

The moon is in the spotlight, or crosshairs, again

October 20 2011, by Kim Newton



On Saturday, Oct. 8, over 580 International Observe the Moon Night events were held in 54 countries to bring renewed interest to Earth's oldest celestial neighbor. (NASA/MSFC)

On July 20, 1969, millions viewers all over the world gathered around the television to watch as two humans changed history by walking on the surface of the moon. It was an amazing time for space exploration and the moon.

Fast forward 42 years and the [moon](#) is back in the spotlight. On Saturday, Oct. 8, observers from more than 54 countries celebrated Earth's oldest neighbor by participating in the second International Observe the Moon Night. More than 580 events were held to raise awareness about the moon and the night sky.

The event, hosted by NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and the Lunar Quest Program in Huntsville, Ala., was held at the Education Training Facility in Huntsville and drew more than 500 children and adults. Visitors were treated to a number of moon-related educational activities and scientific presentations to build awareness about the brightest object in the night's sky. Participants learned how the moon was formed, more about its numerous craters, how to observe the moon from Earth and about NASA's work in lunar research and exploration.

One of the biggest draws was a cluster of telescopes set up on the lawn staffed by lunar experts who knew how to zero in on the moon's prominent craters that night. Audible gasps were heard from visitors as they exclaimed in amazement at what they saw. "I can't believe it's not completely smooth and round like a bowling ball," said one child. "Look at all those craters! It's amazing," said another.

The clear [night sky](#) offered perfect viewing conditions and it almost seemed like the moon turned up its wattage, or reflection, showing off its many craters, hills and rills. Rills are snakelike depressions that wind across many areas of the maria, or dark areas on the surface of the moon.

The moon was definitely bright on Oct. 8, even though it doesn't give off any light of its own. Instead, it reflects light from the sun. Like Earth and the rest of the solar system, the moon is about 4.6 billion years old and Earth's only natural satellite.

The moon put on a visible display that night. Observers remarked about how impressed they were with what they saw and learned at the Observe the Moon event. Many remarked about how they took the moon for granted since it's always visible, even during the daytime, but they seem to never look up.

Many looked at our closest celestial neighbor with a bit more awe after that [night](#). Amazing, it is.

Provided by Marshall Center News Releases

Citation: The moon is in the spotlight, or crosshairs, again (2011, October 20) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-10-moon-spotlight-crosshairs.html>

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