

Thaxted Astronomical Society

News

Features

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Elon Musk's

Starlink Satellites

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-8235355/Elon-Musks-Starlink-satellites-cause-stir-streak-skies-western-Europe.html>

... Oh that's what they are! Chain of Elon Musk's Starlink satellites cause a stir as they streak through the skies of western Europe in dazzling display

Daily Mail 20th April 2020 >

- Video emerged online of the Starlink satellites trailing through the night sky
- Starlink is the informal name for Musk's Space X project
- Some people on Twitter compared the lights to Christmas and Santa's sleigh

SpaceX's Starlink project has made a very visible appearance above much of western Europe, startling sky-gazers.

A string of bright lights appeared to march uniformly across the sky last night, with photographers capturing the event and sharing footage on Twitter.

Prominent comedian, science communicator and physicist Dara O'Briain took to Twitter to bemoan the man-made constellation, saying 'there goes the night sky'

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People unfamiliar with maverick billionaire Elon Musk's plans to send up thousands of satellites into space to beam down internet were befuddled by the sight.

Suggestions trying to explain its appearance ranged from UFOs and aliens to Santa and his reindeer.

The string of bright lights seen across Britain and Europe was actually a procession of Starlink satellites in orbit.

The satellites are designed to provide broadband coverage across the world and each one weighs 575lbs (260kg).

They form a constellation which will eventually create a network encompassing all of Earth orbiting 341 miles above the surface.

Videos and images on Twitter were met with incredulity and outrage, including from Mr O' Briain.

In response to a user asking him for an explanation to the sight, Mr O'Briain tweeted: **Yep, just saw them too. It's the Starlink satellite network, and Elon Musk wants to put a 1000 of them up. There goes the night sky.'**

His posted garnered more than 150 replies from others who shared his disdain.

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The consensus among Twitter users was that the Starlink initiative is a harbinger of doom for future observations of the cosmos beyond our planet.

Amateur and professional astronomers alike have condemned the project since the first launch in May 2019, saying it will make scientific research more difficult.

SpaceX has so far launched 362 Starlink satellites into orbit, and is experimenting with dimming them.

The US-based company is testing a dark, anti-reflective coating to see how it alters the reflection from the crafts.

During the launch of the last batch, on March 18, SpaceX's live broadcast presenter claimed early indications suggest the coating is working.

'Preliminary results show a notable reduction,' said Jessica Anderson, one of the hosts of the webcast.

She added that the company had 'a couple of other ideas that we think could reduce the reflectivity even further,' Space News reports.

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Independent research published on pre-print site arXiv indicates the so-called DarkSat is around 55 per cent dimmer than the ordinary Starlink satellite.

University of Alabama astronomer Bill Keel has previously told the AFP that the sighting of the first Starlink satellite train had experts trying to extrapolate what effect artificial constellations of such steady brightness might have as they grow in number.

Fears developed, he said, that 'in 20 years or less, for a good part the night anywhere in the world, the human eye would see more satellites than stars.'

However, SpaceX believes this project will do more good than harm, as 'Starlink will provide fast, reliable internet to locations where access has been unreliable, expensive, or completely unavailable,' the company writes in its mission description.

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The string of lights could be seen travelling through the sky across western Europe



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Picture of Elon Musk's Starlink satellites passing over Essex last night by amateur photographer James Newman. Britons were left amazed and confused as Elon Musk's Starlink satellites lit up the night's sky



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Dara Ó Briain

@daraobriain



Yep, just saw them too. It's the Starlink satellite network, and Elon Musk wants to put a 1000 of them up. There goes the night sky.



Ian F @bluerover77 · 15h

So @daraobriain about half a dozen star looking lights equidistant apart moving at speed through the sky. Ideas?

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WHAT IS STARLINK AND WHAT ARE ITS GOALS?

Elon Musk's SpaceX has launched the fifth batch of its 'Starlink' space internet satellites - taking the total to 300.

They form a constellation of thousands of satellites, designed to provide low-cost broadband internet service from low Earth orbit.

The constellation, informally known as Starlink, and under development at SpaceX's facilities in Redmond, Washington.

Its goal is to beam superfast internet into your home from space.

While satellite internet has been around for a while, it has suffered from high latency and unreliable connections.

Starlink is different. SpaceX says putting a 'constellation' of satellites in low earth orbit would provide high-speed, cable-like internet all over the world.

The billionaire's company wants to create the global system to help it generate more cash.

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Musk has previously said the venture could give three billion people who currently do not have access to the internet a cheap way of getting online.

It could also help fund a future city on Mars.

Helping humanity reach the red planet is one of Musk's long-stated aims and was what inspired him to start SpaceX.

The company recently filed plans with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to launch **4,425 satellites into orbit above the Earth** - three times as many that are currently in operation.

'Once fully deployed, the SpaceX system will pass over virtually all parts of the Earth's surface and therefore, in principle, have the ability to provide ubiquitous global service,' the firm said.

'Every point on the Earth's surface will see, at all times, a SpaceX satellite.'

The network will provide internet access to the US and the rest of the world, it added.

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It is expected to take more than five years and \$9.8 billion (£7.1bn) of investment, although satellite internet has proved an expensive market in the past and analysts expect the final bill will be higher.

Musk compared the project to 'rebuilding the internet in space', as it would reduce reliance on the existing network of undersea fibre-optic cables which criss-cross the planet.

In the US, the FCC welcomed the scheme as a way to provide internet connections to more people.