

GRAB BAG

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

The banana slug can grow to almost 10 inches long and is a master decomposer.

Wild Side

Ariolimax columbianus

Pacific banana slug

By LYNETTE
RAE MCADAMS

A native of the forest floor from southeast Alaska all the way to Southern California, the Pacific banana slug especially thrives in the moist environs of our local coastal woodlands.

The second largest species of terrestrial slug on the planet, it can grow to almost 10 inches long and weigh as much as four ounces. Typically yellow in color (denoting its common name), this slug can also appear greenish, brown, tan, or even white, and often exhibits dark brown spots. Using a muscular foot, it moves at a rate of six inches per minute.

Well-known for its slimy reputation, *A. columbianus* is offensively gross to many, but widely misunderstood. Serv-

ing as a master decomposer, it consumes forest plant matter at an almost alarming rate, helping spread seeds and spores in the process, all the while excreting a nitrogen-rich fertilizer — further securing its place of importance in the nutrient cycle.

While admittedly off-putting to most humans, the thick mucous secreted by a banana slug aids in the multiple purposes of respiration, locomotion, self-protection against predators, and perhaps most importantly, the attraction of a mate. Laced with pheromones, the slime — a universal delicacy among slugs — draws potential partners toward each other at the beginning of what will become a long and slow (very, very slow) courtship.

Though possessing both male and female genitalia,

and biologically capable of self-fertilization, the hermaphroditic banana slug prefers to expand its gene pool by mating with another slug. In a ritual of copulation that would make even a presidential candidate blush, mating slugs stimulate one another for hours until penises erupt from their heads — sometimes as long as the slug's whole body — then exchange sperm and store it to fertilize their own eggs internally. To disengage from intercourse, the slug gnaws off its own penis.

On the brighter side, Pacific banana slugs have two sets of tentacles: The upper pair, known as eyestalks, are responsible for sensing light and motion; the lower pair detect chemicals or distinguish smells. With incredible dexterity, the slug can retract or extend the tentacles at will, and should one be lost, the slug can grow a new one. (Sadly, this regenerative property does not apply to genitalia.)

Some reports indicate that licking the underside of a banana slug will make one's tongue go numb; only the most intrepid scientists among us know for sure.



PHOTO BY MATT LOVE

The loose life lives on in the Bridge Tender in Seaside.

A GLIMPSE INSIDE

By MATT LOVE

Bridge Tender

Thirty-one years is a long time between visits to a bar, but it sure has a nice ring to it.

About a month ago, I walked into the Bridge Tender in Seaside, ordered a beer, watched a slack Necanicum River from the corner window, and dived back into my personal history.

It was noon on a weekday. I had nothing to do. Seaside felt listless under overcast skies.

The last time I patronized the Bridge Tender was the summer of 1985 when I was 21 years old. My buddies and I were

rampaging through town, acting dumb, living the loose life that characterized that era.

Let me admit something: I miss the loose American life. I want to write a book about the important lack of looseness in our culture without sounding nostalgic. Is that possible? Is it possible to make the case for loose again and commit to a Giant National Untethering? Let's get it loose. Let it loose.

I surveyed the Bridge Tender. It seemed pretty much the same as I remembered it from my

youth. The gritty wood interior was still intact! Thank the gods of Oregon tavern life.

Yes, there was liquor and micro beers now, video slots, a flatscreen TV and clear air. But there were also plenty of cultural items from the loose past: a cigarette machine, a (non-internet) jukebox, pool tables, and locals talking gossip about other locals who didn't measure up in multiple categories of human measuring. I could listen to these men for hours spin their yarns of eternal looseness.

I might also add that not a single Bridge Tender customer was fiddling on a smartphone, dinking on a tablet or seemingly concerned that work needed doing somewhere else. They were fall feeling, unhurried, talking good profane talk and extolling the virtues of naps. It's called loose.

Matt Love is the author/editor of 14 books, including "A Nice Piece of Astoria" and "Of Walking in Rain." His books are available at coastal bookstores or his website, nestuccaspitpress.com



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