

Leonids 2001

Sunday 18th November 2001

The night began with high expectation, well sort of – it was cloudy but we were all hopeful that it would clear up and we might actually see a bit of the meteor shower.

After sitting around for a while in the coffee lounge and drink hot chocolate (that machine must love AstroSoc!) it was time to go up and check out the night sky – and what did we see? Well not much was the answer! The sky was cloudy for the whole night and yet again the weather in Birmingham has let us all down. At least for us who where there we got to see some very questionable activities going on in the Guild – via the binoculars! If you want to know more about that just ask Tom and I am sure he will be more than happy to tell you.

So at about 3 a.m. (I think anyway!) we decided to call it a night and left it, however we might not have seen much ourselves but that was an entirely different matter for people around the world.

Although the 2001 Leonids did not reach the several-thousand-per-hour peak rates some scientists predicted, many observers around the world witnessed more than a thousand meteors per hour during the height of the celestial show. With a moonless sky early Sunday morning, hourly rates often topped one hundred. But for meteor watchers in the United States and Canada, the peak arrived around 5 a.m. (EST). Japanese observers reported several meteors per second during a second peak visible from eastern Asia and Australia.



The meteors generally had a white colouration however there was the odd few reported to be of other colours, such as green. Some of the meteors even left dust trails (see inserted picture by John Chumack via Astronomy.com) that due to the wind gave spectacular patterns and colours – what a shame we did not see anything in Birmingham – well there's always next year, but from a person who has lived in Birmingham all of his life I very much doubt that!

Lets hope the weather holds out as Scientists expect Earth to sweep up even more Leonids in 2002 than it did this year however the moon will brighten the sky preventing us from seeing many of them.

Samuel George (21st November 2001)