

# Quick Flash Guide to the Fireflies of West Virginia

Flashing fireflies are harbingers of summer in West Virginia, with flashing typically beginning in May and lasting until August. Many night-active, flashing male fireflies can be identified to species based entirely on their unique flash pattern and color. Therefore, this guide is designed for identification based on this flash behavior!

If you see:

- **Yellow flashes** go to “*Photinus*” subheading, but see also “Snappy Single Sync,” “Heebie-Jeebies,” and “Spring Treetop Flasher” species
- **Green flashes** go to “*Photuris*” subheading
- **Orange flashes** go to “*Pyractomena*” subheading
- **Continuous glowing** go to “*Phausis/Pleotomus*” subheading

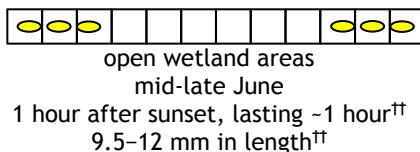
In the flash pattern depictions below, each box represents 1 second,  represents flashes,  represents flickering flashes, and  represents prolonged flashes (12 seconds of flash behavior for each species is depicted). Be aware that higher temperatures increase the speed of flash patterns, and lower temperatures decrease the speed of flash patterns. Fireflies will not flash below 50°F. Species length information and flash charts were adapted from “Fireflies, Glowworms, and Lightning Bugs” by Lynn Faust.<sup>†</sup>

Please contact [westvirginiafireflies@gmail.com](mailto:westvirginiafireflies@gmail.com) if you believe you see a firefly that has an asterisk next to its name in this guide, or for any firefly related questions! For more detailed species descriptions, flash animations, and general firefly facts please visit <https://westvirginiafirefl.wixsite.com/westvirginiafirefly>.

## Photinus

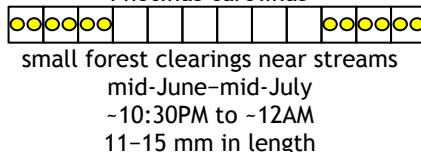
### Fiery Firefly

*Photinus ardens*



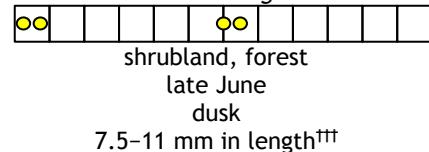
### Synchronous Firefly

*Photinus carolinus*



### Double Cousin

*Photinus consanguineus*



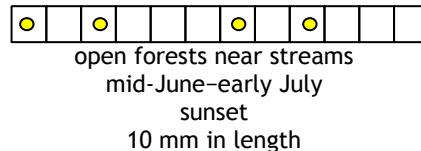
### Cattail Flash-Train Firefly

*Photinus consimilis*



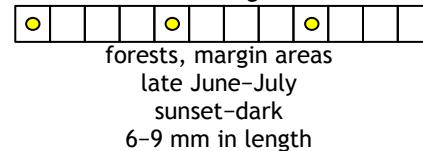
### Mr. Mac

*Photinus macdermotti*



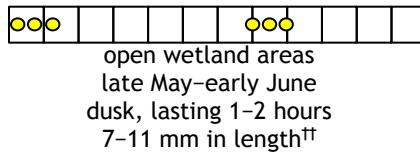
### Little Gray

*Photinus marginellus*



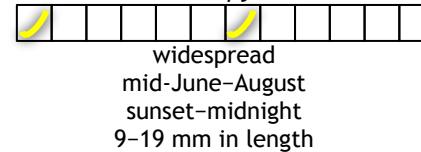
### Murky Flash-Train

*Photinus obscurellus*



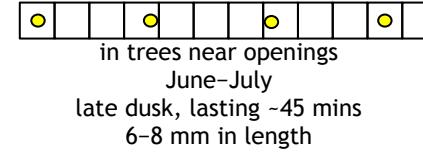
### Common Eastern Firefly

*Photinus pyralis*



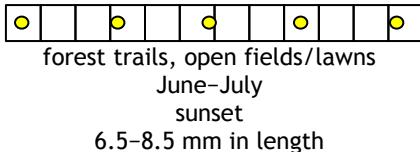
### Creekside Tree Blinker

*Photinus sabulosus*



### Yellow-Bellied Firefly

*Photinus scintillans*



<sup>†</sup> Faust, L.F. 2017. Fireflies, Glowworms, and Lightning Bugs: Identification and Natural History of the Fireflies of the Eastern and Central United States and Canada. University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, 30602.

