

Meteor shower over N. America a dud

May 24 2014



A view of a meteor shower over the National Park of El Teide on the Spanish canary island of Tenerife, on December 13, 2012

Astronomers and amateur sky watchers across North America went to bed early Saturday disappointed by a meteor shower hyped as "potentially spectacular" that, in the end, was a dud.

The US Naval Observatory described the Camelopardalids meteor shower on Friday as a "potentially spectacular show," but that potential was never fulfilled.

The meteor shower could be seen by people in the United States, Canada and Mexico starting around 0230 GMT Saturday, according to NASA.

A weak showing, combined with passing clouds and light pollution from towns and cities, conspired to turn what many hoped would be a light show extravaganza into a sleepless night of stargazing punctuated by occasional streaks of light.

The best photos posted online on sites like Flickr, including those from NASA, show a sky lit with stars with occasional streaks of light.

NASA had a live feed camera pointed towards the sky, but despite the site's upbeat music there was little to see.

The #Camelopardalis were a bust," read a posting on Twitter. "From 12:45am-4:30am EDT: 12 small faint ones, 1 bright one, & 1 sporadic. I stayed up for this?"

One Twitter user wrote: "#Camelopardalis. More like #Cantopenmyeyelinds when my alarm goes off at 8 am."

In their defense, astronomers weren't entirely sure what to expect from a comet they only discovered in 2004.

"Meteor showers are like the weather. They are a little bit hard to predict," said Paul Wiegert, associate professor at the University of Western Ontario.

This meteor shower originates from the trail of dust behind a small, dim comet known as 209P/Linear. The debris gets tugged into Earth's orbit this year by the force of gravity from Jupiter.

Meteor showers consist of space rocks that burn up upon hitting the top

of Earth's atmosphere, producing a bright flash of light that gives the appearance of a falling star.

A key piece of this meteor shower mystery lies in the ancient trail of dust behind the comet, which was produced centuries ago.

Initial predictions were that a few hundred meteors would be visible per hour, or a few meteors per minute—"not a special-effects extravaganza ... but it is in line with many of the strong annual [meteor showers](#)," Wiegert told AFP.

The annual Perseids meteor show that lasts for several days in August is made up of shooting stars that barrel by at a pace of 150,000 miles (241,000 kilometers) per hour.

The Camelopardalids meteors moved slower, traveling at around 36,000 miles (58,000 kilometers) per hour, Cooke said.

The show did not impress "Space Junkie," who wrote on Twitter: dear #Camelopardalis ... thanks for the meteor-less yawn factory. take notes from the #persedis this july."

Astronomers flew in from Europe to observe the skies from a remote astronomy base in Saskatchewan, Canada, Cooke said, while others traveled to the US southwest where the forecast was for clear weather.

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