

Lila[!] and the Missing Sea Sparkles

How One Community Helped
Nature Shine Again



Outer Banks, North Carolina

Lila and the Missing Sea Sparkles: How One Community Helped Nature Shine Again

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ISBN: 978-1-972352-92-2

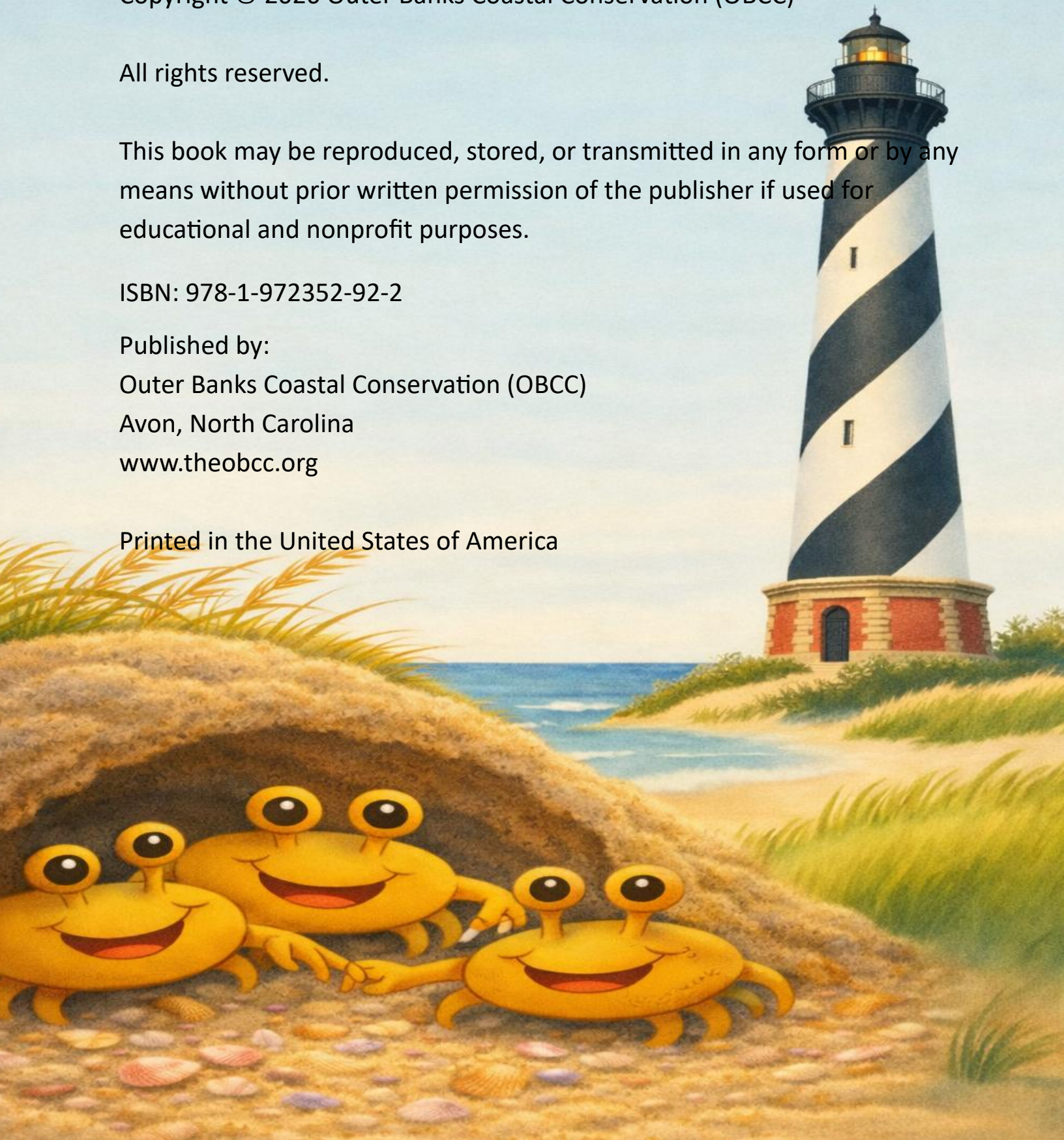
Published by:

Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC)

Avon, North Carolina

www.theobcc.org

Printed in the United States of America



About This Book

This storybook was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

All materials in this book may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

To learn more, access additional resources at: www.theobcc.org.



Every summer night, the beach at Cape Hatteras glowed like magic. When the waves rolled in, they shimmered blue and green—tiny plankton lighting up the water like stars in the sea. Fireflies flickered in the dunes, and even the air felt alive with light.



But one summer, something changed.

New houses were built along the shore. Each one had bright porch lights, glowing yard lamps, and security lights that stayed on all night long. The boardwalk by the dunes sparkled too, lined with bulbs that never slept.



At first, no one noticed the difference. But soon, the children did.

“Where did the sparkle go?” asked Lila one night as she and her little brother Tim waded at the edge of the surf.

The water was dark—no glowing waves, no twinkling lights beneath their feet. Even the fireflies had vanished from the dunes.



That night, Lila's mom explained, "The new lights are so bright, they confuse the creatures that glow. Fireflies think it's daytime, and the plankton stop shining when they can't sense the dark."

Lila frowned. "So we took away their night?"

Her mom nodded sadly. "Sometimes, too much light can hurt the natural world."



The next morning, Lila and Tim gathered their friends. They made signs that said:
“Lights Out for the Ocean!”
“Let Nature Glow!”



They talked to shop owners, neighbors, and the people who ran the new boardwalk. They explained how artificial light affects wildlife—how sea turtles, birds, and glowing plankton all depend on the dark.