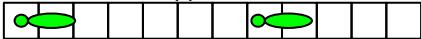
<sup>††</sup> Lloyd, J. E. 1969. Flashes, Behavior and Additional Species of Nearctic *Photinus* Fireflies (Coleoptera: Lampyridae). The Coleopterists Bulletin, 23(2): 29-40.

<sup>†††</sup> Green, J.W. 1956. Revision of the Nearctic species of *Photinus* (Lampyridae: Coleoptera). Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences, 28(4): 561-613.

<sup>††††</sup> Lloyd, J. E. 2018. A Naturalist's Long Walk Among Shadows: Of North American Photuris. Bridger Press, Gainesville, FL, USA, 477 pp.

## Appalachian Dot Dash Firefly\*

*Photuris appalachianensis*



high elevation wetlands

Time of year: late June–early July

after dark–midnight

13–14 mm in length

## Fairchild's Firefly

*Photuris fairchildi*



woodland openings, fields

early June–mid-June

late dusk–midnight

~15 mm in length

## Snappy Single Sync\*

*Photuris frontalis*



forested wetlands & bottomland

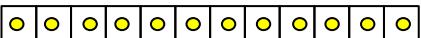
late June

late dusk, lasting 1–2 hours

11–17 mm in length

## Heebie-Jeebies

*Photuris hebes*



tree margins near water, fields

late June

dusk, lasting 1–2 hours

10–12 mm in length

## July Comet

*Photuris lucicrescens*



riverside, moist forest, edge

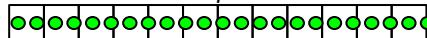
June–July

late dusk–midnight

15–20 mm in length

## Potomac Firefly\*

*Photuris potomaca*



early succession along Potomac

~early June–early July

dusk and into the night

Variable length

## Spring 4-Flasher

*Photuris quadrifulgens*



(1) open areas bordered by trees

late May–early June

~1–2 hours after sunset

12–20 mm in length

More likely to see pattern 1.

May emit 2–5 flashes in cluster.

## Slow Glows

*Photuris "slow glows"*



tree margins near water, fields

early June–early July

late dusk–midnight

11–17 mm in length

Emits a single flash early in evening

## Christmas Lights

*Photuris tremulans*



(1) woodland openings, fencerows

early June–mid-June

after dark–midnight

10–12.5 mm in length

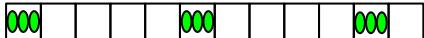
Could see either pattern 1 or 2.

## Did you know?

West Virginia is home to 32 species of firefly, including the ones you see on this sheet *and* several other species that are day-active and do not glow or flash as adults.

## Variable Triple Flash

*Photuris versicolor*



widespread

mid-June–early July

dusk and into the night

13–18 mm in length

# Pyractomena

## Spring Treetop Flasher

*Pyractomena borealis*



forests, trees along open areas

late April–May

dusk

14–22 mm in length

## Marsh Flicker

*Pyractomena dispersa*



wetland and adjacent areas

late May–early June

dusk–midnight

7–14 mm in length

## Candle Firefly

*Pyractomena angulata*



forests, margins

mid-June

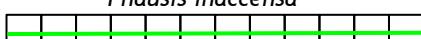
after dark–midnight

9–17 mm in length

# Phausis / Pleotomus

## Shadow Ghost\*

*Phausis inaccensa*



forest, on forest floor

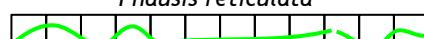
mid-June–early July

late dusk and into the night

Note: only females glow, stationary  
4–6 mm in length

## Blue Ghost\*

*Phausis reticulata*



forest

late May–July

just after dark, lasting ~1.5hr

6–9 mm in length

## Davis's Oddball\*

*Pleotomus davisii*



forest, on forest floor

~ mid-June

after dark and into the night

Note: only females glow, stationary  
12–20 mm in length