



# Stargazing LIVE NEEDS YOU!

You and your society can be part of TV's biggest astronomy event in 2012. Here's how...



**ON THE CD**  
A pdf of this feature to share

**S**targazing LIVE's return to our screens in January next year is a great time for astronomy societies to run an event and introduce the wonders of the night sky to a new audience.

Astronomy societies were hugely important to *Stargazing LIVE 2011*, explains presenter Brian Cox. "What the series became was a catalyst to get people interested in astronomy and for that you don't just need an hour on television where people will hopefully become interested in the subject. You need to have the backing behind it so people can go on to become real astronomers. I think that really worked last year and for me that's the point of the programme: people will watch it and then go to their local astronomy society and stay there," says Brian

"Just like last year, each episode is going to be specifically themed," says series producer Alan Holland, "so it will be easy for our partners to plan their own events. We're going to

start off with the Moon and the planets of the Solar System, before looking at the Milky Way and galaxy formation, and ending with the quest to locate life on distant exoplanets. Dark skies will also be an important theme as we highlight the effects of light pollution on stargazing."

In January 2011 more than 180 partners, clubs and societies held over 300 *Stargazing LIVE* events.

These included sidewalk astronomy, star parties and some more unusual nights out. 'Starlings and Starlight' saw Mexborough and Swinton Astronomical Society combine birdwatching and astronomy, while the

University of York took more than 30 keen astronomers on a guided night-time cycling tour of a scale model of the Solar System. In total over 40,000 people had a taste of astronomy, many for the very first time, and some organising groups reported attendance levels twice as great as expected.

Working with other local organisations like schools, libraries, nature societies or photography



▲ Get your society involved with an observing event to coincide with *Stargazing LIVE 2012*

## STARGAZING LIVE SUCCESSES

Real success stories from *Stargazing LIVE 2011*

*"It was by far the busiest outreach event we've ever held at the Cardiff Astronomical Society. Around 500 people turned up, yet the long queues didn't put them off. It was really great to see so many people interested in astronomy."*

Theresa Cooper, Cardiff Astronomical Society

*"We are really excited about the opportunity to be involved with Stargazing LIVE again – the 2011 event was the biggest event we have ever organised and everyone who got involved enjoyed it."*

Peter Campbell-Burns, Farnham Astronomical Society

*"Despite the poor weather early in the evening, our observatory car park quickly filled up and our meeting room was overflowing with visitors. The sky conditions did improve and we had queues at members' telescopes. Our membership numbers have hit the 200 mark and gone beyond – a great success for the science of astronomy. We look forward to Stargazing LIVE 2012."*

Gerard Gilligan, Liverpool Astronomical Society

*"Over 400 budding astronomers descended on our event with an infectious enthusiasm to discover the wonders of the night sky through our telescopes. The excitement and eagerness to learn, especially from the youngsters, was heart-warming. We all wore the widest grins by the end of a stellar evening."*

Martin Andrews, Maidenhead Astronomical Society

*"Over 500 people of all ages attended our daytime continuous demonstration, planetarium and Q&A workshop. It was a record attendance for us."*

Richard Hickman, Stars In Your Skies, Shropshire

*"I didn't know the observatory was here and I only live around the corner. Thank you for showing me the Universe!"*

A visitor to Stargazing LIVE 2011 at the Liverpool Astronomical Society

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Stargazing LIVE airs on BBC Two on 16, 17 and 18 January from 8pm to 9.30pm. Visit [www.bbc.co.uk/stargazing](http://www.bbc.co.uk/stargazing) for more details

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groups really made these event sparkle. If you want to get involved in 2012, teaming up with a local tourist destination might mean more people come along to experience a 'wow' moment under the stars.

## A helping hand

While hosting a Stargazing LIVE event doesn't automatically mean that you'll appear on television, the BBC is able to offer guidance and support in other ways. BBC Learning has a team of project managers across the UK who can help societies get in touch with other local partners in their area. If you're interested in a collaborative event, or are looking for an interesting location to hold a Stargazing LIVE activity, email [stargazing@bbc.co.uk](mailto:stargazing@bbc.co.uk) with details of what you are planning and to find the contact in your area.

The BBC will also provide posters, banners and resources to hand out at events. Last year's *Star Guide* proved hugely popular, both at the events and in download form, and it will be returning this year. The BBC can also publicise your event using Things To Do. This new online activity planner can be searched by postcode and will list all of your future events, even after Stargazing LIVE has finished. You can find it at [www.bbc.co.uk/thingstodo](http://www.bbc.co.uk/thingstodo)

Of course, the weather may not go to plan, but there are ways around this. "Observing can share the stage with other activities and conversation," says the UK Dark Sky Discovery partnership's Dan Hillier, who has experience of running more than 350 sessions throughout Scotland.

Proven strategies Dan has used to weatherproof events include choosing an accessible venue that has warmth, space and refreshments. "It doesn't need to be the darkest spot if people are learning to recognise the constellations or observe Jupiter for the first time," he says.

## Kids love space

Children are fascinated by the night sky and they're not alone out there. A family-friendly event will attract parents and grandparents too. Dan Hillier gives a few ideas on how to get the kids involved.

- ▶ In your publicity, be clear that the event will be family-friendly and say that you'll finish by 9pm, even if you end up observing into the small hours.
- ▶ Go for an evening that isn't followed by a school day, as this will restrict children coming along.
- ▶ Take advance bookings if you can as this is reassuring for many parents.
- ▶ Make it weatherproof. Kids feel the cold quickly and often have shorter attention spans than adults so they'll really welcome any indoor facilities. You should also have plenty of spare hats and gloves to hand.
- ▶ Start the session with a five-minute indoor introduction to naked-eye observing – it gives everyone something to do while queuing for the scopes and bins.
- ▶ Kids will get stuck into activities like making star umbrellas; paper and pens for drawing will also occupy the wee ones.



▲ Add your society's Stargazing LIVE 2012 event onto the BBC's new online activity planner

"A mobile planetarium is guaranteed to make your evening a success, though there's likely to be a fee and they need a room large enough." Other recommended specialist activities, suggests Dan, are comet-making with dry ice, rocket-making and meteorite-handling.

"Simpler to provide are short talks, telescope displays, astro images and scale models. Strike a balance between people sitting and listening and more active options," says Dan. He also says it's a good idea to call on all the local skills you can from universities, astronomy clubs, science centres, outdoor learning providers, outreach scientists and planetarium providers.

"Stargazing LIVE 2011 was a big success," says Alan Holland, "and we'd like to say a giant thank you to all the event organisers, clubs and societies that made it so. You helped so many people get excited by the night sky and we look forward to seeing what's to come in 2012!"



Star child: kids enjoy looking at the night sky

- ▶ Keep talks short – 20 minutes maximum – with lots of astro images and a few words on the slides.
- ▶ Try to involve professional educators such as retired teachers or countryside rangers; they can help 'carry' an activity for children, even without a great deal of astronomical knowledge.
- ▶ Welcome questions and be encouraging!