

NATURE NOTES

MAY, 2026

Fireflies

"Have you ever seen fireflies on a warm summer night? They flit and flicker, tiny sparks of light dancing in the darkness."

Fireflies, commonly known as lightning bugs, are actually winged beetles. *Photuris Frontalis* fireflies are common along the southeast coastal region and frequently hunt in marsh areas near springs, ponds, and creeks. They can be spotted on Dewees at twilight in late spring, June, and July. In the Conservation area, in the Impoundment at Old House Lagoon near Chapel Pond, the Firefly Blind (old bird blind) and near Lot 137, as well as across from Lots 84 and 85, along Pelican Flight near Marshmallow Walk, and around Huyler House Pond.

The male firefly communicates with and "courts" the female with a series of bioluminescent flashes created by a chemical reaction in their abdomens. Adult males use a specific series of flashes to attract females of their own species. After mating, the female firefly lays 400-1000 eggs in moist soil or rotting leaves near marshes and ponds. In 1-2 weeks, the eggs become larvae. The larvae enter the water, where they will stay for about a year. Larvae shed their skin five times in that year.

When they emerge from the water, they live underground as pupae and are bioluminescent. Thus, the name glow-worm.

Firefly larvae are carnivorous, eating snails, slugs, earthworms, and other soft-bodied insects. Adult fireflies generally do not feed except to drink nectar and honeydew; yet the female larvae that can't fly may attract male fireflies with their own glow and consume them. The adult life span is only sixty-one days, as they live only long enough to mate and lay eggs.

According to the Xerces Society, fireflies have cultural, biological, and economic importance and are important components of natural ecosystems. They play an important role in human medicine and technology. Ecologically, fireflies are beneficial garden insects as they feast on other insects that are often harmful to plants and animals. Sadly, fireflies are at a high risk of extinction. Their decline is due to heavy pesticide use (often for mosquito control), habitat loss from urban development, climate change, high levels of light pollution, poor water quality, invasive species, and over-collection.



How to Create a Healthy Habitat for Fireflies

- Avoid using pesticides or artificial fertilizers.
- Turn off outdoor lights at twilight. On Dewees, use only red or amber outdoor lighting.
- Leave leaf litter and rotting logs to provide habitat for larvae.
- Plant native trees, shrubs, and grasses.
- Create "wild zones" with taller grasses to provide moisture and protection.
- Do not capture fireflies—enjoy them in their natural habitat.
- Use indoor lighting intentionally to reduce outdoor light reflection.
- Red film can be added to outdoor solar driveway, porch, and stair lights to minimize light pollution.





Audrey



Fire Fly Learning

1. Something I learned about fireflies is that they can lay up to 500 eggs!
2. After about four weeks, in late summer the eggs will hatch.
3. The tiny insects that emerge are called larvae.
4. Shedding an outer shell or exoskeleton is called molting.
5. Did you know that fireflies aren't a fly? They are a type of beetle.



Volunteer Opportunity

Love fireflies and being outdoors at dusk? Volunteer with the Environmental Program to help collect firefly flash pattern data on spring evenings after sunset. No experience needed. Training is provided, and families are welcome. Contact Lori Wilson to learn more: lori@deweesislandsc.com



Fireflies or Lightning Bugs?

Whether you refer to them as fireflies or lightning bugs, there is no doubt that you have seen these bright insects around Dewees Island. There are over 2,000 species of these insects, South Carolina being a home for 26 of these species!



