

# Dark Skies: What's Hiding in the Dark Skies of Yorkshire? [C1]

Lontano dall'inquinamento luminoso delle città, due parchi naturali nel nord dell'Inghilterra organizzano attività guidate per osservare il cielo notturno e avvicinare l'astronomia al grande pubblico.

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The darker the sky, the more you can see; the blacker the night, the brighter the Moon, the [dimmer](#) the streets, the stronger the [glow](#); the deeper the shade, the lighter the view." The Yorkshire poet Ian McMillan wrote these words as an ode to the Dark Skies Festival. Held annually from mid-February to early March in numerous national parks across the UK, the Dark Skies Festival aims to promote appreciation of Britain's night skies and nocturnal wildlife.

## NATIONAL PARKS

The Yorkshire [Dales](#) and the North York [Moors](#) in the north of England play a special role in the festival. These spectacular nature landscapes, where [dry-stone](#) walls [snake](#) through landscapes [peppered](#) with [field barns](#), are perfect for [hiking](#) all year round. Popular routes include the [Dales](#) Way, Pennine Way, Coast-to-Coast Walk, Cleveland Way and Rosedale Railway Walk. The Yorkshire [Dales](#) have inspired many Yorkshire-born poets and artists, including Ted Hughes and David Hockney, who still enjoys outdoor painting in various locations around Yorkshire. The North York [Moors](#), a European Special Protection Area for [merlin](#) and [plover](#) bird species, are popular among birdwatchers and conservationists. In late August through September the North York [Moors take on](#) the purple [hue](#) of the [heather](#), which covers around 44,000 hectares of the national park. Wintertime brings snow to the [upland](#) areas. The Dark Skies Festival marks the end to the [bitter](#) weather, offering an opportunity to experience the Yorkshire landscape in the [crisp](#) air of early spring.

## DARK SKY RESERVES

In 2020, the North York [Moors](#) and the Yorkshire [Dales](#) were declared International Dark Sky Reserves, a title given to areas with low levels of [light pollution](#) and ideal conditions for [stargazing](#). This year marks the 10th anniversary of Dark Skies Festival. To find out more, Speak Up contacted Helen Dalton, Yorkshire [Dales](#) National Park Tourism [Officer](#). As she explained, the festival is the ideal opportunity to visit a [range](#) of attractions, including the 14th-century fortress Bolton Castle, or Ribbleshead Viaduct, a 19th-century structure that crosses an area of moorland called Ribbleshead, through which the River Ribble also runs. **Helen Dalton (English accent):** Events are [hosted](#) around the whole of the Yorkshire [Dales](#) National Park. It's not just in one place, which gives you an opportunity to be able to see as many different locations as possible. To capture the [crisp](#) night sky, Bolton Castle has been fantastic; we've had some amazing nights there. We saw [shooting stars](#) last year, which was just amazing. And also, Ribbleshead, it's iconic. And you get to see even the [Milky Way](#), so....

## GUEST SPEAKERS

Dalton detailed some the activities of this year's edition of the festival. Events [range](#) from informative talks about space, to [stargazing](#) at Broughton Sanctuary, a country [estate](#) outside Skipton with extensive grounds. **Helen Dalton:** We're having a bit of a dark sky safari at Broughton Sanctuary, and there'll be a planetarium there where children [and] adults can learn about the dark skies in the planetarium. But they're also doing a film of Broughton Sanctuary as well, and their [rewilding](#) programme and what they have to offer. And it's very much about [wellbeing](#) and mindfulness. And we've got Mark Westmoquette, who's an astronomer who focuses on the mindfulness of yoga and becoming one with nature and one with the sky. And it's just a different way of [stargazing](#) and a different way of looking at the sky and understanding where we are from, really. He does it so well, and he's got such a beautiful voice. They've got moon bathing, which are these big iron baths outside, where you [lie](#) in the bath and just look up at the sky. And also, storytelling around the Fire Temple, and then guided walks as well. And then the North York [Moors](#) have got Maggie [Aderin-] Pocock, who is a female

astronomer on UK TV. And she's fantastic. So, she's actually doing an event at Whitby Castle. So two big events to start of the 10th anniversary of the Dark Skies Festival.

## THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

We then asked Dalton about the constellations visitors can expect to see when looking [skyward](#) during the Dark Skies Festival. **Helen Dalton:** The constellations at this time of year in February, Orion is a key one. Cassiopeia as well, and The Plough... They're all ones that you can see in the February [time slot](#) when we're hosting the festival. A lot of our astronomers do talk about the history, which is really good, and obviously, Greek mythology, and why the constellations are named how they are named.

## WILDLIFE WATCH

The Dark Skies Festival offers an opportunity to observe the park's nightlife. Dalton recommended the Grimwith walk, a 4.5-mile walk around Grimwith [Reservoir](#), as the best way [to spot](#) nocturnal animals. The walk, [taking in](#) impressive views of the moors and the lower Yorkshire [Dales](#), begins in the evening and participants experience the fall of night together. Local wildlife to look out for include the [ringed plover](#), a common bird species in Grimwith, as well as nocturnal birds such as [barn owls](#). **Helen Dalton:** We've got the accessible Grimwith walk, so you'll be able [to spot](#) the wildlife then. That is accessible for everyone — so, [pushchairs](#), [wheelchairs](#)... You've got the opportunity to walk round Grimwith [Reservoir](#) and enjoy some beautiful food at the end of it. But even just the dark skies, when you hear the call of an owl and identifying which one it is, whether it's a [tawny owl](#) or a barn owl... It's a bit cold for [bats](#), but sometimes we have had the bat sounds at night, so that has been really fascinating, and... seeing them. It's all about the nature. It's all about appreciating and being out in the dark.

