

Proposal for Emoji: COCKROACH

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Date: 20 February 2019

Identification

- Name: COCKROACH
- Keywords: COCKROACH, ROACH, INSECT

Images



Credit: Aphelandra Messer. Free for use in conjunction with this proposal.

Sort location

- Category: animal-bug
- The emoji in that category that it should come after: 🦟 MOSQUITO

Reference emoji

- 🧝 GOBLIN

Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of the COCKROACH emoji to the Unicode emoji library. The cockroach represents 4,600 different species of insects, some of which date back 320 million years. The creature has also become a cultural symbol of survival and resilience, and found its way into cultural works dating back to the 1900s in Mexico, Cuba, the Greater China region and the United States. There is a strong global demand for COCKROACH online, particularly in the burgeoning internet populations in South Asia as well as in the US. Adding a COCKROACH emoji would not only benefit the currently small animal-bug collection but also ensure that if cockroaches do outlive humans in the future, at least they have an emoji too.

Introduction

The cockroach are an ancient group of insects (order: *Blattodea*) that date back at least 320 million years. There are actually 4,600 distinct species that are widely referred to as "cockroaches" — 30 of these species commonly reside in and around human habitation.



Screenshot of *La Cucaracha* by Santa Cecilia Mariachi Band. Retrieved Dec 16, 2018 from [youtube.com/watch?v=-I5TV3veFOY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-I5TV3veFOY)

Cockroaches embody a rich linguistic tradition. The English word *cockroach* is derived from its Spanish name *cucaracha*, which is also the title of a Spanish folk song (*La Cucaracha*) popular during the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution. In North America, *cockroach* is commonly abbreviated as *roach*, while across the seas in France, *cafard* is also a term for melancholy/depression and hypocrite.¹

While most entomologists dispute the popular claim that cockroaches could survive a nuclear winter, they are still hardy creatures that can thrive in both Arctic and tropical climates and are still ten times more resistant to radiation than humans.² Their hardiness has led to them to become a global icon for being a survivor and/or resilience. As Madonna famously quipped, "I am a survivor. I am like a cockroach, you just can't get rid of me."³

True to its reputation, the cockroach has have found its way into countless cultural works over the centuries. On top of the Mexican folk song mentioned above, the cockroach appears in a famous line from the 1983 movie *Scarface* ("I'll bury those cock-a-roaches"); as a character in the popular 80s US comic strip *Bloom County*⁴; as a pet in 90s Chinese language comedies⁵; as sidekicks in a French animated comedy series,⁶ as the main character's loyal friend in the 2008 Pixar



Cover for *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*.

¹ Dictionnaire de français Larousse https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/cafard_cafarde/12073

² Live Science: Could Cockroaches Really Survive A Nuclear Winter?

<https://www.livescience.com/32749-could-cockroaches-really-survive-a-nuclear-winter.html>

³ http://thinkexist.com/quotation/i_am_a_survivor-i_am_like_a_cockroach-you_just/333818.html

⁴ Wikipedia: Minor characters in Bloom County

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minor_characters_in_Bloom_County#Milquetoast_the_Cockroach

⁵ Wikipedia: 小強 <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%B0%8F%E5%BC%B7>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oggy_and_the_Cockroaches

animated feature *WALL-E*, and in *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale*, which the American Library Association named a Notable Children's Book in 2008.⁷

Many species of cockroach thrive in dense urban areas where they are widely synonymous with decay and poor hygiene, making them an important public health symbol as well. Cockroach droppings (including feces and shed skin) are linked to asthma as well as gastroenteritis, typhoid fever, and possibly polio, hepatitis, and other diseases.⁸ The addition of this emoji could give health professionals and individuals alike a quick way to communicate with the public about the presence of roaches in certain areas or to signal the need for pest control.

Despite being millions of years old, cockroaches are finding new leases on life when it comes to cockroach-human cohabitation. They are being used to reduce kitchen waste in China,⁹ as a natural ingredient in Chinese medicine,¹⁰ and have been identified and promoted as a potential source of flour¹¹ and protein-rich milk¹² in a food-scarce future.

