

How do banana slugs mate? Do they lay eggs, or have live babies?

Banana slug mating is somewhat unusual.

Banana slugs are hermaphrodites – they are both male and female at the same time. At the time of mating, one or both of the slugs may become pregnant. In extreme cases a slug can make itself pregnant (very uncommon as it is an extreme form of inbreeding with no mixing of genes from different parents).

The slugs complicated courtship dance probably makes sure that not only are the two slugs ready to breed but that they are the same species. During the dance two slugs will circle each other lunging at each other, nipping and hitting one another with their tails. Towards the end of the dance slugs may also display their sexual organs (in some species the penis is half as long as the slug's body). As the slugs dance they eventually intertwine and become excited. Both slugs insert their penises into the other slugs genital opening and take turns transferring sperm from one to the other.

After much wriggling about and tugging the slugs separate and find an appropriate place to lay eggs. An impregnated slug will lay between 3 and 50 eggs in a somewhat sheltered spot (under a bark chunk, in a small hole or crevice or someplace similar). Baby slugs will hatch in a month or two and mature in a few months. The babies look almost identical to full grown slug but are usually pale white, gaining color as they grow. At the end of their first season baby slugs cannot be told from their parents.

Adapted from The Western Society of Malacologists Field Guide to the Slug