

Draconid observations

In anticipation (see original article below), nine members watched for Draconid meteors on the evening of 08 October 2011. At the critical time (shortly before 9.00 pm BST) there was complete cloud cover. However, before then three Draconids were seen, one of them quite bright. Of some 250 5-second photographs taken by DLC, almost all showed clouds, but two did record a meteor (the same one on both images), at 8.33 pm BST. This is the better one.



For International Meteor Organization report click [here](#).

A Draconid storm?

At the BAA meeting held in Jersey on 03 September Dr John Mason, Director of the Meteor Section, announced the possibility of a storm of Draconid meteors (sometimes called the Giacobinids) this October.

This meteor shower originates from Comet Giacobini-Zinner, which has a 6½ year orbit. It is unusual in that the cometary dust producing the shower has remained close to the parent comet. Normally very few meteors are seen as a result of this ‘shower’, but when the Earth crosses the descending node of the comet’s orbit close to the comet itself meteor rates can be suddenly very high, producing a ‘storm’.

Such a situation occurs this year, and predictions are, therefore, favourable for a high rate of meteors, albeit for a very short period. In 1933 the rate was about 90 per minute, and there were high rates in some later years.

The Draconid meteors have exceptionally slow trajectories, and typically show persistent trains. This may be because they are relatively young, and contain volatile material.

The peak period may last only about 20 minutes. Various predictions have been made as to when it might happen: **between 8.11 pm and 9.42 pm BST on Saturday, 08 October 2011**. The latest prediction, Dr Mason said, is **8.57 pm BST**.

There will, unfortunately, be a bright gibbous moon, it being 11 days old. The meteors radiate from the constellation Draco, at RA 17h 23m, Dec +57°, near the dragon's head, at an altitude of 67°. Dr Mason suggested keeping your back to the Moon, and face north, keeping constant watch as soon as it gets dark, from about 7.00 pm until 10.00 pm.

Let's just hope for clear skies!

David Le Conte

References: Oxford Dictionary of Astronomy, by Ian Ridpath.

International Meteor Organisation shower calendar: <http://www.imo.net/calendar/2011#dra>

Further links: British Astronomical Association article, with links and report form:

http://britastro.org/baa/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=732:draconid-meteor-project-2011&catid=60&Itemid=118

NASA news: http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2011/04oct_draconids/