

Natural Resources Stewardship Committee News

NRSC Wildlife Watch

Blue Ghost Fireflies

Legend is that the blue ghost fireflies are the ghosts of Confederate soldiers. Western North Carolina, and specifically Connestee Falls is one of few places in the world where the tiny ($\frac{1}{4}$ " length) blue ghost firefly thrives.

Fireflies are not flies; they are beetles but unlike other fireflies, blue ghosts do not blink; they have a constant greenish blue glow mating call. The enlarged (4x) blue ghost firefly photo is compliments of Wikipedia. The blue ghost fireflies' ideal conditions for mating season (mid May to early June) include warm and moist forest areas that are surrounded by spongy leaf litter.

Females mature but remain in a larval wingless stage so they cannot fly. Instead, they crawl to the surface, glow to attract a mate. The males fly and hover to locate a female. When a male sees one, he lands near her and flashes his light in a specific pattern. If the female is interested, she will flash her light back. Once they have matched patterns, they will mate. The female lays eggs in moist leaf litter to overwinter and hatch the following spring.

Many NC state parks (including Dupont Forest and Pisgah Forest) close some of their trails to the public during blue ghost mating season to avoid crushing the wingless female insect or disturbing their mating ritual with lights from phones or flashlights. (However, some do offer guided hikes for a paid fee.)

There are a few special places in Connestee where the tiny beetles are found, such as at Ticoa Park along the Ecusta Trail. Remember, while on your night time adventure do not use white lights from a phone or flashlight. However, you may use a red headlamp or flashlight covered with red saran

To help blue ghost fireflies flourish in Connestee we must protect their habitat. Avoid blowing or disturbing any leaf litter in damp areas such as roadsides, paths and trails that are along streams, lakes or other water sources.

To learn more about the lore, habits and habitats of the blue ghosts visit [Discovery.com](https://www.discovery.com) and [Chasing Frames](#) or [Searching for Blue Ghosts](#) in Dupont.

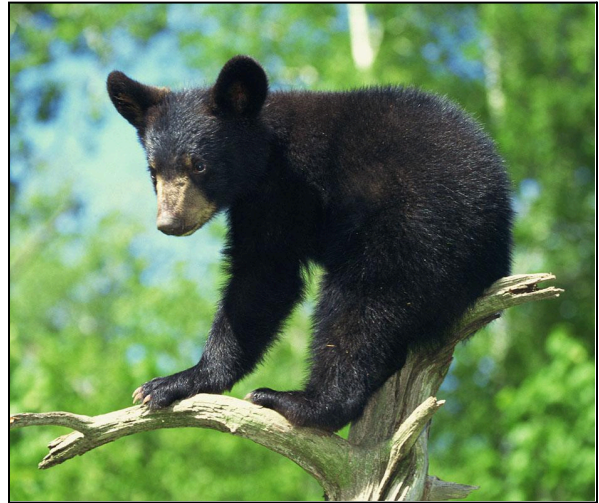


Photo Compliment Visit Smokies NC

What Bears Do In May

From the NRSC and Bearwise.org

May at a Glance: All bears visit all the places where they reliably found food last year. Cubs learn how to climb up (and down) trees, and learn to "talk." Cubs are still nursing, but start experimenting with bear food. Mother bears sometimes leave the youngsters alone and travel up to two miles to search for food. Cubs that are alone aren't usually orphaned or abandoned.



Home Alone, Not Abandoned

If you come across a bear cub (or two or three) that seem to be abandoned, mom is probably off industriously searching for food and has left the cubs in or under a "babysitter tree." It takes a lot of calories to stay in nursing shape and keep the cubs well-fed and growing; the mother bear may be two miles away. Or mom may be hiding nearby, stressed out and waiting for you to leave, so the longer you hang around, the longer the cubs will be on their own.

If you see bear cubs all alone, don't pick them up or touch them. If you believe they are truly orphaned, take a quick photo of the cubs that shows the location (no selfies, please), note GPS coordinates if you can, and leave the area. Contact your state wildlife agency for further guidance. ([NCwildlife.gov "Keep Your Distance..."](https://www.ncwildlife.gov/Keep-Your-Distance...))

How Big Is That Bear Cub?

Bear cubs may look cute and cuddly, but appearances can be deceiving. By the time they start exploring the area around their den they have very sharp little teeth and curved claws designed for climbing. If you've ever picked up a cantankerous cat, you know one reason why you should never pick up a bear cub.



Some cubs are born bigger and stronger than others, and litter mates can develop and grow at very different rates. In May, mother bears are still nursing their rambunctious youngsters. Cubs will begin experimenting with bear food, but typically aren't fully weaned until late summer. A steady diet of their mother's rich milk helps black bear cubs grow from about five pounds at eight weeks old to somewhere between 40 and 60 pounds by six months.

Close to Home

Mom and cubs hang close to the den at first. Cubs shadow their moms and start learning and mimicking some behaviors and vocalizations. Mother bears have a lot to teach their youngsters over the summer and fall so they'll grow big and strong and know how to take care of themselves by next summer.

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Polar bear cubs often get to ride piggyback on land, but young black bear cubs usually follow their moms. Cubs quickly learn to stick together and close to mom; mother bears will sometimes pick up a cub by holding its head in her mouth if one of them is lagging behind or having trouble getting over an obstacle. And occasionally a cub will “climb” up mom’s leg for a rest and a ride.

Ups and Downs of Climbing

For cubs, climbing up is instinctive. By May, cubs can scoot up a tree faster than you can say “Look at that cute bear cub!” Cubs seem to enjoy climbing and will sometimes climb way up into the tree and then discover they’re not sure how to get back down again. Sometimes mom must climb up and show the cubs the proper technique for safely backing down the tree, which is pretty much the same way people back down a ladder, only faster.

Cubs Learn Bear Talk

Mother bears will spend the next several months teaching their cubs everything they need to know to eventually survive on their own. One of the first lessons are the vocalizations that mean “Danger! Get up that tree now! And “It’s safe to come down.” Cubs instinctively know how to cry “I’m hungry” and “I’m scared.” A mother bear sometimes sends the youngsters up a tree to keep them safe while she stretches out on the ground below and takes a much-needed nap.

Where’s the Food?

Bears have a built-in GPS, great long-term memories and an uncanny ability to find their way back to anywhere they found reliable sources of food last year. So, if you had any bear visits last year, make sure the bird feeders are down, there’s no pet food or birdseed outside and the garbage is in bear-resistant containers or stored securely somewhere bears can’t see, smell or get at it. Screened-in porches, inside the garage that’s always open, in your truck bed or outside the back door are not secure places.



Thanks for being BearWise and giving cubs a better chance to grow up wild.

BearWise®. Created by bear biologists. Supported by State Wildlife Agencies.

Dedicated to helping people live responsibly with black bears.

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Bears are out and about in Connetsee!

1. **Do not feed the bears or any other wildlife.** That means remove bird feeders. Keep pet food, coolers, garbage and grills in a secure location away from wildlife.
2. **Do not approach bears** and alert neighbors to bear activity in your area.