Selection Factors Inclusion

Compatibility

There are COCKROACH stickers on WeChat and LINE. But none of the major vendors currently have a COCKROACH emoji.

⁷ ALA: Awards & Grants: *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale*
<http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/content/martina-beautiful-cockroach-cuban-folktale-0>

⁸ ACAAI: Cockroach Allergy <https://acaai.org/allergies/types/cockroach-allergy>

⁹ Reuters: Bug business: Cockroaches corralled by the millions in China to crunch waste
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-cockroaches/bug-business-cockroaches-corralled-by-the-millions-in-china-to-crunch-waste-idUSKBN1O90PX>

¹⁰ SCMP: A giant indoor farm in China is breeding 6 billion cockroaches a year. Here's why
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2142316/giant-indoor-farm-china-breeding-six-billion-cockroaches-year>

¹¹ VICE Munchies: Meet the Scientists Who Are Making Bread with Cockroach Flour
https://munchies.vice.com/en_us/article/ezkeqm/meet-the-scientists-who-are-making-bread-with-cockroach-flour

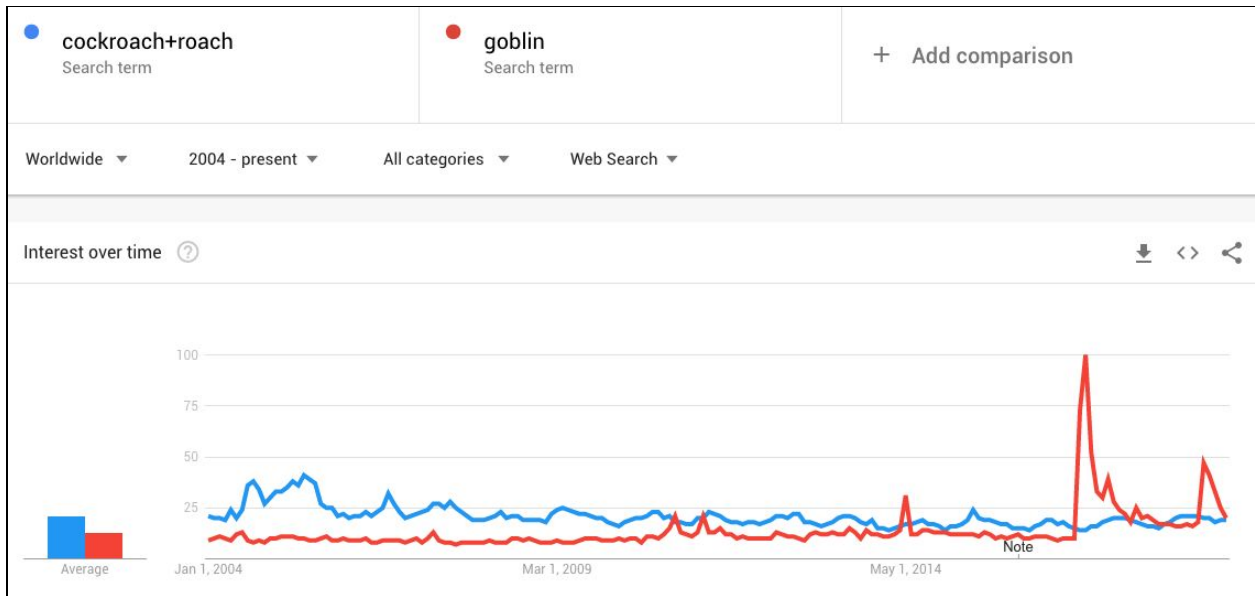
¹² CNN: Drink up: Cockroach milk is the protein drink you didn't know you've been missing
<https://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/27/health/cockroach-milk/index.html>

Expected Usage Level

- Frequency

Google Trends: Web Search

The combined COCKROACH and ROACH search keywords have historically been more popular worldwide than than GOBLIN, except for the recent short-lived spikes in the latter's search activity.

