



Eyes to the heavens: Stargazers of the RSPB Geltsdale reserve near Halburthgate, which offers great views of the night sky. STUART WALKER

Nature reserve becomes the centre of the universe, literally

Special status for RSPB site which is sanctuary for stargazers



In the dark: The RSPB's Geltsdale reserve near Brampton has been granted Dark Sky Discovery Site status

A PICTURESQUE pocket of rural north Cumbria is becoming a sanctuary for stargazers.

Special status has been awarded to the RSPB's Geltsdale reserve in recognition of its unspoiled view of the stars.

And there's been a celebration illuminated by nature itself to mark the achievement as stargazers and bird-lovers joined forces for a late night astronomy session.

The nature reserve, near Brampton, has been granted Dark Sky Discovery Site status.

David Ramshaw, of the Border Astronomical Society (BAS), said: "We were very lucky to have a brilliant night sky - possibly the best this

BY EMILY PARSONS

year so far. The night before and the night after were both cloudy and wet. With all this stormy weather we've been having it was like we were in the eye of the storm for one night."

Retired Carlisle teacher Mr Ramshaw said Geltsdale provides the perfect spot for star-spotting, and the event allowed participants to see the sky clearly.

"Everybody had the chance to look at Jupiter and its satellites, the Orion nebula, the Andromeda nebula, M31 and M32 - which has a supernova visible in it at present," he added.

RSPB Geltsdale was awarded Dark Sky Discovery Site status in September, with the



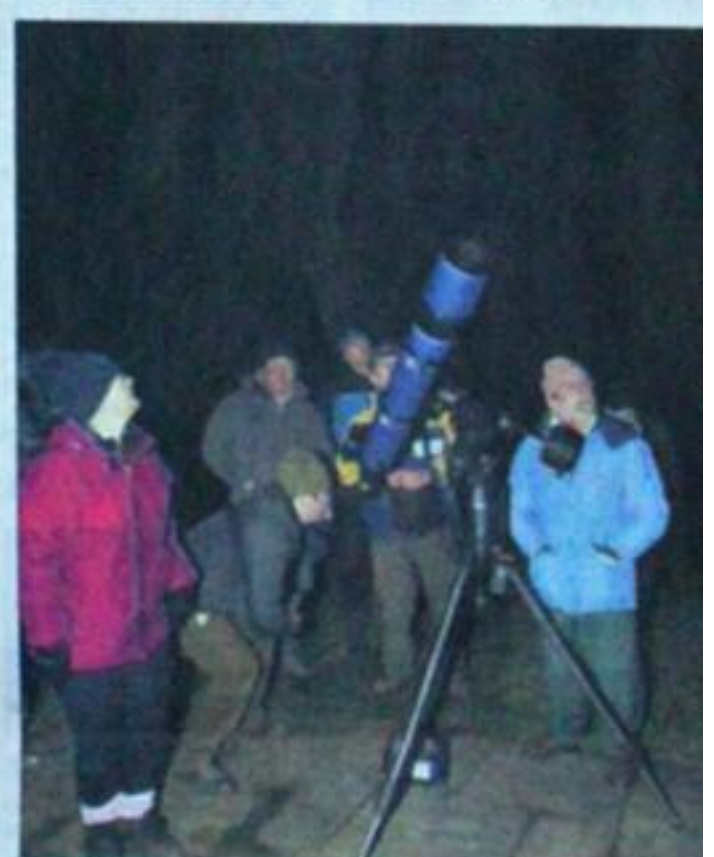
Clear views: Stuart Ridley, from Carlisle and Terry Houghton, from Brampton scan the night sky

support of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The reserve's location, with wide open views of the horizon and away from the light pollution of towns, is a great place for amateur and professional astronomers to stargaze.

In total, about 24 people attended the inaugural event, from both the RSPB and BAS as well as members of the public.

Geltsdale site manager Stephen Westerberg said: "It is a wild site and the wildlife enjoys that open, wild aspect. Because of that, there aren't



Fascination: Stargazers and bird-lovers join forces for a late night astronomy session

any artificial lights for a mile or two.

"Applying for Dark Sky Discovery Site status just fits in with how we are managing the site.

"It is another world - actually lots more worlds."

He added that there are already plans underway to

hold events in the future. Border Astronomical Society was formed in 1971 and hold regular bi-monthly meetings gives talks, hosts special events and runs the observatory at Trinity School Carlisle.

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