



THESE CAN DO IT ALL! THE ALPEN APEX 492 BINOCULARS

Super-Optics

New binoculars let you watch butterflies or mountains up close

BY JIM ANDERSON

This is going to sound like a commercial, but really it's not. I do not do this very often, for ethical reasons and also for fear of discovering later on someone got their nose out of joint because I gave them wrong advice. However, I'm going to stick my neck out and share a wonderful experience I had the other day with a new pair of binoculars.

My wife, Sue, as many of you know, runs a website for butterfly stuff (butterflybuzz.com). Okay, that's the commercial out of the way, but I had to do it if I want to keep out of the doghouse.

Among the items Sue sells are binoculars that are used for butterflying as well as birding. She's always looking for new products, so when Alpen Optics out of Cucamonga, Calif. called to say they had a new binocular that might work for butterflies she said okay, send it up for a trial.

The box arrived, I opened it, and from what I saw at first glance it looked like any other binocular I've seen over the years. I had just removed the dust cover from the eyepieces when I saw a spider scooting across the floor. Many of you know I'm pretty tight into spiders, so without hesitation I placed the newfangled binocs before my eyeglasses and began to focus in on it. Zoom! It came right in, sharp as a tack.

Well, you know how spiders are. Over the years the dumb ones that hesitate while crossing the kitchen floor are quickly

smashed and dropped in the toilet. This one was living proof that Darwin probably knew what he was talking about: It was really moving, but right toward the chair I was sitting on.

Even though the spider was rushing right along I was able to keep it in focus — and the closer it got, the more amazed I got. It stopped right next to my big toe and was still in focus! Not only could I see it clearly, but I was also able to *identify it* as a common male grass spider, *Agelenopsis pennsylvanica* — the markings and pedipalps (the little appendages near the mouth) were that clear.

Then, just for the fun of it, I swung the glasses up and started looking for the summit of North Sister, visible from our kitchen window. Sure, it took a bit of twisting on the focus knob to go from my big toe to the top of a mountain several miles away. But it worked in seconds, and when the summit came into focus, it was just as sharp as the spider — and I was looking *through* the kitchen window!

The 8 x 32 Alpen Apex 492 binocular weighs just a tad over a pound, has coated lenses and is waterproof. It comes with a nifty case and comfortable neck strap, and the really good news is it costs only around \$275. It also has quick-twist eyecups to effortlessly go from glasses to the naked eye.

Naturalists have to be prepared for what creeps, flies or falls on us. These new Alpen binocs focus from infinity to less than four feet in seconds, and for me, that about covers the gamut of what I am involved with 24/7. In addition, I know for sure that they will work for identifying spiders, eagles, osprey, butterflies and glaciers. Can't beat that with a stick!

naturalselection@uci.net 