



Klamath Network Featured Creature

February 2008

California Banana Slug (*Ariolimax californicus*)

General Description:

The California banana slug (*Ariolimax californicus*) is a yellow member of the Arionidae family that resembles, you guessed it, a banana. However, this shell-less mollusk may also be green, white, or brown. Black spots, sometimes covering the majority of the body, are not uncommon. An individual may change color slightly over time, depending on light, food, and moisture availability. *A. californicus* is the second largest slug species in the world, growing up to 25 cm (9.8 in)! The slug's single lung opens externally via a pneumostome, which is highly vascularized for gas exchange. Banana slugs use two pairs of extendable and retractable tentacles in order to sense their environment. The larger pair ("eyestalks") detects movement and light (a slug "sees" and moves according to areas of light and dark). The smaller pair detects chemicals. As is the case with all slugs, banana slugs move slowly with their one muscular foot.

Feeding:

Banana slugs are detritivores. They consume leaves, dead plants, mushrooms, and animal droppings with their radula, turning these foods into soil. This highlights the important niche this decomposer occupies in the forest, breaking down matter into soil and spreading seeds and spores. Unfortunately for the banana slug, raccoons, shrews, moles, ducks, geese, salamanders, and garter snakes find this creature tasty, after they roll the slug in the dirt to compact its slime!

Where to see it in the Network:

California banana slugs are common in Redwood National and State Parks, Oregon Cave NM, and Whiskeytown NRA.



All images - Wikipedia

Distribution:

A. californicus lives on moist forest floors along California's coast. Other banana slug species can be found along the Pacific Coast from Alaska to central California.

Habitat:

California banana slugs require moist surroundings. Damp forest floors and crevices in rotting trees are usual haunts for this slug. Banana slugs aestivate in order to avoid drying out. Once it has found a suitable dark and damp place to escape drier weather, it will curl up tightly and surround itself with a mucous layer for a few days. California banana slugs will venture back to these same hide-outs again and again.

Behavior:

Banana slugs are hermaphrodites. When ready to mate (several times a year), a banana slug will smell out the slime trail left by another slug. The slugs exchange sperm and lay about 20 opaque eggs under leaves and logs. Interesting enough, this slug can fertilize itself and produce eggs without a mate. Besides carrying pheromones to attract a mate, *A. californicus*' slime serves many purposes. The slime aids in movement, coating the ground with a mucous layer that the slug can easily glide upon. It helps prevent dehydration and desiccation. The slime also helps the slug's skin stay moist so it can breathe through it.

Status:

California banana slugs are common in areas that meet their needs and are not under any special status throughout their range.

Interesting Fact:

Scientists have been trying to replicate the glue properties of the banana slug's slime because it is one of the best natural glues.

More Information:

[Wikipedia](#)
[NaturePark](#)