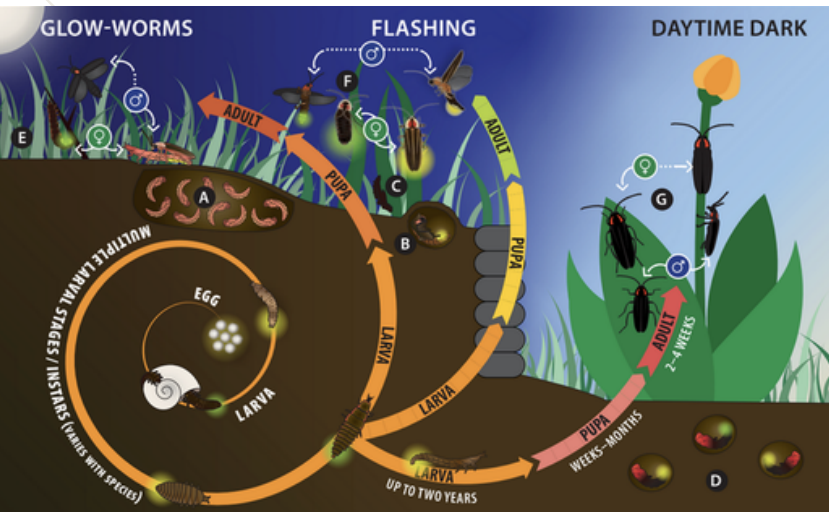
These bright insects light up their abdomens to communicate with those of the same species! To create this bright light, they have a special organ that takes in oxygen, then the oxygen combines with luciferin.

Leaf litter and tall grasses are used throughout their lives! To help fireflies you can leave the fallen leaves and mow less often to ensure they have a habitat.

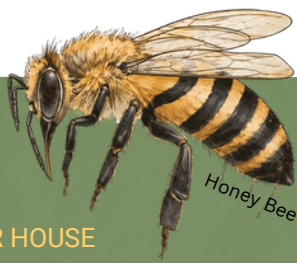
Follow this QR code to learn more!



- Like many insects, fireflies have a life cycle that includes several stages. The longest stage of their life is actually lived in the water.
- Females lay 400-1000 eggs on the surface of moist, rotting leaves.
- In 1-2 weeks, the larvae enter the water, where they will stay for about a year.
- They shed their skins at least 5 times.
- Larvae eat earthworms, snails, and slugs; adults are also carnivorous.
- When they emerge from the water, they live underground as a pupae, and they are bioluminescent at that point, earning them the name of "glowworms."
- Adult fireflies live 10-14 days before mating and dying.
- Males have two organs that emit light; females have one.
- There are four types of flashing behaviors to look out for: J-shaped flashes, double flashes, single flashes, or 3x.



THE BUZZ



MAY 23 | 6:30 PM | HUYLER HOUSE

- Storytime & Dessert - Wear your pajamas!

MAY 29 | 5:30 PM | HUYLER HOUSE

- Welcome Our New Interns - Haley McGugan, Catie Thompson, and Anna Williams

MAY 31 | 5:30 PM | HUYLER HOUSE

- Summer Kickoff: "Sea Turtle Sundaes"

NATURE REMINDERS

- Plant native flowers and plants that attract bees and butterflies.
- Single-use plastics and balloons are not allowed on Dewees.

COMING THIS SUMMER

- New Huyler House Storytimes
- Programs on Purple Martin, Turtles, Whales, and Migrating Birds

WEEKLY NATURE PROGRAM

- Join Lori every Friday at 12:30 PM - Help check Purple Martin nests and learn more about these mosquito-eating birds.

What's that Smell?

Visit the Huyler House pond and the new bird blind. It is a closed system, and doesn't connect to moving water. That means, unlike the impoundments, there isn't any flushing action to clean the pond with fresh water.



Last year, there were over 120 nests of birds on this pond. Each nest had 2-3 chicks, plus two parents, meaning that there are well over 300 birds, many of which can't fly yet. And the pond is their restroom.

Add in a bunch of reptiles and some algae, and a little pollen, and it can get a little strong. As the weather cools in fall, it will dissipate.

Marsh Matters

1. SPRING IS HERE
2. NEW GREEN SHOOTS OF SPARTINA sp.
3. OSPREY ARE NESTING
4. SHEEPSHEAD ARE SPAWNING
5. CLAPPER RAIL CALLING



A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

EXPLORE & OBSERVE

1. Visit the new bird blind at the Huyler House pond to observe birds and their babies. Bring binoculars!
2. Look for Painted Buntings, which return to Dewees from South America in late April.
3. Observe eagle and osprey nests from a respectful distance.

SHOREBIRD PROTECTION TIPS

- Walk the beach at low tide in posted nesting areas to avoid disturbing birds.
- Plovers and terns often lay eggs directly on the sand.
- Keep dogs leashed and out of dunes near nesting areas.
- Avoid Huyler House Walk during nesting season.
- Walk around resting shorebirds or stay near the low tide line when birds are feeding.

