



The countryside charity
London

Working for a greener city

Dark Skies in London: an introduction

Our view of the cosmos is a source of infinite amazement for humanity, but in London, the stars are blocked out by light pollution. Is your neighbourhood filled with bright lights that stay lit all night? How far do you have to go to experience a truly starry sky or marvel at the Milky Way?

London may be one of the most light-polluted cities on Earth, but there are lots of ways to restore and protect our dark nights, from checking your home lighting to going outside to count the stars in the night sky. And you can support CPRE London's campaign as part of the [More Natural Capital](#) coalition to persuade the next Mayor of London to develop best practice guidance for lighting design to reduce light pollution and to safeguard and extend dark sky areas.

What is light pollution?

Light pollution is artificial light that shines where it is not wanted or needed. In broad terms, there are three types of light pollution:

- *skyglow* – the pink or orange glow that spreads above towns and cities, caused by a scattering of artificial light by airborne dust and water droplets
- *glare* – the uncomfortable brightness of a specific light source
- *light intrusion* (light trespass) – light that spills beyond the boundary of the property on which it is located, sometimes shining through nearby windows and curtains

Why is light pollution important?

Light pollution is important for the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and human health. Wasted light is an expensive waste of energy – just imagine leaving a garden hose or faucet running all night. Light pollution also negatively impacts humans and wildlife, and it contributes significantly to our carbon footprint.

- **Climate emergency** - The climate crisis is the biggest threat facing life on this planet. We must drastically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, a significant percentage of which come from lighting. London and cities like it have a leading role to play, and reducing our light waste is a critical part of the solution.
- **Biodiversity** - Light pollution has a significant negative impact on biodiversity. According to Cofnod, 60% of wildlife in the UK depends on natural darkness to survive. Light waste interrupts natural wildlife rhythms, including migration, reproduction, pollination and feeding patterns, which in turn disrupt the food chain.

- **Human health** - Artificial light at night causes sleep disorders, depression, insomnia and other health problems. Recent studies have found that exposure to light at night disrupts the body's production of melatonin, a brain hormone responsible for regulating the human biological clock.

Rediscover the night in London - Urban Stargazing Tips

- ☆ Get up high
- ☆ Face away from central London
- ☆ Use your parks and green spaces
- ☆ Don't be afraid of the dark
- ☆ Shield light pollution and glare
- ☆ Let your eyes adjust for at least 20 minutes without light
- ☆ Use an app like [SkyView](#) to navigate
- ☆ Learn to use a paper star chart
- ☆ Opt for easy to carry binoculars
- ☆ Winter is the best season – grab a tea or mulled wine & bundle up!

Stargazing in & around London

Want to find a dark stargazing spot in London? Check out the [CPRE's Night Blight map](#) to see which areas of London are darkest.

Here are some relatively good locations within London:

North & West

☆Hampstead Heath ☆Regent's Park ☆Richmond Park ☆Darlands Nature Reserve, Totteridge Common and Mill Hill Park

East & South

☆Epping Forest ☆Blythe Hill Fields ☆Dulwich Wood ☆Walthamstow Wetlands

Further Afield

- ☆ The National Trust have identified some dark sky areas around London [here](#)
- ☆South Downs National Park – is the closest [International Dark-Sky Reserve](#) to London

Get Involved – a Dark Skies 'Bucket List'

- Participate in CPRE's Star Count, Earth Hour and other citizen science campaigns
- Escape light pollution at your nearest dark-sky site to experience a truly dark, starry night sky

- Learn about London's nocturnal wildlife, such as bats, foxes, owls, hedgehogs and moths
- Fully shield all outdoor lighting at your home and use warm colour-temperature bulbs and timers
- Ensure windows have curtains or blinds and keep them closed at night
- Ask local councils and highway authorities to adopt lighting policies that protect our natural night
- Go for a nighttime walk in your local park to spot planets and stars
- Attend a lecture or online event about astronomy or light pollution
- Support CPRE London's campaign to persuade the next Mayor of London to take action on light pollution
- Become a member of CPRE and Dark Sky London
- Donate to the International Dark Sky Association

Cultural Heritage: London's Observatories

Astronomy has been an indelible part of London's cultural heritage for centuries and astronomical science is still practiced at these historic observatories today.

Greenwich Royal Observatory - Founded by King Charles II in 1675, the Old Royal Observatory in Greenwich is the historical home of British astronomy, where Greenwich Mean Time was initiated and some of the world's most important astronomical contributions have been made.

Mill Hill Observatory (UCLO) - Opened in 1929, the UCL observatory at Mill Hill is one of the most important student observatories in the country, with five telescopes, classrooms and an astronomy library.

Hampstead Observatory - Sitting atop one of central London's highest points, the Hampstead Observatory was founded in 1899 and its Cooke telescope (still in use) presented in 1923. It was lovingly refurbished and reopened in 2019.

For more information on astronomy:

If you want to find out more about astronomy join a local astronomy club – here are some links:

- Astronomical Society of Haringey – ashaastro.co.uk
- Baker Street Irregular Astronomers – bakerstreetastro.org
- Croydon Astronomical Society – croydonastro.org.uk
- Flamsteed Astronomy Society – flamsteed.info
- Hampstead Garden Suburb Astronomical Society – hgsas.co.uk
- West of London Astronomical Society – wolas.org.uk

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