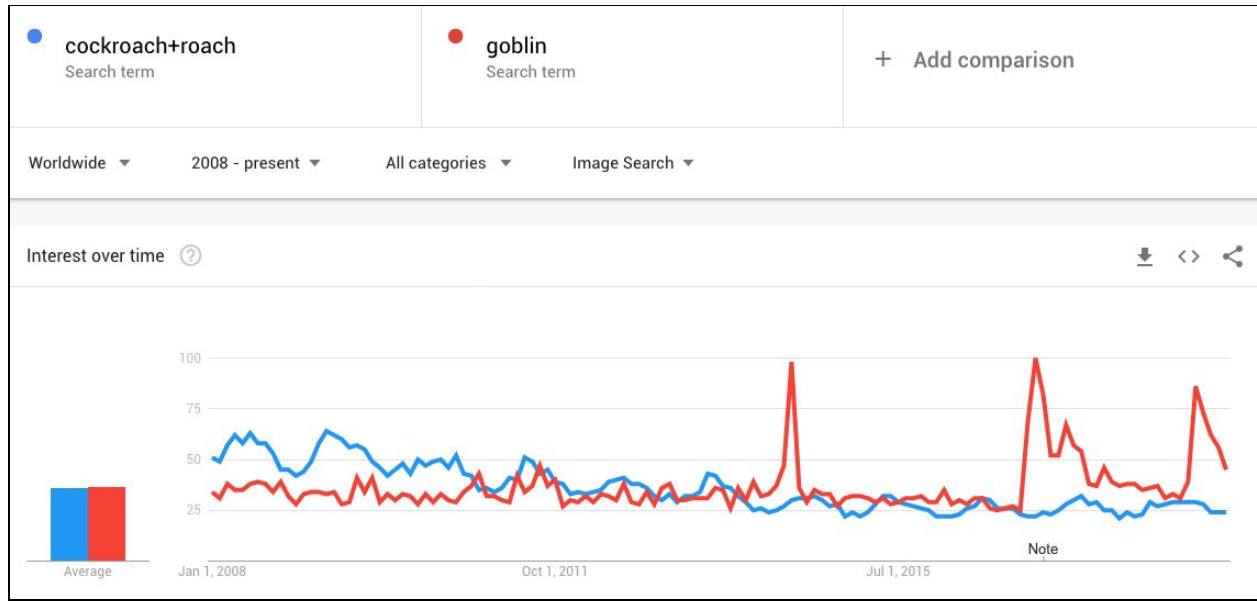


Moreover, COCKROACH and ROACH dominate search queries in many parts of the world, most acutely in South Asia but also in Ukraine, South Africa, Russia and the United States.