Soon, the town agreed to try something new: motion sensors, dimmer bulbs, and lights turned off by 10 p.m. That night, the beach was quiet and dark again.



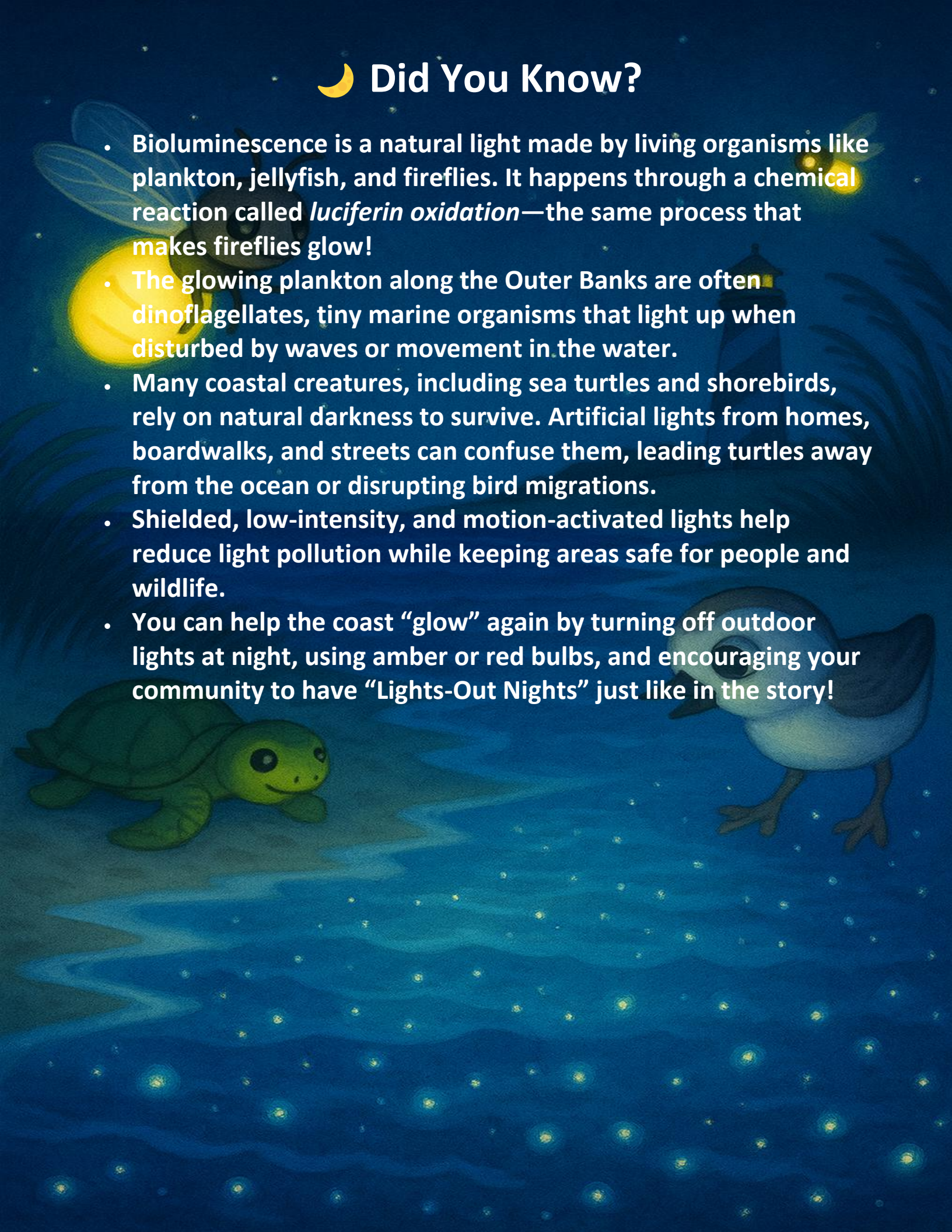
Lila and her friend Melanie ran to the water's edge and gasped—
The waves sparkled once more. The sea shimmered with light, and
the fireflies danced above the dunes. The night had come back to
life.

And from that day on, the town remembered:
Sometimes the best way to see the beauty of the coast...
is to turn the lights off and let nature shine.



🌙 Did You Know?

- Bioluminescence is a natural light made by living organisms like plankton, jellyfish, and fireflies. It happens through a chemical reaction called *luciferin oxidation*—the same process that makes fireflies glow!
- The glowing plankton along the Outer Banks are often dinoflagellates, tiny marine organisms that light up when disturbed by waves or movement in the water.
- Many coastal creatures, including sea turtles and shorebirds, rely on natural darkness to survive. Artificial lights from homes, boardwalks, and streets can confuse them, leading turtles away from the ocean or disrupting bird migrations.
- Shielded, low-intensity, and motion-activated lights help reduce light pollution while keeping areas safe for people and wildlife.
- You can help the coast “glow” again by turning off outdoor lights at night, using amber or red bulbs, and encouraging your community to have “Lights-Out Nights” just like in the story!



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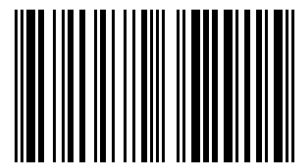
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Lila notices that the glowing waves and fireflies at Cape Hatteras have disappeared. She learns that bright lights from new homes and boardwalks are causing light pollution, which confuses wildlife and stops nature's nighttime glow. Lila and her friends encourage the community to use dimmer, motion-activated lights and turn lights off earlier. Soon, the glowing waves and fireflies return, teaching everyone that protecting natural darkness helps wildlife thrive.

About the Publisher

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9781972352915
ISBN 978-1-972352-91-5