



There is a surprising amount of activity under an old log. A multitude of living things call a rotting log home. Many are decomposers with an important job to do. Without the decomposers to clean up leaves, logs, dead animals, and scat (forest word for poop) the waste would just pile up. Decomposers break down organic matter so that nutrients are recycled back into the soil which allows more plants and trees to grow.

Many decomposers are microscopic (too small to see), such as bacteria, but there are plenty large enough to see with the naked eye, although a magnifying glass can be useful. Let's take a closer look! Please be respectful of the busy decomposers.

1. Find a decomposing log or branch. You can look for them in a forest, your backyard or garden.
2. Gently knock on the log to see if there are any small animals in it. Watch for a few moments for the telltale coming and goings of yellowjackets. If it is a home to a chipmunk, or other large critter move away, and find another log.
3. Examine the area around the log. Can you see where the tree once stood? How did the log get here?
4. Observe the log: Does it feel damp, dry, crumbly? Does it smell? Is there anything growing on it? Can you see any plants, moss, fungus or lichen growing on it? Is there evidences of anything living in/on the log? Do you see trails, holes, tunnels, maybe sawdust?
5. Carefully, because this is a fragile habitat where many creatures may live, roll the log away from you. Explore the critters you find under the log. You may see centipedes, ants, fly larvae or sow bugs. What other critters do you see? Are there any mushrooms, mould, or other kinds of fungi? They are part of the decomposer team, too.
6. Gently return the log to its original position. Leave the critters where you found them. (See *Tips for Parents* on how to answer "Can we take it home?")
7. Wonder together: ~ How many things do you think live in, on or under your "log hotel"? Why would these creatures want to live under an old log? What would the world look like if there were no decomposers? How long will take for the log to vanish?
8. Try matching the Log Hotel Guests with their name on the next page.



Tip: Enjoy a reading of Wendy Pfiffer's story, "[A Log's Life](#)", with the Burlington Children's Space.

You can join Naturalist Marty on a virtual hike to look under a log at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GXCntkYfRc>



Log Hotel Guests

Draw a line from the critter to its name



Centipede

Sow Bug

Earthworm

Beetle

Salamander

Snail eggs

Pill Bug

Ant

Millipede

Slug

Answers: 1 - Centipede, 2 - Millipede, 3 - Salamander, 4 - Ant, 5 - Slug, 6 - Pill bug, 7 - Sowbug, 8 - Beetle, 9 - Earthworm, 10 - Snail eggs