UC SANTA BARBARA

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‘Life That Glows’

Bioluminescence is a persistent mystery everywhere — in the deep ocean, shallow reefs, plains and forests, soil and air. The numerous ways in which life forms biochemically create light are still being explored, but why they do it remains an enigma.

Scientists posit that many organisms — fireflies, millipedes, bacteria, squid, plankton, jellies, krill and ostracods — have developed bioluminescence for a variety of reasons: to trick predators, to attract mates and even to communicate. Many are not closely related, yet hundreds of species have separately evolved the ability to emit light.

As part of the 18th International Symposium on Ostracoda (ISO-18) Aug. 27-31 at UC Santa Barbara, a screening of the award-winning BBC documentary “Life That Glows” will be held at 8 p.m. Aug. 29 in the campus’s Hatlen Theater. Co-sponsored by Ammonite Films, the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Biology (EEMB) and the ISO-18 conference, the documentary is free and open to the public. In the film, Sir David Attenborough reveals the vast scale of bioluminescence in unprecedented detail, thanks to specially designed cameras.

“The film is absolutely beautiful and the science is accurate and easy to understand,” said Todd Oakley, an EEMB associate professor and convener of ISO-18. “We are fortunate to host several of the scientists featured in the film, as well as one of the cinematographers, who are available for a question-and-answer session after the screening. It will be a really special night.”

Panelists include UC Santa Barbara alumni Steven Haddock, a senior scientist at the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, and Jim Morin, professor emeritus at Cornell University; Gretchen Gerrish, an associate biology professor at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse; Trevor Rivers, a research affiliate and instructor at the University of Kansas in Lawrence; and Elliot Lowndes, natural history videographer whose footage appears in “Life That Glows.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.