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Glow-worm by Michael Blencowe of the Sussex Wildlife Trust

It's not what you look like but what's inside that counts. The Glow-worm knows this. First off, we need to get one thing straight – she's not a worm. Glow-worms are beetles, except she doesn't look much like a beetle - more like a squashed woodlouse.

She may not look like much but she knows that she has a certain something that is more alluring than all the brightly coloured feathers, petals, fur and scales that others use in their desperate cries for attention. When the colours of the day start to fade, she undertakes a dignified climb to the top of a blade of grass. She positions herself carefully, turns on her love-light and shines.

When scientists explain this phenomenon they use words like 'bioluminescence' and discuss the 'oxidation of luciferin' – but these boffins and their fancy talk ain't fooling me. I know magic when I see it and to look upon Glow-worms shining on a warm summer's evening is just that – magical.

Of course the Glow-worm is not glowing for our benefit – there's a special someone she's trying to attract. I've been referring to the Glow-worm as 'she' because the female is the one who does the glowing. The male looks like a different species altogether and is Glow-worm by association. Much smaller and beetle-like in appearance, he has bulging eyes which are protected under a see-through rim on his tough beetle-body – imagine a tiny Marty Feldman in a suit of armour and a sun visor and you're not too far off.

On warm evenings he flies over the grass looking down for a female's glow. When her signal registers on his radar he dives, crashing to the ground near her. He then looks up through his visor to locate the female hanging over him, before scuttling the short distance to his new partner.

This amazing little animal has inspired poets through the centuries. William Blake's Glow-worm lit the path for the 'Troubled wilderd and forlorn' while in the poem 'Among All Lovely Things My Love Had Been' William Wordsworth woos his sweetheart with a Glow-worm. But surely the most epic verse ever written about a Glow-worm is this anonymous poem: "I wish I were a glow-worm, a glow-worm's never glum, 'cos how can you be grumpy, when the sun shines out your bum?"

Ends

Sussex Wildlife Trust is an independent charity caring for wildlife and habitats throughout Sussex. Founded in 1961, we have worked with local people for over half a century to make Sussex richer in wildlife.

We rely on the support of our members to help protect our rich natural heritage. Please consider supporting our work. As a member you will be invited to join Michael Blencowe on our regular wildlife walks and also enjoy free events, discounts on wildlife courses, *Wildlife* magazine and our Sussex guide book, *Discovering Wildlife*. It's easy to join online at sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/join