

# A brief guide to glow-worms



## What are glow worms?

Glow-worms (their scientific name is *lampyris noctiluca*) are beetles. The females grow up to 25 mm long while the smaller males grow up to 18 mm. They live in two stages after hatching. The young are called larvae and they live for one or two summers and eat snails and slugs. The adults live only a few weeks during the summer.

## Where do they live?

Glow-worms like chalky or limestone areas and prefer open grassland and hedges. They are rarely found on "improved" agricultural land.

Larvae live in sheltered places under rocks and wood, or hide in undergrowth during the day. They are nocturnal and are most active during moist conditions. As they grow they moult up to five times. They hibernate over the winter.



The female adult beetles are the easiest to spot – at night time they climb up grass stalks and glow.



## How and why do they glow?

Normally it is the wingless female beetle that glows, in order to attract the flying males. Males can glow but rarely do.

Peak glowing time is June and July but can last from late May to September

The light is a form of bioluminescence; a molecule called luciferin is oxidised to produce oxyluciferin, and as it oxidises it produces the green glow that the glow-worms are famous for.

## How are they born?

After mating the female stops glowing, lays 50-300 eggs and then dies. The eggs are pale yellow, about 1mm across and they hatch into larvae after 4-6 weeks. The larvae pupate in late spring to emerge as adult beetles in May to July.



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