MPs urged to stand up for starry skies

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Dark starry skies are a magical sight and a distinctive feature of the countryside. But too often, light pollution means that many of us are unable to actually see the stars.

To help protect and improve our view of the heavens, the Buckinghamshire branch of CPRE, the countryside charity is inviting local people to be ‘citizen scientists’ and take part in Star Count 2023 – a cosmic census that will help map our view of the stars and the impact of light pollution across the county.

But that’s not all. This year, the charity is going a step further and asking local people to email their MPs to support improvements to national and local planning policy to tackle light pollution.

Last year’s Star Count showed that while light pollution nationally had fallen, in Buckinghamshire it increased slightly to 61 per cent, leaving fewer stars visible to the naked eye - all of which is bad news for people and nature.

Supported by the British Astronomical Association’s Commission for Dark Skies, 2023’s Star Count will be happening between 17-24th February when stargazers will be asked to count the number of stars they can see within the constellation of Orion and submit their count on the CPRE website.

Paula Buck, chair of CPRE Bucks, said: “Dark skies are really important for the health and wellbeing of people and animals. Too much artificial light can have a negative impact on our sleep and disrupt wildlife. Star Count is a great way for young and old to get involved in helping to rewild our skies. Best of all, you don’t need any special equipment because it’s all done with the naked eye. You just need to look up and start counting.”

The results from Star Count will help CPRE to create a map of where star-spotters are enjoying deep, dark skies, and identify areas where light pollution is most serious.

Mrs Buck added: “When people have submitted their count, we’ll be inviting them to email their MP and ask them to support new policies that will tackle light pollution at a national and local level. The fact that just 3 per cent of people in the UK enjoy truly dark skies is something we urgently need to address.”

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