

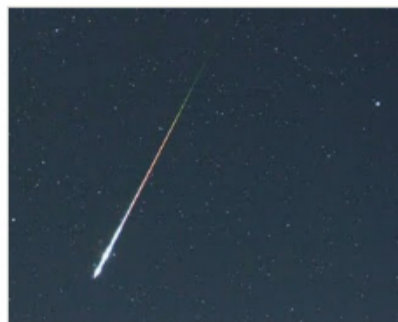


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Twitter fans set for Perseid party

Stargazers around the world will join in the first cosmic party to watch meteors tonight, thanks to Twitter. Hundreds are linking up via the popular website to share the experience as nature puts on a spectacular, natural firework show called the Perseids. As many as 100 shooting stars an hour may be seen raining across the sky under ideal conditions during the night during the shower's peak.

Skymania



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Conditions will be less than ideal in 2009, due to a bright Moon, but many should still be visible if the sky is clear.

These meteors - dubbed "tweeteors" for this event - 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.

The "meteorwatch" campaign has been organised by stargazers at Newbury, Berks, together with UK organisers of the International Year of Astronomy. It is also being promoted on Facebook.

But it has attracted a major international following with observers around the world reporting on the build-up to the shower's peak. Some meteors may be seen for several nights around the peak.

Adrian West of the Newbury Astronomical Society said: "Everyone is welcome to join in, whether they are an astronomer or just have an interest in the night sky."

"Use the hash tag: #Meteorwatch and get involved, ask questions, follow the event and enjoy the night sky with us. Images and other information will be tweeted as it happens. Live!"

Richard Fleet, President of Newbury Astronomical Society is delighted that so many people are involved. He said: "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."

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.

You can find out more about the [Twitter Meteorwatch campaign here](#).

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◆ PAUL SUTHERLAND, [Skymania.com](#)

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