

Creating harmony

■ Tiny shop in Lafayette offers treasures of the Orient without having to travel too far.
Page 5



Well lit

■ Lafayette artist's simple and elegant ceramic lamps are sold at museum gift shops.
Page 20

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2006

SERVING LAFAYETTE, MORAGA AND ORINDA SINCE 1955

Vol. 71, No. 13 • www.ContraCostaTimes.com



NICOLAUS HASLUND, left, reaches across Isabel Kirke to touch a millipede from Kenya held by Alicia Long, right, at Burton Valley School in Lafayette. The first-graders took part in an Insect Discovery Lab thanks to Torsten Hasselmann, an educator with the group Center for Ecosystem Survival. Below, Kevin McConnell takes a close-up look at a giant thorny phasmid from the rain forests of Malaysia

BOB PEPPING/STAFF

Center targets kids before bugs 'uncool'

By Meera Pal
STAFF WRITER

For some, they are creepy, icky and crawly.

For others, they are the most fascinating many-legged creatures around.

Yup, we're talking bugs.

Most likely, if you are under the age of 8, you are still willing to touch them and play with them.

A classroom full of Burton Valley Elementary School students recently had the pleasure of learning — first-hand — about bugs.

Torsten Hasselmann, education specialist with the San Francisco-based Center for Ecosystem Survival transported the group's Insect Discovery Lab to Lafayette earlier this week, much to the delight of Michelle Patterson's class of first-graders.

"That tickles," said 6-year-old Harris Sahar with a laugh as he held a Darkling Beetle from California.



The Center's "main goal is habitat conservation of rain forests and coral reefs," Hasselmann explained in an interview before the kids arrived.

"We want to get kids connected and fascinated with science, before

science becomes uncool, before bugs become uncool."

For most kids, an aversion to insects and bugs is learned behavior. Most children are curious about bugs and insects and not afraid to touch them, he said.

ONLINE

www.savenature.org

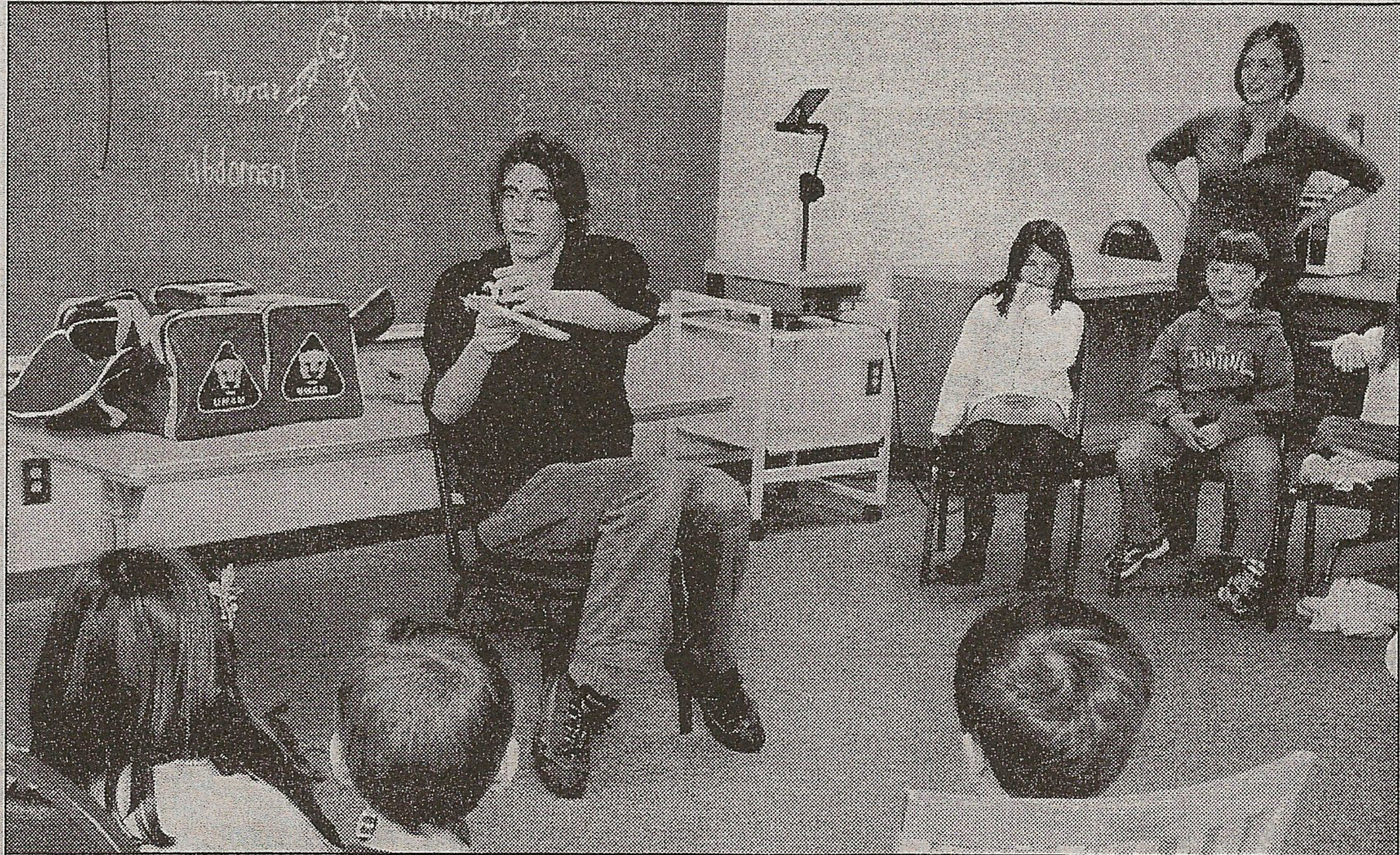
That was true with Patterson's students, all of whom, eagerly stretched out their hands, palms up, anxious to hold an African millipede and Australian walking stick.

