

Nature Week at Heritage Village - April 5th

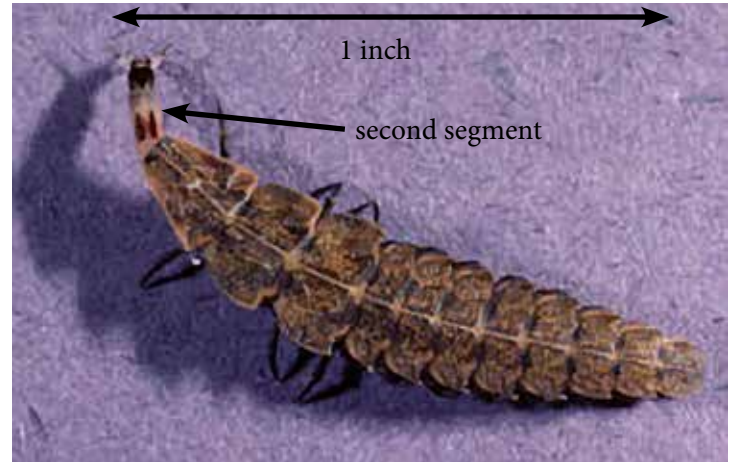
We know it is spring because the hawk watchers have migrated in. Unfortunately these early harbingers respond to neither the photo-period nor the temperature spectrum. They work off the Gregorian calendar and so don't tell us much about what other animals in the woods are doing.

But today a clear indication of spring was the presence lightning bug larvae slinking down the tree bark. These critters look like they just arrived from a Star Wars casting - UGLY.

As a quick look would indicate they undergo complete metamorphosis after gorging on other insect larvae, snails and slugs. So despite their appearance they are good garden friends.

They begin life in mid-summer as eggs laid in the soil. Even at this phase in their life they glow a tiny bit. In late summer they convert to larvae.

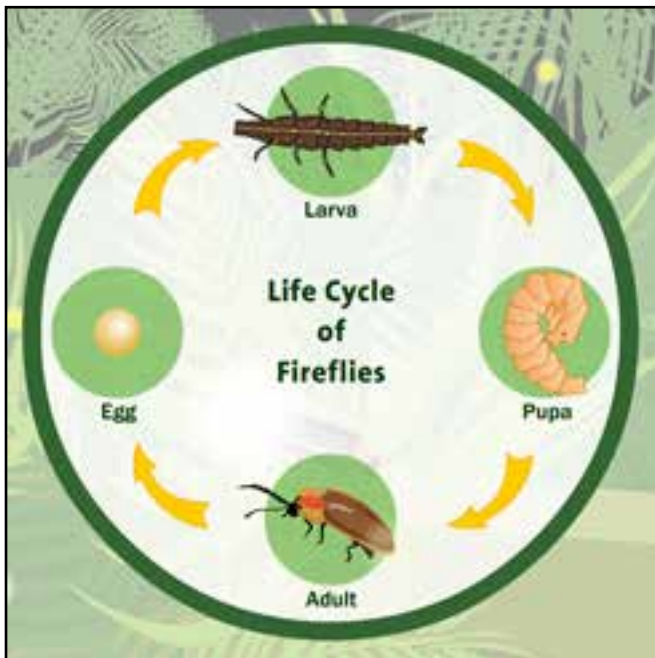
The larvae stage, which is out and about now, is very flat and looks like it is covered with armour plates. With a closer look



you will see that the plates resemble the one big plate over the head of the adult. This worm-like critter is often called a glowworm because they are luminescent - notice the second segment has some glow in this photo and the terminal end can glow.

The larvae of some species pupate by making mud chambers on the bark of trees. Since the ones I found are big enough that they are may be getting ready to pupate. While in the chamber their body will be totally broken down, the cells reused and the adult will emerge totally transformed.

The adult's only purpose is to reproduce. The male flies low to the ground blinking to attract females. His low flying elevation makes him an easy target for firefly collectors. The female hangs out in vegetation and when she sees the appropriate flash pattern she returns the signal so the male can hone in on her. They mate, she lays more eggs and the cycle repeats.



Like most of nature our knowledge is very sketchy. Do adults eat? Some say they do, some say they don't. Some say they eat other insects, some say they eat pollen. Watch them carefully and then report your findings to an insect expert, and entomologist. One resides at the University of Michigan Biological Station in Pellston all summer.

