



John B. Buck, Who Studied Fireflies' Glow, Is Dead at 92

By [JEREMY PEARCE](#)

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Dr. John B. Buck, a biologist whose studies of fireflies advanced understanding of their behavior and explained their often spectacular displays of synchronized glowing, died on Wednesday at his home in Sykesville, Md., near Baltimore. He was 92.

The cause was non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, his family said.

Dr. Buck, who spent four decades at the National Institutes of Health, pursued research in the property of glowing, called bioluminescence, in soft corals and other organisms, and was known chiefly for his work with fireflies in Jamaica, Thailand and New Guinea.

Vast displays of fireflies glowing in unison along tidal rivers had been reported in Southeast Asia and other regions for centuries, but had not been recorded or closely studied. In the 1960's, Dr. Buck, assisted by his wife, Elisabeth, and others, set out to make the first measurements of the phenomenon, by attaching a series of light meters to an electrocardiogram machine.

Describing their experience in Thailand, Dr. Buck wrote in a 1968 article for the journal *Science*: "As we drew in toward the dark shoreline, pale nebulous patches began to resolve, at a distance of 30 meters or so, into bushes or trees spangled with hundreds of tiny lights pulsing steadily in a rapid rhythm of about two per second."

"Each time we saw this hurrying, soundless, hypnotic, enduring performance," he continued, "it impressed us anew as uniquely different from any behavior we had ever seen."

After establishing that fireflies were flashing codes of light to one another and did

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