

Tweeting Shooting Stars

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Amateur astronomers across the UK are preparing to tweet the world's first mass participation meteor star party, as part of the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009). Led by Newbury Astronomical Society, the Twitter Meteorwatch will take place from the evening of Tuesday 11th until the morning of 13th August 2009, covering the peak of the Perseids meteor shower.

Meteors (popularly known as 'shooting stars') are the visible streaks of light that result from the disintegration of small particles entering the Earth's atmosphere at high speed. In this case the material comes from the tail of Comet Swift-Tuttle, which last passed near the Earth in 1992. The resulting meteors appear to originate from a 'radiant' in the constellation of Perseus and so are named Perseids.

During the peak of the shower between fifty and eighty shooting stars may be visible each hour from a dark sky site. The Newbury astronomers will lead a global network of amateur stargazers who will be live-tweeting images of the meteors as well as twitpics of the Moon, Jupiter and a host of nebulae, galaxies and other astronomical objects.

With UK amateur astronomy societies and astronomers around the world taking part, the [Twitter](#) Meteorwatch should reach tens of thousands of people. Richard Fleet, President of Newbury Astronomical Society is delighted that so many people are involved. "The Perseids can be spectacular and are one of the highlights of the astronomical calendar. Join in our Meteorwatch and you can enjoy one of the most beautiful sights in the sky for yourself."

Steve Owens, the UK Co-ordinator of IYA2009 adds: “IYA2009 is all about getting people to look up and ask questions about the night sky. With so many astronomers taking part in the Twitter Meteorwatch there will always be something to see and someone to answer your questions. It’s great that the Newbury Astronomical Society is using a [social networking](#) tool like Twitter to bring astronomy to the general public.”

The Twitter Meteorwatch follows on from a Twitter Moonwatch that Newbury Astronomical Society ran in May this year, during which thousands of people saw images of the Moon, tweeted questions to expert astronomers, and chatted online about astronomy.

Richard Fleet now sees Twitter as an ideal way to popularise astronomy. “We realised early on that what people want are images of the [night sky](#), so we used our array of telescopes and cameras to provide a constant stream of pictures which we uploaded straight to Twitter. We were amazed at how excited people were about our Twitter Moonwatch; we had thousands of people who had probably never looked through a telescope before asking us questions directly and viewing images.”

To take part in the Twitter Moonwatch, just follow @NewburyAS and @astronomy209uk on [twitter.com](#) and search for the term #meteorwatch.

Source: Royal Astronomical Society ([news](#) : [web](#))

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