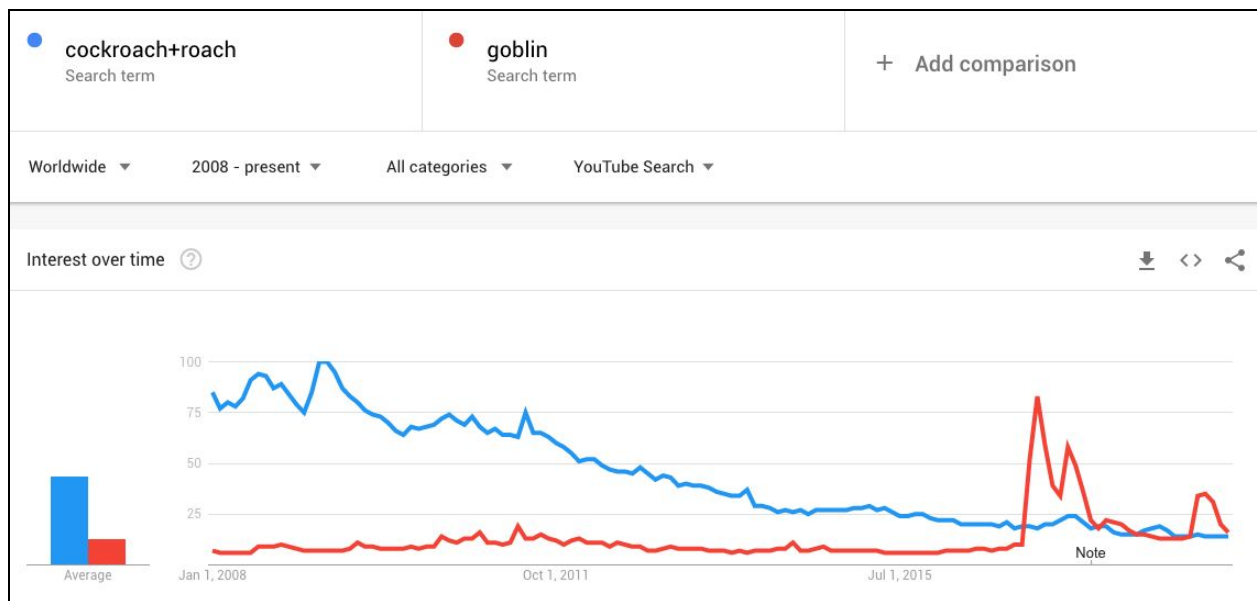
Google Trends: Image Search

The results are similar when it comes to global Image Search data – COCKROACH and ROACH are comparable to GOBLIN except for the surge in the latter over the past few years:



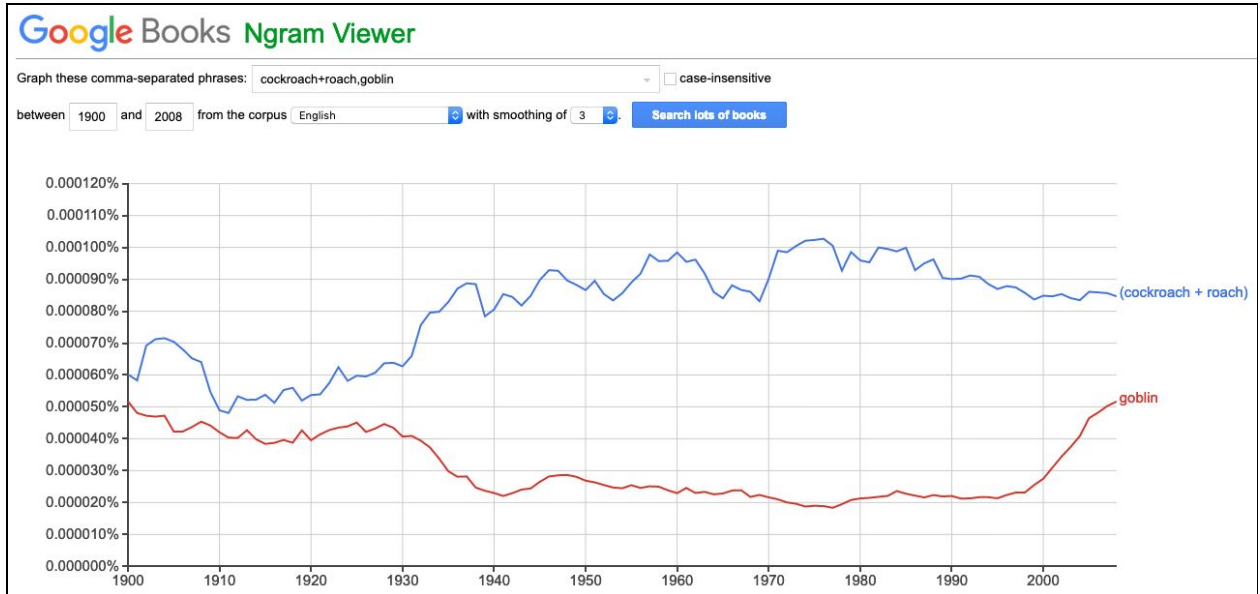
Google Trends: Youtube Search

The pattern is more pronounced on Youtube, where COCKROACH and ROACH have reigned and it's only recently that GOBLIN has caught up:



