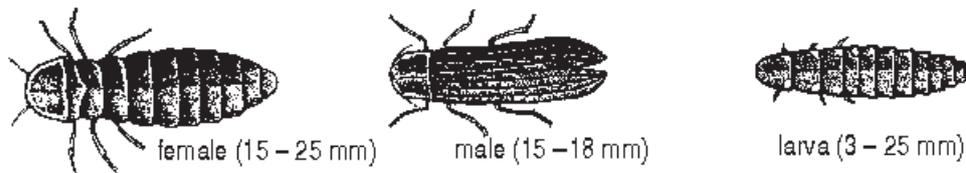


The glow worm – *lampyris noctiluca*



Like the ladybird or honey bee, the glow worm is a familiar name to all but the most obtuse urbanites among us, but when was the last time you saw one? What do you know about them?

The glow worm is, of course, a beetle. Only the wingless female glows strongly, in order to attract the flying males whose compound eyes, though eight times more powerful than those of the female, can only see her glow from a distance of up to 10m. Each female has an adult glowing life of only a few weeks until she mates, as she dies soon after laying her eggs.



The eggs hatch into larvae after a few weeks, and the glow worms remain as larvae for one or two further summers, feeding on small snails. They paralyse the snails before injecting a digestive enzyme into the shell that turns the body tissue into a snail broth, which they drink.

As adults, the glow worm has only one goal – sex. (They can't even feed.) But first they have to find each other. They do this by using reflective cells and a form of bioluminescence. Their light is created when molecules of luciferin are oxidised to produce oxyluciferin, with the enzyme luciferase and ATP (adenosine tri-phosphate) acting as a catalyst in the reaction.

While there is little doubt glow worm populations are declining, the reasons are poorly understood. Habitat loss, parasites, insecticides and the growing tendency to tidy up verges, hedges, village greens and churchyards in the countryside are part of the reason but, ironically, it may be the very thing that first drew them to our attention that is threatening their survival – light!

The seemingly growth in security lighting, coupled with the introduction of solar lights in gardens, pose a great challenge to glow worms. Males are attracted to artificial light of any colour. So, if you are lucky enough to have them in your garden, spare them a thought when the males are flying in June and July and switch off your outdoor lights after dark.

We have at present two known sites of this mysterious creature in the parish and would like to know of any more. We can also provide tips on their conservation.

At the risk of lowering the tone of this august publication, I will leave you with a rhyme from the Wildlife Trust website.

'I wish I was a glow worm, a glow worm's never glum.
How can you be unhappy when the sun shines out ya bum!' (Anon)

Jonathan Wood
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