

The Enchanting Glow-Worm

A Guide to Britain's most Luminous Inhabitant



Female Glow-worm 'glowing'

Nature's Living Lantern

Despite the name, glow-worms aren't actually worms—they are beetles! Measuring about 2.5 cm long, these incredible insects are famous for their bioluminescence.

- **The Light Show:** Look for two bands of light on the female's tail. She waves her tail to and fro like a beacon to attract a mate.
- **A Glowing Family:** While the females are the main stars, even the eggs and larvae have a subtle glow.
- **The Signal:** Once a female has successfully mated, her light goes out. She often dies shortly after laying her eggs.

The Epic Life Cycle

A glow-worm's life is a journey of several years, but their time as an adult is only the final chapter.

- **The Egg (30 Days):** Eggs are laid in summer in moist soil or moss and take about a month to hatch.

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- **The Larva (1–3 Years):** This is the longest stage of their life. UK glow-worms typically spend two to three years as larvae, surviving several winters by hibernating under logs or deep leaf litter.
- **The Transformation:** In late spring of their final year, they enter a "walkabout" phase, wandering in daylight to find the perfect open spot to pupate.
- **The Adult (14–28 Days):** After pupating for a few weeks, they emerge as adults. They do not eat at all during this stage; they lack mouthparts and rely entirely on energy stored from their time as larvae.



Glow-worm larvae

Finding the "Sweet Spot"

To see the best display, you need to time your visit perfectly.

- **The Calendar:** The peak season is late June to early July.
- **The Nightly Window:** They usually glow for 1 to 2 hours once true darkness falls (around 10:30 PM).
- **Moon Phase Matters:** Choose a night when the moon is not full. A dark, moonless night makes their bioluminescence much easier to spot.
- **Habitat:** In Britain, they love "ecotones"—the edges where habitats meet. Look for them on the grassy margins of woodland rides, disused railway lines, and chalk grasslands.

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Survival and Threats

- **The Hunter:** As larvae, they are fierce predators. They follow slime trails to find slugs and snails, injecting them with a paralyzing fluid before eating them.
- **Light Pollution:** Artificial light is their greatest enemy. If a site is too bright (from streetlights or a full moon), flying males cannot find the females' green beacons.
- **Weather:** They won't appear if it is too cool, though this is usually only a factor early or late in the season.

Tips for Surveying & Spotting

- **Wait for 'Color Fade':** Start your walk when it becomes too dark to distinguish colors (around 10:30 PM).
- **Consistency:** If conducting a survey, always walk the same route every time.
- **Location:** Look for them clinging to tall grass stems; they use the same spot nightly, so you can return to watch them.

Quick Facts Summary

Feature	Detail
Typical Size	2.5 cm
Larval Diet	Slugs and Snails
Larval Duration	2 to 3 years in the UK
Adult Lifespan	2 to 4 weeks
Ideal Conditions	Dark night, no full moon, late June/early July



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