

News Release



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Draft

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**Discovering the night sky: pinpointing stargazing sites for more eyes**

Astronomers at the University of Hertfordshire are taking part in Dark Sky Discovery – a pioneering new national and regional partnership of astronomy and environmental organisations led by the Science and Technology Facilities Council, which is being launched next week (24 October)

The Hertfordshire team is working with Exmoor National Park to set up a camera to monitor the sky at Exmoor. The camera will join a network that includes identical cameras on the Isle of Wight, Guernsey and at the University of Hertfordshire. These cameras can discover anything that changes in the night sky. For example, they are poised to catch a supernova event and Exmoor represents an excellent dark site to do this from. Together the cameras regularly detect meteors and with views from different locations have the potential to find the path of an incoming meteor and help in the recovery of meteorites.

In the Eastern region, University of Hertfordshire astronomers are considering a number of Dark Sky Discovery sites. Professor Hugh Jones from the University of Hertfordshire says “An excellent example of an early partnership that we have established is with Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. The park provides a range of locations with access to dark skies along with good public transport links and other amenities.” At the national launch event hosted by the Waterworks site within the Lee Valley Regional Park, the University of Hertfordshire will run a range of astronomical activities for local community groups.

 The Dark Sky Discovery was made possible by £176.8k grant, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and awarded through Natural England’s Access to Nature programme, which will support a 2-year programme to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to come together in their local area and enjoy the night sky in a radically new way.

Working with astronomy, environmental and community organisations in every English region, the aim is to involve people in identifying safe, accessible ‘Dark Sky Discovery Sites’ – places in urban and rural areas where they can take part in stimulating stargazing sessions. Today, a number of Dark Sky Discovery Sites are being unveiled in England – and also in Wales and Scotland - illustrating the range of great local spots that people can use for stargazing.

Dr Mark Gallaway, based at the University of Hertfordshire Bayfordbury Observatory, says: “Although we have a very active local visitor programme. Dark Sky Discovery is all about realising that in every community there is somewhere that is the best place to see stars, planets and meteor showers. We aim to provide people with the resources to support local initiatives that allow people from a whole range of different backgrounds to discover the universe that is just beyond their doorstep on a clear night.”

The project is funding activity in nine English regions so that astronomy and environmental organisations can work with community groups to harness local dark skies for local priorities.

The project is partnering with the hugely popular BBC Stargazing Live which will be broadcasting its second series on 16-18 January 2012.

For more information, please visit [www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk](http://www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk)

**Ends**

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**Notes to editors:**

**About Dark Sky Discovery**

The Dark Sky Discovery project is based on the successful Dark Sky Scotland programme which, since 2007, has been enabling thousands of people to enjoy informed, first-hand experiences of astronomy in the company of friends, family and others from their local communities. Dark Sky Scotland has involved over 100 community events in urban and rural Scotland and the training of over 800 people to run activities.

The members of Dark Sky Discovery National Steering Group are:

* Association for Science and Discovery Centres
* British Astronomical Association
* Campaign for Dark Skies
* Federation of Astronomical Societies
* Institute of Physics
* Royal Astronomical Society
* Royal Observatory Edinburgh Visitor Centre/Science and Technology Facilities Council (lead partner)
* Society for Popular Astronomy
* Steve Owens (freelance)

For a google map of and the criteria for Dark Sky Discovery sites [www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk](http://www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk)

Regional and country information:

The lead partners and Dark Sky Discovery sites (DSDS) are:

* North East: Pete Edwards, Durham University,

DSDS: Kielder Forest Observatory, Northumberland

* Yorkshire & Humberside: Helen Barraclough, Space Connections,

DSDS: xx

* North West: Alan Brown, STFC Daresbury Laboratory

DSDS: Low Gillerthwaite, Ennerdale, Lake District

* East: Hugh Jones, University of Hertfordshire:

DSDS: Waterworks Nature Reserve, Lee Valley Regional Park

* South West: Emma Dennis, Exmoor National Park,

DSDS: Wimbleball Lake, Exmoor

* West Midlands: Tony Fox, Cannon Hill Park

DSDS: Cannon Hill Park

* South East: Jo Lewis, STFC Rutherford Appleton Laboratory

DSDS: Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Hampshire

* For the London and East Midlands regions there is an opportunity for a lead partner to join the DSD England project.
* Wales: Allan Trow, Dark Sky Wales

DSDS: Mountain Centre, Libanus, Brecon Beacons National Park

* Scotland: There are xx Dark Sky Discovery Sites – see [www.darkskydiscovery](http://www.darkskydiscovery) for details

Dark Sky Discovery is complementary to other dark sky-based initiatives in the UK including:

• The UK Campaign for Dark Skies (CfDS) - a section of the British Astronomical Association. The CfDS aims ‘to preserve and restore the beauty of the night sky by campaigning against excessive, inefficient and irresponsible lighting’. [www.britastro.org/dark-skies](http://www.britastro.org/dark-skies)

• Dark Sky Parks and other similar designations are awarded to local areas by the International Dark Sky Association. [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)

For more information on the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh, please visit [www.roe.ac.uk](http://www.roe.ac.uk)

**About Access to Nature**

1. Access to Nature has awarded a grant of £176.8k to the Dark Sky Discovery initiative.

1. Access to Nature is run by Natural England and is funded by the Big Lottery Fund’s Changing Spaces programme launched in November 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environments.
2. Natural England manages this £28.75 million Lottery-funded programme on behalf of a consortium of twelve national environmental organisations comprising BTCV, British Waterways, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Greenspace, Groundwork UK, Land Restoration Trust, The National Trust, Natural England, RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts and the Woodland Trust.

4. Through this programme, it is Natural England’s ambition to create opportunities for people from all backgrounds to have greater access to our natural environment and bring a lasting change to their awareness and understanding as well as improved links to the natural world, which many of us can take for granted.

5. Access to Nature closed to applications in May 2010 but for further information about the programme visit [www.naturalengland.org.uk/accesstonature](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/accesstonature)

6. The Big Lottery Fund is the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004. For further information about the Big Lottery Fund, its programmes and awards visit [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

**About STFC**

The Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) delivers impact to the UK by enabling world class research, innovation and skills. It funds research programmes at universities as well as providing access to large experimental facilities in the IK and around the world.

Dark Sky Discovery is part of a programme of activities supported by STFC to promote public engagement with science and technology.

STFC is one of seven publicly-funded research councils.  It is an independent, non-departmental public body of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

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**About the University of Hertfordshire:**

* *The University of Hertfordshire is the UK’s leading business-facing University and an exemplar in the sector.  It is innovative and enterprising and challenges individuals and organisations to excel.*
* *The University of Hertfordshire is one of the region’s largest employers with over 2,700 staff and a turnover of more than £235 million. With a student community of over 24,500 including more than 2,000 international students from over eighty five different countries, the University has a global network of over 165,000 alumni.   For more information, please visit* [*www.herts.ac.uk*](http://www.herts.ac.uk)
* *The University of Hertfordshire was awarded the Times Higher Education ‘Entrepreneurial University of the Year 2010’*
* *Research is at the core of the University’s strategy to facilitate far-reaching engagement with business, community and national and international partners.* *The University’s research is world-leading and has been recognised by the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).*

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