



**mouvement
écologique**

P R E S S R E L A S E

When the night glows – the “Gehaansfénkelcher” are back!

Mouvement Ecologique invites you to experience the luminous natural spectacle of glow-worms (or fireflies) around St John's Day!

At the end of June, some of Luxembourg's forest edges, bushy corners and late-mown meadows are transformed into a sea of lights: the glow-worms or fireflies – affectionately known as 'Gehaansfénkelcher' in Luxembourgish – are out looking for mates. Mouvement Écologique invites all citizens not to miss this unique natural spectacle – and to help preserve it for future generations by safeguarding a diverse cultural landscape.

Fascinating little beetles

Glow-worms are neither worms, nor are fireflies flies – actually they are beetles from the family of the *Lampyridae*. Three species are found in Luxembourg: the common glow-worm (*Lampyris noctiluca*), the lesser glow-worm (*Lamprohiza splendidula*) and the short-winged firefly (*Phosphaenus hemipterus*).

Their glow is a masterpiece of nature: using the luminescent compound luciferin, they produce 'cold light', 98% of which is converted into light and hardly any into heat – an efficiency that even modern LEDs, at around 50%, fall far short of. This light helps the insects find mates: the flightless females glow from the ground, whilst the males of the lesser glowworm search for these signals whilst flying and glowing themselves.

Venture out into the night and nature to spot them – don't miss the moment!

The Luxembourgish name “Gehaansfénkelcher” is no coincidence: the glow occurs precisely around St John's Day (24th of June), in Luxembourgish “Gehaansdag”. For about two weeks – from mid-June to the end of June – the spectacle can best be observed. Provided certain conditions are met: the night must be warm, dry and windless, and the observation spot must be far away from artificial light sources such as street lighting. After dark, from around 10.15 pm or 10.30 pm, the fireflies begin to glow, and this can continue until midnight. Forest edges with plenty of bushes, late-mown meadows with hedges and country lanes with tall grass verges are the ideal spots.

An indicator of the state of our countryside

In the past, fireflies glowed at the edges of many woods and along paths, even in some gardens – today you have to look more specifically. Their decline is not an isolated phenomenon: it is symbolic of the disappearance of entire species communities from the cultural landscape.

Hedgehogs, garden dormice, brown hares – many animals that the Mouvement Écologique supports in its work are suffering from the same causes.

The former, small-scale cultural landscape has largely disappeared. Glow-worms require light, open vegetation – often in areas bordering on shady zones rich in snails (the larvae feed on snails). It is precisely this network of so-called fringe habitats that has given way to monotonous, large-scale, intensively farmed land. Shrub edges, structurally rich forest edges, unmown roadside verges: these elements have disappeared from our landscape because of this development, but also due to the expansion of built-up areas and a certain 'obsession with cleanliness'. And with them, many animals that depend on them – fireflies are doubly affected, as both the adult glow-worms require the declining biotopes and the larvae, which live in the soil for up to three years, also need undisturbed conditions there during their development.

Existing glow-worm populations can quickly collapse due to the fragmentation of their habitats: only the males of the lesser glow-worm are highly mobile due to their ability to fly; females and males of other species cannot cover greater distances as quickly to establish themselves in a new habitat. Local extinction can thus quickly result.

Added to this are light pollution and pesticides. Artificial light from settlements and roads disrupts mating signals: the males simply can no longer find the glowing females. Studies also show that various pesticide active ingredients, such as neonicotinoids, can be harmful to the glow-worms – even if they themselves are not the intended target of the toxins, as the snail-eating larvae are actually beneficial insects. However, these pesticides do not act purely selectively – other organisms are also affected.

Go out, marvel together and share

Mouvement Ecologique is calling on people not to miss this magical moment – and to use it as an opportunity to share a nature experience and become aware of the value of a diverse cultural landscape.

Anyone who wishes to can also try to capture the experience in photographs – a guide to long-exposure photography is available on the Mouvement Ecologique website.

Anyone wishing to share their observations and experiences can do so by emailing **natur@oeko.lu** or on social media using the hashtag **#mecoglows**.

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