Hasselmann explained that most of the center's buggy inhabitants are raised in captivity at zoos around the country, while the walking sticks actually reproduce on their own.

According to Joy Owen, conservation associate with the center, the Insect Discovery Lab visited more than 20,000 students last year.

The center's goal is to instill a sense of awareness, wonder and appreciation of insects and nature, according to the center's Web site.

See BUGS, Page 9



BOB PEPPING/STAFF

TORSTEN HASSELMANN brought a variety of exotic arthropods to show students at Burton Valley School in Lafayette.

Bugs

FROM PAGE 1

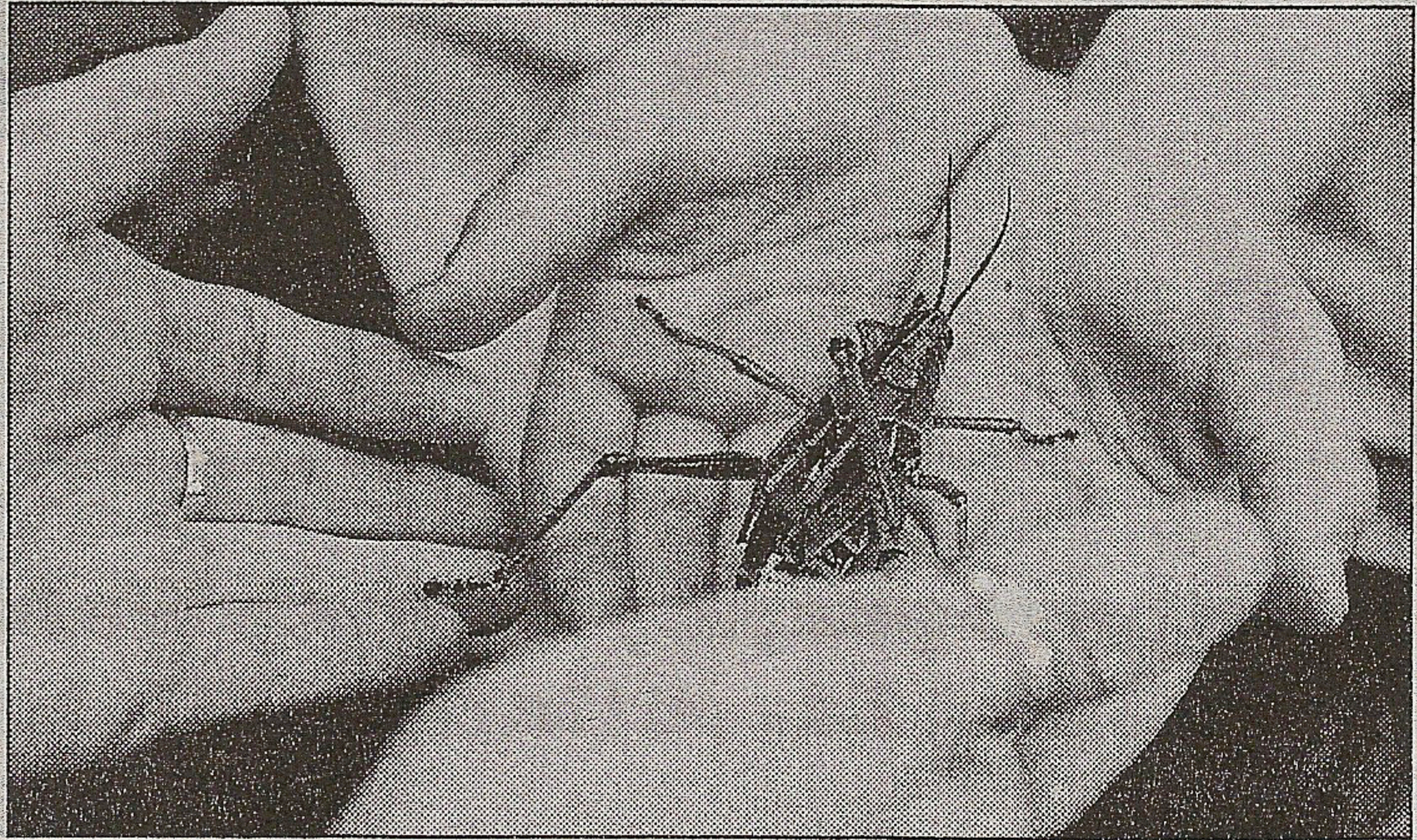
Before bringing out the stars of the show, Hasselmann did a quick lesson on the difference between the types of insects and how they help the environment.

"Insects make plants grow," he said.

The kids also learned how the Australian walking stick can mimic the movements of a scorpion for survival.

According to Adrian Altaffer, 6, the walking stick "felt like silk" and the lubber grasshopper was not very heavy, despite its enormous size.

In between the creepy creatures, Hasselmann expounded on the importance of the world's rain forests.



BOB PEPPING/STAFF

TEACHER MICHELLE PETERSON hands off a lubber grasshopper to Cameron Burrill.

"Almost half of all of the animals and plants in the world live in the rain forests," he said. "They are cutting 125 acres a minute, which means 13 extinctions a day."

The kids, however, seemed more interested in what other bugs Hasselmann had brought with him, and whether they would be allowed to hold it.