Perseid Meteor Shower: Shooting Stars [B2]

A metà agosto di ogni anno, la Terra attraversa la scia della cometa Swift-Tuttle e migliaia di frammenti di roccia e ghiaccio entrano nell'atmosfera, provocando un sorprendente spettacolo di stelle cadenti.

Dreamers and amateur astrologists should look to the night sky in mid August. The Perseid meteor shower will light up the heavens, in a dazzling display of shooting stars. They are visible for several weeks, but they will be brightest on certain nights. With the moon setting around midnight, the sky will be dark enough for viewing. The pre-dawn hours offer the best conditions to watch the show — and perhaps to make a wish.

ROCKS AND ICE

So what is a meteor, exactly? It is not actually a star, but rather a piece of space debris falling down to Earth. It comes from the rubbletrailing behind a comet, consisting of rocks and ice. While in space, it is called a 'meteoroid' and, once on the ground, it is called a 'meteorite' but, while it travels through our skies, it is a plain old meteor. When the Earth passes through a comet's trail, these particles enter the atmosphere, where they burn up and display streaks of light.

ELUSIVE COMET

The Perseid meteors come from the Comet 109P/Swift-Tuttle, which is in a 122-year orbit around the Sun. The comet itself was last seen in 1992 and will not be seen again until 2125, but its long trail of debris produces a meteor shower every year. Its next pass in a hundred years' time is predicted to be as bright as Comet Halle-Bob in 1997, which was the brightest in recorded history.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Swift-Tuttle is a very large comet. At 26km in diameter, it is twice the size of the one that supposedly killed the dinosaurs. The comet was named after two scientists — Lewis Swift and Horace Tuttle — who separately discovered the comet in 1862. The meteors' name derives from the constellation Perseus, after the eponymous hero from Greek mythology. Perseus lies in the northern sky, in

the shape of a sideways Y. Every year, it provides the backdrop of the Perseid shower.

WHEN AND WHERE

This year promises to be quite spectacular, with up to a hundred meteors per hour visible during the peak. According to NASA, they will travel at 59 kilometres per second, reaching temperatures of 1,650° C. The Perseids are best seen in areas with minimal light pollution, so the countryside or a park are ideal. Stargazing apps will help to locate the right place to look. Avoid looking at your phone and allow your eyes to adjust to the darkness. Then lie on your back, watch the show and, if you are so inclined, wish upon a star.

Glossary

- **plain old meteor** = meteora ordinaria
- **backdrop** = sfondo, scenario
- **dazzling** = abbagliante
- **shooting stars** = stelle cadenti
- **rubble** = macerie
- **Stargazing** = osservazione delle stelle
- **lie on your back** = sdraiarsi sulla schiena
- **meteor shower** = sciame meteorico
- **debris** = detriti
- **pre-dawn** = prima dell'alba
- **trailing** = strascicare
- **Avoid** = evitare
- **if you are so inclined** = se sei propenso
- **light up** = illuminare
- **moon setting** = tramontare della luna
- **sideways Y** = i greca di lato
- **wish upon a star** = esprimere un desiderio
- **streaks** = strisce
- **eponymous** = eponimo