I had found my camera and was able to take a few shots. Since the bear was still in the tree, I decided it was safe to move along, which is probably what the bear wanted all along.

Turkey and quail and grouse, oh my! Most often heard rather than seen. They hide in brush and scare the bejeezes out of you, if you happen upon them.

It's not unusual to spot a spotted

fawn in early summer - they are as scatter-brained as they are cute and comical. Don't be surprised if they run directly at you before they run away. Most often, they stick close to mamma. If you spot a fawn, mamma is usually somewhere close.

Chipmunks and squirrels are a bit crazy, and often the bane of the most well-behaved dog. Chipmunks dart around and blend into the woods very well.

Squirrels have been known to chew on log homes and wooden decks. I've heard they make a good stew.

Raccoons and skunks are nocturnal and are seen mostly on the road, dead. I stopped my car one evening to let a fat raccoon waddle across in front of me. It was followed by three more, equally fat raccoons, who, one at a time, thought it was okay for them to waddle across the road, too.

I laughed the whole way home.

Opossums are also nocturnal and are also most often seen on the road, dead. They are North America's only marsupial, which means they carry their young in a pouch.

Alive, they are really very good crit-

ters to have around. They are scavengers. They clean up the "leavings" of dead animals, even what the vultures and eagles don't eat. They also eat ticks, slugs and beetles, so they are good for the garden.

They're not the cutest animal in the forest, but the babies have white fur and little pink noses, making them borderline cute.

AND they are immune to rabies.

We can't forget the groundhogs - well, maybe we can. After all, it is gardening season. I think they are the critters who take one bite out of every tomato on the vine.

Wild critters are always, always best observed at a distance.

If you happen along a baby critter, leave it alone. Its mother is usually somewhere nearby. If not, she left it alone for a reason.

If you happen along a dying critter, leave it alone. Wild animals can be very aggressive when they're hurt. They have very sharp teeth and claws.

When they eat the flowers or the vegetables in your garden, try to remember, they were here first.





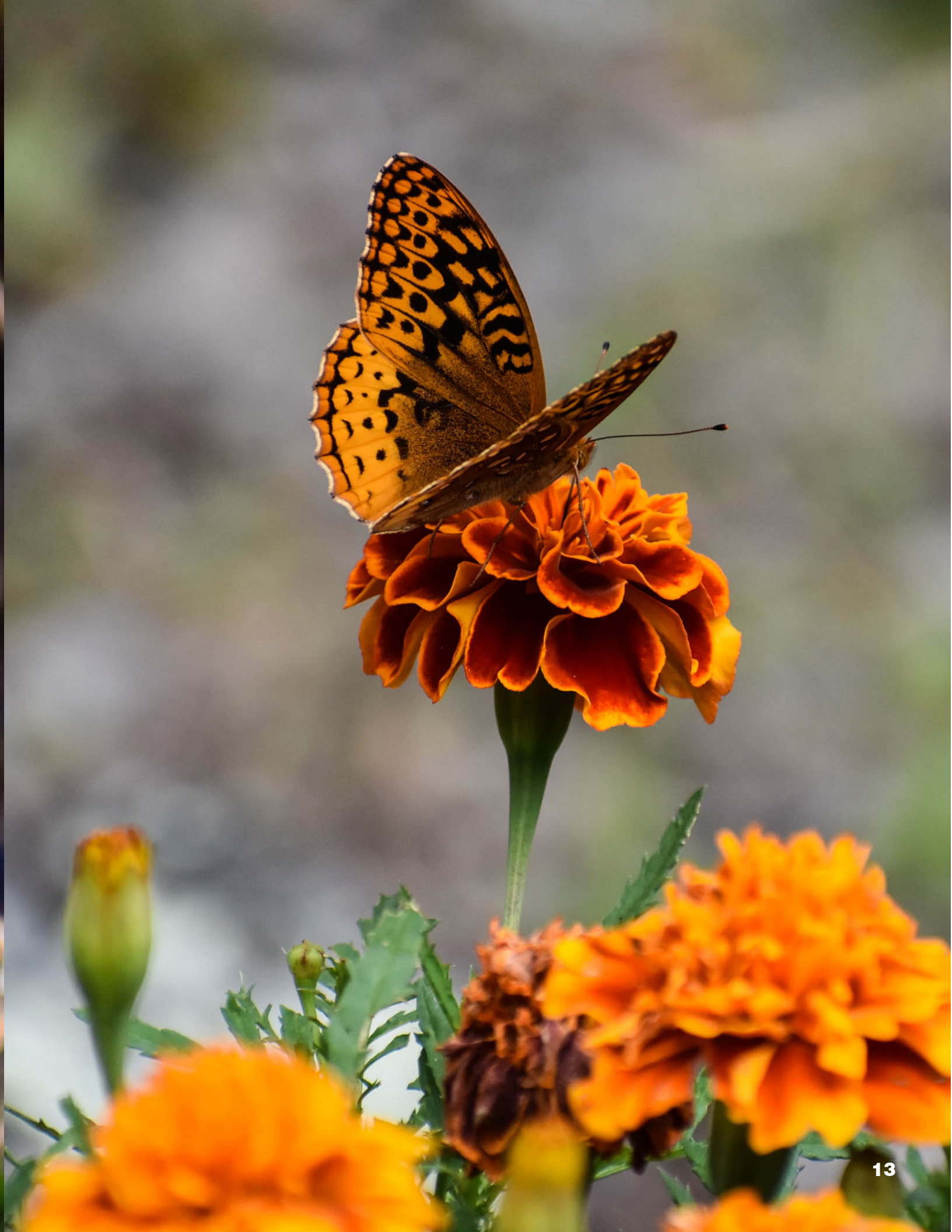














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