Cave Cricket

Photo by: Eddie Dunbar

Lives Under Stones and Boards

Latin Name: Many genera and species

Order: Orthoptera

Subfamily: Rhaphidophorinae

Cave crickets live in caves or deep underground. Above ground they live in wells, rotten logs, stumps, hollow trees and amongst leaf, litter or under stones, boards and logs. These crickets are humpbacked in appearance and are also known as “camel crickets.” They also have very large hind legs, and long, slender antennae. They are wingless, from about 10-20 mm in body length and brown. These crickets feed on vegetative matter.

Earwigs

Photo by: Eddie Dunbar

Mothers Care for Young

Latin Name: **Order:** Forficulidae
Forficula auricularia Linnaeus **Family:** Dermaptera

Earwigs are known locally as “pincherbugs”. They do in fact pinch, using forceps-like organs on the abdomen. Adult insects are about 12-25 mm in body length. The head is dark brown with black eyes. The thorax is very dark brown with wings that are hidden beneath leathery coverings called “elytra”. The abdomen is very dark brown. The insect feeds on living and decaying vegetative matter. They also may feed on living and dead insects. Mothers care for their eggs until they hatch, protecting the eggs from would be predators and fungus.

Common Ground Beetle

Photo by: Eddie Dunbar

Predator of Invertebrates in Leaf Litter

Latin Name: Pterostichus sp.

Order: Coleoptera

Subfamily: Carabidae

Two species of these ground beetles are common in the San Francisco Bay Area. These are predators, feeding on a wide range of soft bodied invertebrates in leaf litter and beneath objects on the ground. The beetles are entirely black. Antennae are long. Fine lines are etched along the length of the wing covers. Beetles are medium-sized, with body lengths 10-28 mm.

Jerusalem Cricket

Photo by: Eddie Dunbar

Feeds on Decaying Organic Matter

Latin Name: Stenopelmatus sp.

Order: Orthoptera

Family: Stenopelmatidae

Also, known as “potato bugs,” these insects have nothing to do with potatoes. They live underground or under debris on the ground and feed upon the organic matter they encounter, including other insects. This insect has a characteristic bald head with beady black eyes. The abdomen is has a dark band on each segment. Legs are adapted for burrowing. This cricket’s song is a drumming produced when it beats its abdomen against the ground. Its large, human-like head has inspired both American Indian and Spanish names for the Jerusalem cricket, including “niña de la tierra,” meaning “daughter of the earth.”

Springtails

Photo by: Eddie Dunbar

Nearly Too Tiny to See

Latin Name: Many genera and species

Order: Collembola

Family: Hypograstruidae

Most springtails are small and difficult to see. Springtails commonly encountered will be less than 2-3 mm long. They get their name from their ability to spring into the air using an organ called the “furcula,” that is folded beneath the body. Springtails are quite common in leaf litter and other decaying material, where they feed on decaying organic matter and microbes. Springtails are among the most abundant of all macroscopic animals, with estimates of 100,000 individuals per cubic meter of topsoil, essentially everywhere on Earth where soil and related habitats occur.

Gray Slug

Photo by: Eddie Dunbar

Plant Feeders that Live in Leaf Litter

Latin Name: **Order:** Gastropoda
Milax gagaes (Draparnaud) **Family:** Milacidae

This slug is common throughout the Bay Area. In gardens, nurseries and around homes the slug can also be a pest when it competes with humans for food or decorative plants. The slug is a light gray and typically no more than 25 mm in body length. However, the slug may be as dark as black and have a body length of up to 50 mm. When disturbed or at rest the slug assumes a C-shape. Slugs are plant feeders, but take live in leaf litter or on the undersides of debris on the ground, such as stones, logs and boards.

Brown Garden Snail

Photo by: Wikipediar

Introduced from France as Food

Latin Name: Cornu aspersum Müller

Order: Stylommatophora

Family: Helicidae

Introduced from France during the 1850s as *escargot*, this snail is one of the best-known of all terrestrial molluscs. Snails move by gliding along on a muscular “foot.” They leave behind a silvery “slime trail” which also signals their presence. During cold weather, snails and slugs hibernate in the topsoil. During hot, dry periods or when it is cold, snails seal themselves off with a parchmentlike membrane and often attach themselves to tree trunks, fences, or walls.

California Slender Salamander

Photo from Wikipedia

A Predator on Invertebrates in Leaf Litter

Latin Name: Batrachoseps attenuatus (Eschscholtz)

Order: Orthoptera

Family: Plethodontidae

This is a common salamander in Oakland. They are distinct, being very long-bodied and 7-13 cm in body length. These creatures may be seen in leaf litter and beneath objects on the ground. The upper body is brown; the underside is dark gray with whitish dotting. These salamanders are adapted for life in earthworm burrows where they forage for mites, spiders and snails. Eggs are laid as early as December. Clutches contain about five to twenty eggs. Hatching occurs March to April. Eggs hatch into tiny salamanders. There is no larval stage.