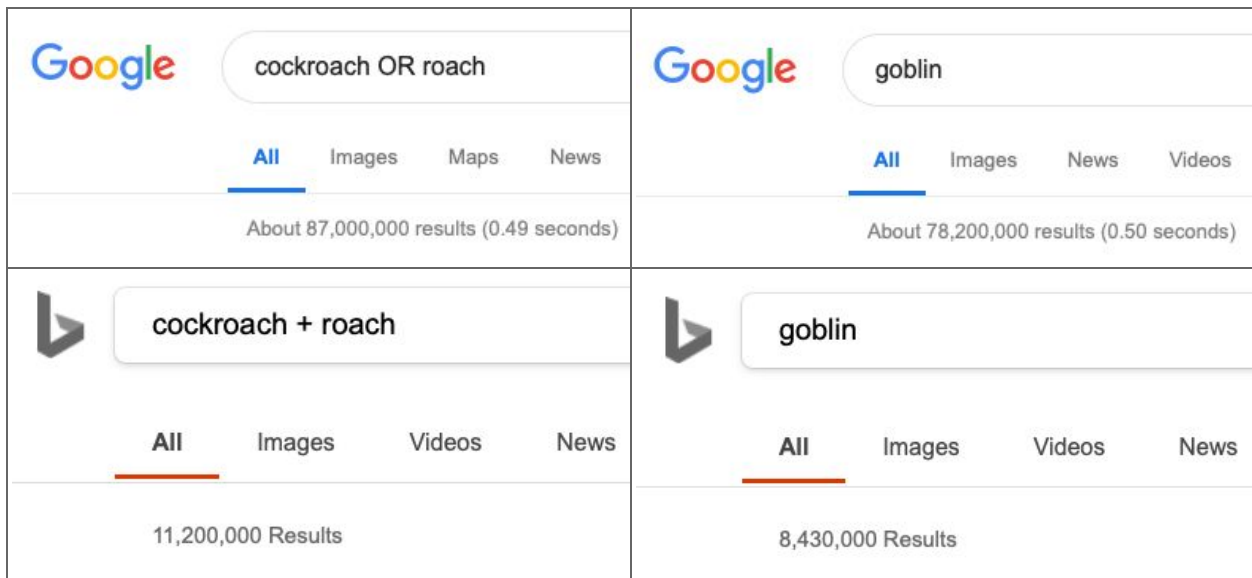
NGram Viewer

Google Ngram data shows that COCKROACH and ROACH have clearly captured the popular imagination more so than GOBLIN:



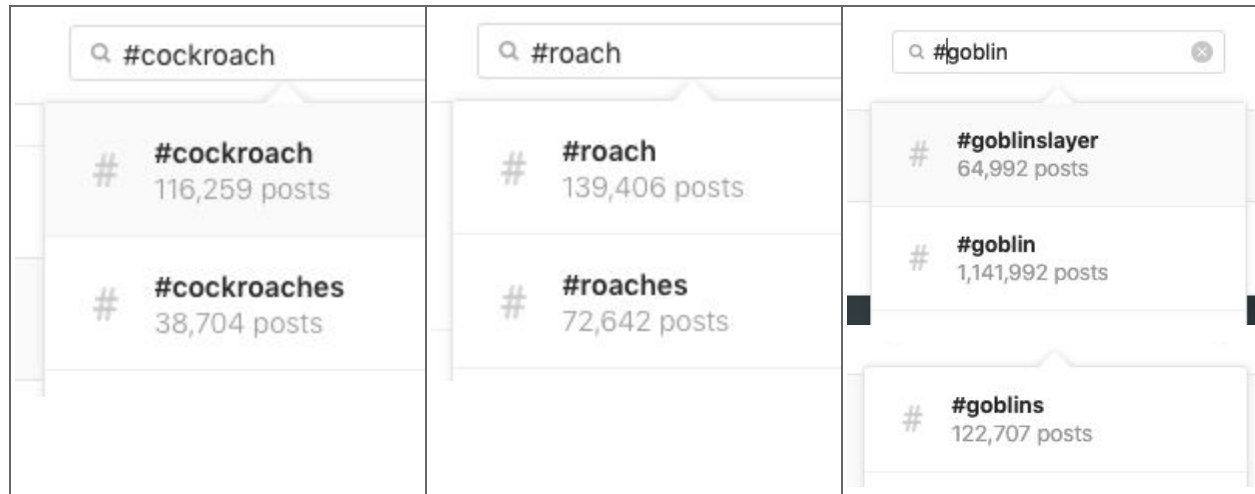
Google & Bing Search

COCKROACH and ROACH yields more results than GOBLIN in both Google and Bing:



Instagram hashtag search

There is also a solid demand for COCKROACH and ROACH on Instagram:



- Multiple Usages

COCKROACH will be a versatile emoji that can be used in a number of ways:

- As a visual signifier for a house pest and for something that's hard to get rid of.
- To reference a survivor in a nuclear winter.
- In French, either as a visual pun for indicate melancholy/depression, or to call somebody a hypocrite.
- To reference its appearance in various pop culture hits and cultural works throughout the years,¹³ including the the historic Spanish song named after the insect.

