

BBC Learning English

6 Minute English

Night skies



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

Neil: Hello, I'm Neil.

Callum: And I'm Callum.

Neil: And this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. Today we're talking about night skies. Now Callum what kind of a view of the stars do you get from your house?

Callum: Well, it's actually not too bad on a clear night. How about you?

Neil: Well, I don't often see the stars where I live, but perhaps this is because I live closer to the centre of London than you. So there's probably less **light pollution** where you live.

Callum: Well it is true that the best places to see stars are the darkest places on the planet, like deserts and mountain tops and that's where you see those pictures of powerful telescopes.

Neil: Yes, in certain locations around the world you can get a really clear view of thousands of **twinkling** stars, some planets and sometimes the odd **satellite** moving across the sky.

Callum: **Twinkling** describes light which flashes off and on very quickly, just as stars do. And you may be familiar with the very famous song, 'Twinkle twinkle little star'.

Neil: Yes and a **satellite** is an object which moves around a larger object in space. Usually when we talk about satellites, we mean man-made objects, such as communication satellites, although it also means natural objects like moons.

Well, before we continue our discussion about night skies I have a quiz for you, Callum. I want to know how many moons the biggest planet in the solar system, Jupiter, has. Is it:

- a) 1
- b) 12
- c) 64

Callum: I have absolutely no idea, so this is just a guess. I'm going to go for b) 12.

Neil: Well, we'll check on that at the end of the programme. We've been talking about night skies and good places to see the stars. Callum, would it surprise you to hear that the night sky above a part of the UK has been awarded special protection status?

Callum: That does surprise me because there aren't that many remote parts of the UK compared to other countries.

Neil: Well, it's in Exmoor National Park, which is in the south-west of England. Let's hear what's been happening from the BBC's reporter, Andrew Plant.

Andrew Plant, BBC

Now, those staff at Exmoor National Park are aiming to put the darkness back into night-time. Using these light monitors they proved that Exmoor was officially one of the UK's darkest spots, and now its first Dark Sky Reserve, somewhere the stars really do come out at night.

Neil: They used light monitors to prove that a National Park in England is one of the darkest places in the UK.

Callum: So what does this mean?

Neil: It means that it's now Europe's first Dark Sky Reserve. A reserve is an area – usually of land – kept in its natural state.

Callum: So does this mean it'll be illegal to turn lights on?

Neil: I think it does, yes! There will be strict controls on things like street lights to reduce light pollution and keep the night truly dark. Have a guess at how many more stars you can see in a Dark Sky Reserve than in a city.

Callum: That's not fair, is this another quiz?! I've already been tested once!

Neil: Oh come on.

Callum: Oh, well, I think it's probably in order of several thousand. So maybe when the street lights are on you can see 50-100; but when there are no street lights, 4-5-7-10,000?

Neil: Well let's find out. Listen to this clip, again from the BBC's Andrew Plant. He's speaking to someone who's excited by the park's new status.

Andrew Plant, BBC

Exmoor is already attracting seasoned star gazers and telescope tourists alike.

Interviewee: When it's dark you can see as many as 2,500 stars whereas in a city you might be lucky to see 200.

Neil: Did you catch what he said there?

Callum: Yes, apparently when it's dark you can see almost 2,500 stars compared to just 200 in a city. That's quite a big difference.

Neil: The reporter used the expression '**star gazer**' to describe someone who likes looking at stars. To gaze is to look at something for a long time, especially something you like. Are you a star gazer?

Callum: Not so much, although my son is fascinated by the moon when it's not hiding behind the clouds.

Neil: Do you think you'd be tempted to go and visit a Dark Sky Reserve?

Callum: I did visit an observatory when I was on holiday in Hawaii once, and that was fascinating, but I'm not a telescope tourist, no.

Neil: Right, OK. Well, here's Allan Trow from an organisation called Dark Sky Wales. He wants the same status to be given to an area of Wales in the UK. He thinks it will attract people to the region.

Allan Trow, Dark Sky Wales

It opens up a whole realm of opportunities for amateur astronomers, because they will travel anywhere in the UK and abroad, a lot of them, to find dark skies. And if something is literally on their doorstep, then they'll take advantage of it.

Neil: He says it opens up a whole **realm of opportunities** for **amateur astronomers**. What does he mean by that?

Callum: A realm is an area of interest; so there will be lots of chances for **amateur astronomers** – people whose hobby it is to study the stars.

Neil: Well Callum, I think it's time to go back to the question I asked you at the start of the programme. I wanted to know how many moons the biggest planet in the solar system, Jupiter, has. Is it:

- a) 1
- b) 12
- c) 64

Callum: I said b) 12.

Neil: And you were wrong, I'm afraid. It's 64 which is incredible – it came as a complete surprise to me! Yes, 64, amazing! Thank you for listening and goodbye!

Callum: Bye!

Vocabulary and definitions

light pollution	artificial light at night which makes the night sky lighter and means stars can't be seen very well
twinkling	describes the way light from stars seems to shine strongly then weakly
satellite	an object which moves around a larger object in space
star gazer	someone who enjoys looking at stars
realm of opportunity	chances to explore a certain area of interest
amateur astronomers	people who study the stars as a hobby

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