

Bugs

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IJ photos/Marian Little Utley

STARE: Ludwing Arason, 7, get a close up look at an eastern lubber grasshopper during a visit from the Insect Discovery Lab at the Belvedere-Tiburon Child Care Center.

Tiburon pupils bug-eyed over insects

By Lara Moscrip
IJ reporter

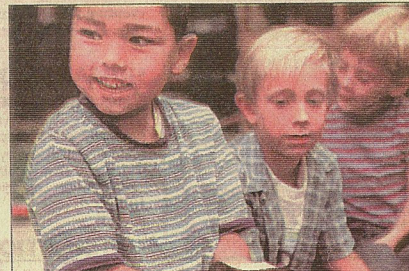
American darling beetles crawled, Madagascar cockroaches hissed, and Malaysian giant thorny walking sticks stretched their legs at the Belvedere Tiburon Child Care Center in Tiburon yesterday.

Those insects and others from around the globe showed off their brilliant colors and complex defense

"Every child is born a naturalist. Most will hold the insects willingly; they're naturally curious about them," said Gershenz, who also works with the Insect Discovery Lab, an outgrowth of the Center for Ecosystem Survival. The lab is hosted by the San Francisco State University's biology department. Gershenz and his co-workers deliver lectures to students in hopes of inspiring them to help protect the

of the insects. The Malaysian giant thorny walking stick — with its bright green leaf shaped body and thin, twig-like arms — was one of the few insects that could not be handled by the children. In order to camouflage effectively in its environment it comes equipped with small thorns on its outer surface.

Children also saw insects from the Southeast Asian rainforests of Thailand, and



began with a general anatomy lesson of the insect, followed by direct contact between the kids and the insects.

Nervous laughter filled the room when the Madagascar hissing bee crawled out of its plastic container. And squeals of delight accompanied the African millipede's entrance.

Gershenz and his colleagues specialize in teaching and lecturing to promote the safety and future of tropical rainforests. Gershenz hopes to educate children and students and eventually branch into other areas to promote rainforest protection.

"We hope to work with retailers (businesses) to raise funds," Gershenz said. "We could put rainforest meters that collect change to buy acres of rainforest and coral reef stores. Everyone can help, even \$3 or \$4 to buy a latte can buy 1,000 square feet of land."

Gershenz and the Center for Ecosystem Survival know how important community involvement and awareness is in order to protect the rainforest. Together, the organization has raised funds to purchase more than 11 million acres of forest and has contributed all of its donations to buy rainforest land and coral reefs.

He said that the Center for Ecosystem Survival has experienced an increase in popular interest. "Ten years ago the CES was working with three or four organizations to promote conservation. Now we're working with different zoos, schools, universities, aquariums and natural history museums in order to protect the environment," Gershenz said.

For more information about the Insect Discovery Lab, call 33392.