

We are all stargazers

The Dark Sky Discovery Programme

Diverse Audiences

Research is for everyone

Astronomy is hugely popular with people from many backgrounds. It's a route into discovering the wider world of science and technology, and there is an irresistible raw appeal to the simplest and most visceral astronomy experience – seeing the night sky. In 2011, STFC built on existing approaches in this area to provide a coherent nationwide framework for them by forming Dark Sky Discovery as the first national outreach partnership of the UK's main professional and amateur astronomy organisations.

From the outset, Dark Sky Discovery sought to reach new audiences. Initially, it targeted audiences in geographically remote areas including the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It has also run initiatives geared towards reaching other less engaged groups, including young people with behavioural problems, BME groups, and blind and visually impaired people.



Dark Sky Discovery has been great for the south west region. It has been an opportunity for a multitude of organisations to come together, that wouldn't have previously ever thought of collaborating, to organise dark sky events. So we have had place-based organisations, community groups and educational groups – all coming together under the Dark Sky Discovery banner.

Emma Dennis, Exmoor National Park

157 ↑ Dark Sky Discovery Sites

Ultimately, a key strength of Dark Sky Discovery is that, with good design, it has been shown to engage audiences of any and all backgrounds.

This has been instrumental in helping Dark Sky Discovery form national and local partnerships, particularly with organisations in the open spaces and outdoor learning sectors. Partners have included the Forestry Commission Scotland, The National Trust for England and Wales and the Institute for Outdoor Learning. This has brought STFC science and technology into places and programmes where it did not previously reach. In addition to the public and school educational benefits of this work, these partner organisations have worked with Dark Sky Discovery to support community development and tourism impact in many rural areas of the UK. Most of the UK National Parks, many Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and several island communities have co-ordinated regional engagement with the Dark Sky Discovery programme.

In its early years, Dark Sky Discovery ran local stargazing events, supplemented by weather-proof astronomy activities. Having demonstrated that this model works, the programme now provides strategic support for other organisations to run this type of activity. It provides training workshops and resources for teachers, outdoor educators and others; and it runs the Dark Sky Discovery Site scheme through which local organisations and groups nominate the best local stargazing spots in their area. Throughout its evolution, Dark Sky Discovery has sought not just to show people the wonders of the night sky, but to give them the skills to explore it for themselves and to find out about the way that researchers explore it through science and technology.



www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk

**6,000,000
HITS A YEAR
260,000
UNIQUE VISITS**

1,500
Teachers and educators
have been trained to run
Dark Sky activities