EXPLORING THE WORLD OF BANANA SLUGS

on Filoli's Nature Preserve

Have you been to Filoli to hike on a school field trip or with your family? If so, perhaps you had the chance to see banana slugs up close! They are very interesting creatures that we find here at Filoli in our redwood forests, creek and pond habitats, and in other shady, damp areas of the Nature Preserve. A great time to look for banana slugs is after it rains because moisture creates the perfect environment for them to be active.

Why do banana slugs make slime?
Banana slugs make slime to move across the forest floor. They also use slime as glue so they don't fall off a log, as shown in the photo to the left.

Another use for their slime is to find other banana slugs. Just follow the slime trail!

Once they make the slime, they use it to help them slide along the forest floor on a 'foot'. Their foot doesn't look like our foot at all! The muscular foot stretches the entire length of their body. It contracts and relaxes, which scoots banana slugs along the ground. Try tightening up and relaxing your arm muscles to get the idea of how they move. If banana slugs didn't have any slime, they would get stuck in the dirt!

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The slime has another important purpose: it is toxic. If predators try to eat banana slugs, the predators will get a mouth full of slippery slime that will numb their mouths, making it difficult to eat banana slugs. This is a great adaptive survival technique! One final surprising purpose of banana slug slime is that they use the slime to clean themselves. Dirt and debris that sticks to banana slugs can be moved down to their tails where the debris collects. What do you think they do with the dirt on their tails? They eat it!

What are other body parts of banana slugs?

Now, let's look at its tentacles. Tentacles are somewhat like antennas. Look closely and you will see that banana slugs have 4 tentacles: 2 large upper tentacles, and 2 small lower tentacles.

What do you think banana slugs need the tentacles for? If you were a banana slug, what would you use your larger and smaller tentacles for? If you think the tentacles help banana slugs to see and smell, those are great observations! They help banana slugs see light and movement (upper optical tentacles) and to smell and feel (lower sensory tentacles).

Upon close observation, we see an air hole on the right side of its body. Banana slugs breathe through the air hole, bringing oxygen to their single lung! How many lungs do people have?

Watch this video and look for both sets of tentacles and its breathing hole on the right side of the banana slug. The tentacles actually retract (shrink in size) when the banana slug gets scared, as you will see in the video.

Now that you have seen a banana slug in action can you draw one? Watch the video again, if needed, and use the photos to help you find all its parts.

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How does slime help banana slugs thrive in the redwood forest?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Sketch the Banana Slug
Label the optical tentacles, sensory tentacles, air hole, and foot.

How long is the banana slug? _____ Inches

List the colors of its body:

_____

We hope you enjoyed exploring banana slugs on Filoli's Nature Preserve. We look forward to you visiting Filoli on your next hike!

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