

Discover Anchorage in the dark

As the lights go out in the Abel Tasman some parts of the park come alive. Here are a few things that can only be seen in the wild and wondrous night at Anchorage.

One of the best places to see glow worms (and cave weta) is within easy reach of the Anchorage Hut. There are three grottos (small caves) on the western end of the beach. While it is easy to spot the glow worms you will need a torch to shine up in the ceiling to see the cave weta.

Use all sensible caution around water and watch your head as you go into the caves.

Also watch out for the lone elephant that guards these caves. You might need to spot her during the day. She is nearly always found, leaning up against the rocks before the caves. Usually it is her head, trunk and ear that give away her hiding spot.

On the way back, check for oceanic phosphorescence (more common in the winter). Toss a stone in the water to see if you can cause a reaction in the dinoflagellates – tiny micro-organisms who emit a brief and very bright light when disturbed. It is thought that the flash is designed to startle or divert predators, allowing that cell to escape.



Photo Dave Buckton takeonlypictures.co.nz



Cave weta

Nocturnal and endemic to New Zealand, cave weta are most active at night. Look closely to see the extra long antennae and long, slender legs. They are very sensitive to ground vibrations felt through pads on their feet and specialized hairs on the antennae – so gentle as you go. Loud sounds disturb them, so try to keep things to a whisper.....

Cave weta have small mouths. They do not bite and they do not appear to eat leaves to any great extent. Fungi, algae and lichens seem to be the preferred diet and dead insects don't go to waste.



Cave weta Chris Winks via Wikimedia Commons

Glowworms

Glowworm lights often resemble a star-filled night sky. Māori call them titiwai – referring to lights reflected in water. Glow-worms are the larvae (maggots) of a fly known as the fungus gnat. Glowworm larva use the glowing lights caused by a chemical reaction in a tube near their bums (bioluminescence) to attract small flying insects into a snare of sticky threads.

Glowworms need damp places, where the air is humid and still, to construct their sticky thread webs. When an insect is caught in the thread the glowworm can sense the vibrations and hauls in the prey. A lot of time is spent repairing and cleaning the threads. A worm can make 15–25 lines a night, and will spend about 15 minutes producing each one – so please do not touch the threads – a glowworms life may depend on it!



Photo wikimedia commons