Swaths of Britain, Germany treated to northern lights

March 7 2016

In this long-time exposed March 6, 2016 photo polar lights illuminate the night sky near Lietzen, eastern Germany. The Northern Lights (Aurora borealis) are produced in the earth's atmosphere by a giant cloud of electrically-charged parts of a solar storm. The color effect has been increased with a 10-second exposure. The polar light could be seen in many parts of Germany last night. (Patrick Pleul/dpa via AP)

Parts of Britain and Germany have been treated to a display of the

northern lights, a colorful phenomenon that is usually only seen further north.

The aurora borealis painted skies green, purple and blue late Sunday and early Monday as far south as the southern English county of Oxfordshire, as well as in some northeastern regions of Germany.

An aurora appears when a magnetic solar wind slams into the Earth's magnetic field, exciting electrons of oxygen and nitrogen.

Amanda Townsend, a space weather adviser for Britain's Met Office, said that "once in a while the solar winds are enhanced to levels stronger than normal, with particles at higher speeds." She added that "on this occasion it has connected really well with the Earth's magnetic field."

The Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, shine over the Sycamore Gap at Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland, northeast England early Monday March 7,

The Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, shine over St Marys Lighthouse near Whitley Bay in Northumberland, northeast England early Monday March 7, 2016. (Owen Humphreys/PA via AP)

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