## BEGINNER-FRIENDLY EVENTS

Visitors need no knowledge of cosmology to attend events; amateur stargazers are very welcome, as Dalton explained **Helen Dalton:**The majority of the events are for beginners, really. A lot of the events have an astronomer present who will be doing the talk and the presentation. And it's amazing if somebody points something out, points that constellation out in the sky, and then you see it, once you've seen it once, you can't take your eyes off it when you go out again. So, it's just having the astronomer there to guide you through the night sky to understand the constellations, to understand the different moon phases. Just the basics, really.

## CAPTURING THE NIGHT SKY

When you have an amazing experience, it's normal to want to share it with those who couldn't be there. However, taking photos of the night sky can be a challenge. Luckily, there are events with this in mind. **Helen Dalton:**We've also got some really good photography events, so to actually understand how to take images of the dark skies. Because it's not always that easy with the different exposure on your camera, on your mobile phone and what you can really capture. And those photography dark-sky events just teach you little bit more, especially if you're a basic photographer, just to really understand how to get those amazing images.

## LIGHT POLLUTION

An important [feature](#) of the festival is highlighting the importance of combatting [light pollution](#). Dalton mentioned both wildlife's and humans' need for darkness. **Helen Dalton:**That's one of the reasons why we do it; it isn't just about looking at the dark skies, and it isn't just about looking at the stars — it's about the nature, and our [wellbeing](#), but also nature's [wellbeing](#), too. So, [moths](#), for example, are attracted to the light. And if the light's on all the time, how does pollination occur?... It affects everything. It's not just about the stars in the sky. So the nature recovery, our [wellbeing](#)... Having our lights on all the time isn't great. We need to have darkness, too.

## DURING THE PANDEMIC

Some years of the Dark Skies Festival have been easier to manage than others. With the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the festival team was faced with unique challenges. **Helen Dalton:** During Covid, we didn't let that stop us, and we [hosted](#) re") all our events online. And we got people from all over the world! And it was just wonderful! And it was a really great way of promoting what we offer and meeting lots of different people. It was wonderful. We did have a live streaming from Sweden and the [northern lights](#), which was just amazing. My goal was to actually see the [northern lights](#) after that, and then, this year we've seen them twice, in the Yorkshire [Dales](#) National Park, which has been wonderful. And the North York [Moors](#) have had them as well. And again, that's a really good way of meeting people, 'cause you go out at 10:30 at night, and there's always other people out there.

## MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Dalton has been involved in the Dark Skies Festival since 2017 and has experienced many memorable moments, as she explains. **Helen Dalton:** My most memorable moment was the [shooting stars](#). That was absolutely magical, and actually to turn round and watch everybody's faces... I think for me, it's just the excitement, and the pleasure of them seeing something which you've never seen before. And a lot of the visitors are from towns and cities, and you don't get to see the [blanket](#) of [mesmerising](#) stars in the sky. So, for me it's the pleasure of seeing other people [in awe](#) of the dark sky. Another one that was a really good event last year, it was grandmother's or great grandmother's 80th birthday, and all she wanted to see was the stars through a telescope. So, she came to one of our events, and she had all the family with her, and she saw the Seven Sisters through the telescope. And it was just so lovely to see and lovely that her family had all enjoyed and experienced that with her as well.

## DARK SKY RESERVES

Dark Sky Reserves are places where darkness is conserved for scientific, educational and cultural purposes, and of course, for the enjoyment of the general public. This has increased [awareness](#) of the benefits of protecting the 3,615sq km area from [light pollution](#). Many local businesses now participate in the festival and have obtained “dark sky friendly business” status, meaning that they offer binoculars, literature on the dark skies, warm [blankets](#) and other essentials for a night under the stars.

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# Glossary

- **warm blankets** = coperte calde
- **glow** = bagliore
- **Moors** = brughiere
- **dry-stone** = muretto a secco
- **lie** = giacere
- **awareness** = consapevolezza
- **hue** = tonalità
- **shooting stars** = stelle cadenti
- **ringed plover** = corriere grosso
- **tawny owl** = allocco comune
- **to spot** = avvistare, individuare
- **barn owls** = barbagianni comune
- **bats** = pipistrelli
- **northern lights** = aurore boreali
- **blanket** = manto
- **plover** = piviere
- **estate** = proprietà, tenuta
- **taking in** = contemplare
- **in awe** = con stupore
- **heather** = brugo
- **bitter** = gelido
- **Reservoir** = bacino
- **take on** = assumere
- **crisp** = fresco
- **rewilding** = rinaturalizzazione
- **mesmerising** = hipnóticas, fascinantes
- **skyward** = verso il cielo
- **moths** = falene
- **peppered** = sparso
- **upland** = altipiani
- **stargazing** = osservazione delle stelle
- **Milky Way** = Via Lattea
- **wellbeing** = benessere

- **merlin** = smeriglio
- **light pollution** = inquinamento luminoso
- **Officer** = responsabile, direttrice
- **dimmer** = meno luminose
- **Dales** = valli
- **snake** = serpeggiare
- **field barns** = fienili
- **hiking** = escursioni, camminate
- **feature** = caratteristica
- **range** = gamma, varietà
- **hosted** = ospitare, accogliere
- **time slot** = fascia oraria
- **pushchairs** = passeggini
- **wheelchairs** = sedie a rotelle