

# Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell

## Leopard Slug

<b>Class:</b> Gastropoda
<b>Order:</b> Stylommatophora
<b>Family:</b> Limacidae
<b>Genus:</b> Limax
<b>Species:</b> Limax maximus



Photos Top: fcps.edu ▪ Bottom: blog.uvm.edu

Many of you already know the story of “Clarence/Clare,” the *Limax maximus*, or Great Grey Slug (Leopard Slug), that got loose from its container. For those of you who haven’t heard, let me give you a recap - -

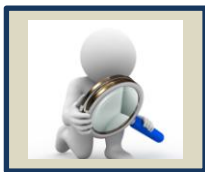
Susan Otis, one of our frequent Help Desk clients, brought a slug to the office for us to identify. It was a beautiful example of a Leopard Slug.

I brought it home the Friday before our regular monthly Master Gardener meeting, planning on doing a “show and tell” for the meeting. Over the course of the next few days, before our meeting on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, I checked to make sure “CC” (Clarence/Clare) had plenty of moisture and vegetation. The slug appeared to be active and surviving his/her confinement quite well.

Let me note that during this time, I did show it to a couple of folks, including my lovely wife Sherry. I, also, should tell you that I had been leaving it on the dining room table (aka my desk) next to some files and catalogs I had been “working through.” Anyway, come that Wednesday afternoon (before our Thursday BAMGA meeting), I went to check on the slug (you might guess I only dubbed it “Clarence/Clare” after it went missing!) and, uh-oh, CC was gone. Empty container. NOT GOOD!!!

I thought about filing a “missing slug” report but, knowing slugs leave a “slime trail” behind as they travel, I figured I could do the sleuthing on my own. Plus, they move very slowly – their fast-track speed is up to six inches per minute. I can move at least that fast, so should be no problem, right? WRONG.

I quickly located, and started following, the “clue” (slime trail) - - it slinked down the side of the container and, in a zig-zag pattern, roamed across the files, magazines and papers on the dining room table. I found where the slug had eaten a quarter-size bite out of the corner of an information sheet on Leopard Slugs. Was CC trying to tell me something? Back to sleuthing - - I’m still thinking this should be easy - - just follow the trail to its end, and return CC to his/her container. Do that – everybody’s happy – but no such luck. The trail ended at the edge of the table. *Note from CC:* The world is flat, and you can fall off.

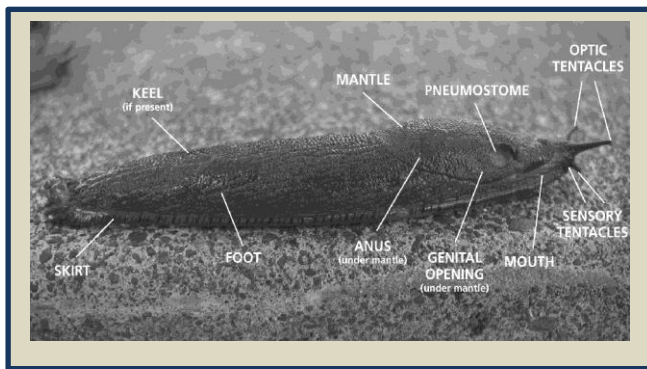


I continued my search to no avail. At the edge of the table, the trail just ended – it didn’t go under the table – it didn’t surface on the carpet below – it didn’t appear anywhere on the chair that was nearby – just vanished into thin air. It was like “Beam me up, Scotty” - - CC had vanished. NOW WHAT? Do I “fess up” to Sherry – let her know there’s a slimy slug slithering around the house, waiting to squish out at the most inappropriate time and place? Not yet - - I’d keep looking. ☹

The rest of Wednesday went by. Thursday morning came. No Clarence/Clare, no show and tell. With only an information sheet (and that slightly eaten), I went to the BAMGA meeting.

