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Page last updated at 18:12 GMT, Friday, 11 December 2009

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Newbury's marathon meteor watch

By Emma Midgley
BBC Berkshire Reporter

Newbury Astronomical Society is hoping to reach out to thousands of star gazers across the world on 12, 13 and 14 December.

Over these three days the Geminids meteors will put on a spectacular show.

Newbury Astronomical Society (NAS) society is following on from its worldwide success in August 2009.

Working from a garden shed, the society attracted thousands of followers to its first Meteorwatch using the social networking site Twitter.

Hundreds of thousands of people joined in their virtual 'star party' and their website received thousands of hits during the Perseids meteor shower.

The society has also appointed BBC Radio Berkshire presenter and avid 'twitterer' Maggie Philbin as their official president following their meteor shower event.

The society regularly communicates with other astronomers and astronomy groups as far afield as Japan, the US and Australia.

Adrian West, a member of the Newbury Astronomical Society, said that the meteor shower would be visible to people across the Northern hemisphere.

However, people in the UK would have the best chance of seeing meteors during the Geminids meteor shower.

"The US is going to be really clouded in," he said. "It's looking better here. It will be very good for Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

"It is going to be at its best on Sunday night. There will be 100 plus meteors an hour.

Adrian said that because the Geminids meteors come from the tail of an asteroid rather than a comet, they burn more brightly.

Asteroids are made of rock or metal, whereas comets are composed of ice and rock.

He said, "The debris from a comet is the same size as a grain of sand, whereas those coming from an asteroid are the size of a small pebble.

"They burn up extremely brightly, they look almost like fireballs."

By comparison, according to Adrian, the debris from meteors can sometimes be as fine as dust, releasing particles the size of those found in cigarette smoke, or tiny grains of sand.

Speaking to BBC Berkshire on Thursday, Adrian said he had already seen a number of Geminids meteorites.

"I've already seen six, one the night before last and five last night, he said. "People will be seeing them all over the world, but mainly in the Northern Hemisphere."

Over the weekend Adrian expects to be enjoying a virtual star party at the NAS headquarters - a shed in the bottom of the garden.

"There will be a lot of us over here," he said. "We will be doing the Meteorwatch on Twitter and Facebook. We will be taking pictures



The Geminid meteorshower will take place on 12, 13 and 14 December

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Meteorwatch on Twitter and Facebook. We will be taking pictures, videoing the meteors and going crazy about it. It will be a virtual star party online."

The society has also created a film-style trailer for the experience, which can be viewed [here](#).

Adrian has good experience of hosting online star parties. During NAS's previous Meteorwatch, 10,000 people participated online, and the NAS blog got 25,000 hits.

And NAS secretary Ann Davies said she was amazed by the contacts that the society had made around the world.

"I went round to see Adrian the other day and he was using Skype to speak to America, Canada, Australia and Japan in a conference call going on," she said.

But Adrian said that social networking was not the point of this weekend's exercise. He said, "The main thing is to get as many people as possible to look up into the sky."

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