

Online Information

The Mystery of the Northern Lights

Fascinating Facts

1. In 1716, Edmund Halley theorized that the Earth's magnetic field and the Northern Lights were somehow connected.
2. *Aurora borealis* comes from the Roman goddess of the dawn, Aurora, and the Greek word *boreas*, which means "wind of the north."
3. Ancient folktales suggested that the aurora can create faint noises like static, clapping, or crackling. Recent scientific research recorded clapping sounds during an aurora display—showing that the folktales just might be true!
4. At the poles, the Earth's magnetic field is weaker, so the Sun's negatively charged particles sometimes enter our atmosphere and collide with the oxygen and nitrogen in our atmosphere.
5. Solar wind particles that collide with oxygen in our atmosphere produce green and yellow light, while nitrogen makes red, purple, and blue light.
6. Jupiter and Saturn also experience auroral ovals on both hemispheres.
7. In 1989, people living as far south as Florida could see the Northern Lights because of a geomagnetic storm on the Sun.
8. Because the International Space Station and the Northern Lights are at the same height in space, the astronauts see the Northern Lights from the side.
9. Ancient cave paintings depicting the Northern Lights have been found in France.
10. In North America, the best places to watch the Northern Lights are in Alaska and in the northwestern parts of Canada, particularly the Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories.