Our President, Jim Perry, allowed me to give a quick little “non-show and tell,” which I did, including the fact I would have to tell Sherry soon if Clarence/Clare didn’t show up. My plan was to search extensively one more time, then tell her Thursday evening that she might just want to keep an eye out for CC.

I’ll come back to that great plan (did I follow through?), but, first, let’s take a look at a few facts about the Leopard Slug.



Photos clockwise from top:  
 Anatomy: [ansci.wisc.edu](http://ansci.wisc.edu)  
 Egg Cluster: [fcps.edu](http://fcps.edu)  
 Mating: [ansci.wisc.edu](http://ansci.wisc.edu)

The Leopard Slug is an immigrant to the U.S., native to Europe but accidentally introduced to many other parts of the world. It is now very common in the U.S. The Leopard Slug is one of the largest keeled slugs - - on its short keel (located on its tail), there are 48 longitudinal rows (elongated and detached) tubercles.

This slug grows to four inches in length and has four tentacles, two long and two short ones. They are grayish yellow with black spots or bands.

Their habitat is fields, woods and gardens. Being slugs, they prefer damp shady places and are mostly nocturnal, emerging sometimes during rainy days. During daylight, they can be found under rocks, logs, and in other dark places.

Leopard Slugs' mating habits are interesting in that they circle each other before mingling their bodies together. They do this on a tree branch or near an edge; then, they fall off, suspended by hanging mucus (slime) from the branch or edge.

Being Hermaphrodites (having both male and female parts), the slugs mate, allowing *both* to lay eggs. They lay their clear eggs in clusters of over 100 eggs, with new slugs hatching the following Spring.

Leopard Slugs live up to three years, taking two years to reach sexual maturity. They hunt at night and crawl or glide on a cushion of mucus slime, using it as their map (follow the "yellow brick

road") to return to their same feeding spot the next night. The slugs feed on leaves, flowers and fruits of plants, but have also been known to feed on mushrooms and carrion. They will also hunt other slugs. They do have a number of predators, though - from toads and turtles to beetles, birds and, even, fireflies. Ducks and eastern moles like them, too. Leopard Slugs can be a problem in the garden if they are in great numbers. They're listed by state Agricultural Departments, from Florida to Oregon, as a major agricultural pest. It is generally thought that predators will keep them in check.

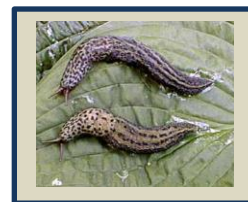
They are "good guys" at times, feeding on many plants we call weeds, i.e., Wild Strawberry, Chicory, Common Ragweed and others.

Now, *back to our missing Clarence/Clare*. While I had planned to fill Sherry in on that Thursday evening (honest!), time passed, and I forgot to tell her about it that night or even later. It wasn't until we ran into Betsy Brown at the farmer's market, and she asked if I had located the slug, that it dawned on me I never had gotten around to mentioning it. Sherry now knows of CC's disappearing act (she happened to be at the farmer's market that morning). We've had a lot of fun wondering where it might be or where it will turn up! Regrettably, though, after exhaustive searching, vacuuming and quizzing even Sally (our Akita/Beagle mix), Clarence/Clare is officially listed as a MISSING SLUG.

Fortunately, I have not been barred from bringing insects (bugs) inside the house; however, there are now restrictions governing placement and viewing of such specimens!!!!

I wish CC well wherever he/she might be!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

☺  
 Jim



Other references include:

[http://www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/leopard\\_slug.htm](http://www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/leopard_slug.htm)

Microscope: [triplecrossconstruction.com](http://triplecrossconstruction.com) ▪ Two slugs: [fcps.edu](http://fcps.edu)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limax\\_maximum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limax_maximum) ▪ <http://ipm.ncsu.edu/AG136/slug6.html>

[www.extension.umd.edu](http://www.extension.umd.edu) (University of Maryland Extension "Home and Garden Information Center")