TIDAL TALK

KING TIDES

- May 15–18 | June 14–16

RESPONSIBLE FISHING TIPS

- Catch only what your family can eat that night.
- When fishing, use tungsten tackle instead of lead, as lead is harmful to waterways, fish, and humans.
- Use a gum net instead of a line net, and use circle hooks.
- Change your fishing or crabbing location if an alligator is nearby.

CRAB POT REGULATIONS

- Label pots with a yellow float, your name, and lot number.
- Pots must include the required by-catch reduction valve(s).
- Pots must remain submerged at all times.
- Check pots at least once daily, preferably twice a day.

BAIT BUCKET REMINDER

- Bait buckets must be labeled with your name and lot number.
- Remove bait buckets from the dock at night.

Learn more at:
South Carolina DNR
Blue Crab Information



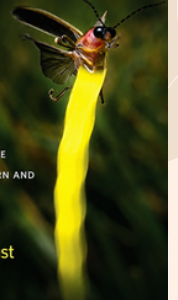
Blue Crab

If You Want to Learn More!

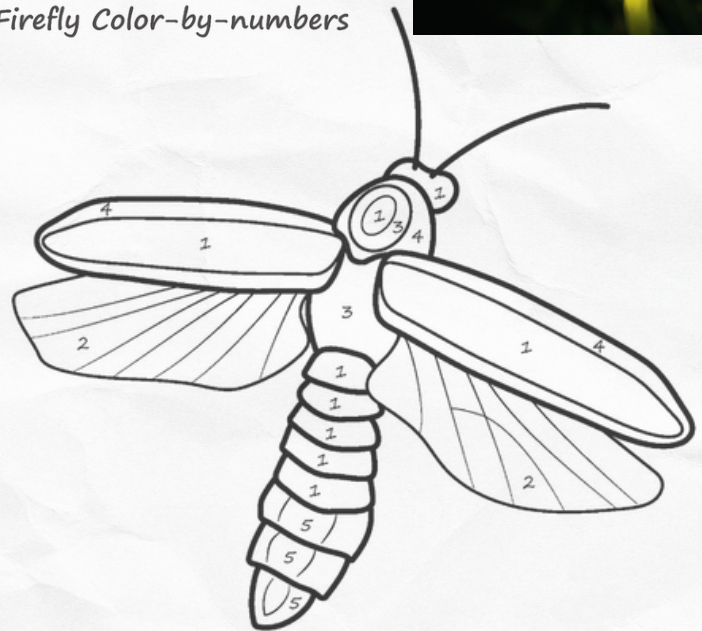
Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs

IDENTIFICATION AND
NATURAL HISTORY OF THE
FIREFLIES OF THE EASTERN AND
CENTRAL UNITED STATES
AND CANADA

Lynn Frierson Faust



Firefly Color-by-numbers



Color Key

- | | | |
|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 - dark gray | 3 - pink | 5 - bright yellow |
| 2 - light gray | 4 - gold | |

TURTLE TRACKS

TURTLE SEASON BEGINS MAY 15

Help protect nesting sea turtles by following these simple guidelines:

1. Turn off indoor and outdoor lights when not in use.
2. Use window curtains whenever possible.
3. Dim lights that can be seen from the beach or reflect outdoors.
4. Use only red or amber exterior lights.
5. If walking on the beach at night, cover flashlights with red film.
6. Keep a careful watch for nesting mama turtles, but do not approach crawling turtles.

GET INVOLVED

- Join the Turtle Team!
- Ask Lori about the Dewees Island Whale Project.



From the Editor

Putting together this first newsletter has been a challenge and a pleasure. I could not have managed without the support of Lori Sheridan-Wilson, Esther Doyle (for her incredible drawings and writing), and Judy Fairchild (for all of her knowledge and my unlimited use of her research and publications). A special thank you to Audrey Shuttleworth for being willing to read about fireflies and write a book review. More islanders are encouraged to contribute to future newsletters with articles and photos.

All the people who suggested names for our new publication deserve a special thank-you. There were so many good ideas that we decided to include them regularly in this and future newsletters.

Lee Miller