

*News Article*

By: John E. Woodmansee, Extension Educator, Agriculture/Natural Resources

E-mail: [jwoodman@purdue.edu](mailto:jwoodman@purdue.edu)

Date: April 30, 2018

Please use by: May 10, 2018

Purdue Extension – Whitley County

Whitley County Courthouse Annex

115 South Line Street

Columbia City, IN 46725-2325

Phone: (260) 244-7615 or (260) 625-3313

[www.extension.purdue.edu/whitley](http://www.extension.purdue.edu/whitley)

## New Indiana state symbol adopted

Indiana has a state flower, a state tree, and a state bird. Most recently, we now have a state insect! Say's Firefly, *Pyroctomena angulata*, became Indiana's state insect when legislation proclaiming it as such was signed by Gov. Eric Holcomb on March 23, 2018.

Purdue entomologists, including retired Purdue entomologist, Tom Turpin, have been pushing for Indiana to adopt a state insect, as most other states have done, for years. This year, with the added urging of some dedicated elementary school students and others, it finally happened. Governor Holcomb signed the bill at Cumberland Elementary School in West Lafayette, Indiana.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wrote on their website: "According to Turpin, having an insect as a state symbol is as important as having a state flower or bird (maybe more important, based on insects' important role in the environment). He says an insect should be a state symbol because insects are important cogs in the environment in many ways such as herbivory, predation, recycling, pollination, etc. The firefly is representative of insects because they are so visible and do not cause problems in any way."

They said the official effort to make the Say's Firefly the state insect began in 1996, when a bill was placed before the Indiana Legislature. It was approved by the House but never came up for vote in the Senate.

Thomas Say, who lived from 1787-1834, was an eminent naturalist who worked in New Harmony, Indiana in Posey County, and is considered the Father of American Entomology.

Fireflies, also known as lightningbugs, have fascinated young and old alike on warm summer days. I used to take my son and daughter into the yard for some "catch and release" fun with lightningbugs. I think the exercise helped my children become less fearful of insects, as many young children tend to be. We would put them in a glass jar for a while to watch them alternately produce their bright, yellow light, and then let them go. Fireflies are beneficial insects native to Indiana, with a light produced by some fascinating science.

The immature larvae are called "glowworms." They actually glow, and unlike the adults, their lights stay on. Glowworms feed on soft-bodied insects, slugs and snails. They are commonly found in damp areas, such as near ponds and streams.

Indiana DNR said the Say's Firefly is one of the earliest emerging fireflies in Indiana. It may be seen from early May through mid-July. There are about 43 species of fireflies in Indiana. Of those species, 31 are lightningbug fireflies (those that flash). The others are called dark fireflies because they do not flash.

Incidentally, the reason we run the words "firefly" and "lightningbug" together (instead of each being two separate words) is that this insect is actually a beetle, neither a fly nor a bug. Turpin explained: "A scientifically correct common name would be 'fire beetle' or 'lightning beetle,' written as two words. Because the insect is not a fly – a member of the order Diptera – that common name is correctly written as the single word 'firefly.' It is also not a true bug in the order Hemiptera, thus lightningbug would be the correct way to spell that name." According to Turpin, about half of insect enthusiasts use the term firefly, and the other half prefer the term lightningbug.

According to the website, [in.gov](http://in.gov), we find the following symbols our state has adopted that relate to living and growing things:

State flower: The peony (*Paeonia*) was adopted as the state flower by the 1957 Indiana General Assembly.

State tree: The tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), also known as yellow-poplar or tulip-poplar, was adopted by the 1931 Indiana General Assembly.

State bird: The cardinal (*Richmondia cardinalis*) was adopted as the state bird by the 1933 Indiana General Assembly.

Read more about our new state insect at Indiana Department of Natural Resource's webpage, from which I have sourced some of the above information: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/entomolo/9718.htm>.



Say's Firefly; Photo: Purdue University

It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service that all persons have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and facilities without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability or status as a veteran.

Purdue University is an Affirmative Action institution. This material may be available in alternative formats.