- Use in sequences

- COCKROACH + 🚓 POLICE CAR'S LIGHT or COCKROACH + ⚠️ WARNING could be used to warn people about pests and general infestations.
- 🦶 FOOT + COCKROACH could be used to communicate stomping on a literal or metaphorical bug.

¹³ Wikipedia: Cockroaches in popular culture
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockroaches_in_popular_culture

- COCKROACH + 🦿 RADIOACTIVE + ❄️ SNOWFLAKE could be used to signal a nuclear winter.

- Breaking new ground.

Yes, COCKROACH is a currently unrepresented insect that encompasses 4,600 different species,¹⁴ in a small category (animal-bugs).

Image Distinctiveness

Yes, the COCKROACH is distinct, particularly within the animal-bug group. It will be one of four bugs viewed from the top down and differentiate itself with its bulky torso (that's not round and red like that of the 🐞 LADY BEETLE), spiky hands, and overall menacing presence.

Completeness

Insects represent 80% of the world's species,¹⁵ but there are only seven (or eight if you count the mis-attributed 🕷️ SPIDER emoji) insect emojis. For context, there are 15 emojis just for birds.

Frequently Requested

The COCKROACH emoji made appearances in the Village Voice's [Thirty Useful Emoji for New Yorkers](#) in 2015, as well as the Miami New Times' [own Miami-themed list](#) in 2015.

Selection Factors Exclusion

Overly Specific

COCKROACH will represent 4,600 different species of cockroaches, 30 of which commonly show up in human homes. The COCKROACH ranges in size from monsters like the Madagascar hissing cockroaches (*Gromphadorhina portentosa*) and Rhinoceros cockroaches (*Macropanesthia rhinoceros*) which commonly grow to 7 or 8 cm, to the tiny German cockroach (*Blattella germanica*) that rarely grows larger than 1.5 cm. This

¹⁴ Wikipedia: Cockroach <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockroach>

¹⁵ Smithsonian Institution: Numbers of Insects (Species and Individuals) <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/buginfo/bugnos>

wide range of sizes is all represented well by a single glyph. These species deserve a representative.

Open Ended

COCKROACH is a very specific insect, and one with which people have very strong (often negative) associations with.

Already Representable

The closest, available emojis are 🐜 ANT, 🕷️ SPIDER, or 🦗 CRICKET. None of these are acceptable substitutes for COCKROACH in any communication, added to which they possess significantly different silhouettes when viewed from afar.

Transient

Cockroaches have been inhabiting this planet for over 300 million years, and given their mythic (albeit not scientifically proven) ability to survive nuclear fallouts, they will probably be here for many years ago.

Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

Cockroaches are animals not logos/brands, is not one that is strongly associated with any brands, is not used in UI design/iconography and is a well-known enough animal that it would not be linked to a deity.

Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type: Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored: N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping:

Simple Lowercase Mapping:

Simple Titlecase Mapping:

Bios

Jason Li (jason@hongkonggong.com) is an emoji lover, avid fan of the internet, and the Emoji Spelling Bee Champion of 2018. Having grown in Hong Kong, cockroaches played a pivotal role in his childhood as house pest #1. He did not squeal in fear during the writing of this proposal, he swears.

Melissa Thermidor (thermidor.melissa@gmail.com) is the Social Media Lead at NHS Blood and Transplant and a New Yorker who now lives in London. She grew up in Brooklyn and has seen quite a few cockroaches growing up.

Amanda Hickman (amanda@velociraptor.info) grew up in California and didn't see her first cockroach until she moved to New York City at age 21. She is not ashamed to admit that she definitely got a little squicked out by working on this proposal. When she's not researching cockroach species, Amanda teaches data analysis and visualization to journalists and builds software to support investigative reporting.