

Dark-Sky Festival Guide

Versions 1.1 (8/3/22) - The program below is under construction and will be revised along the way. Check Back, or better yet, subscribe to the Event News on the festival webpage to get event update notices.

LOCATION

The Buffalo National River is Arkansas's only International Dark-Sky Park and one of two hundred dark-sky places worldwide. This designation is possible because of its increasingly rare natural nocturnal environment. The programming will occur at the **Tyler Bend campground** pavilion. Information, sales, volunteer check-in, and some tabling activities will take place at the **Silver Hill Float Service** near the entrance to the park on Highway 65 north of Marshall. Tentative times of activities for each of these locations are outlined in the condensed draft schedule below.



ACTIVITIES

October night skies are the least cloudy of the year. The temperatures are usually pleasant, and the summer Milky Way remains in the western sky. So it is a great time for a night sky festival, and the centerpiece of this event will be the nighttime programming. Beginning with a guided naked-eye tour of the principal constellations of the Fall sky seasoned with classic mythology and followed by a “star party” in which telescopic views will be shared of the major planets and deep-sky objects - galaxies, open clusters, globular clusters, nebulas, dying stars, and more. As a bonus, the event falls near the peak of the annual Orionid meteor shower. Finally, avid participants with binoculars can pursue, find and observe a list of prominent celestial objects in a celestial scavenger hunt.¹

If it is cloudy, we will not despair, as there will be a unique and engaging alternative programming lined up for each night.

The daytime programming will include lectures, demonstrations, interactive activities, and opportunities to visit with volunteers in diverse “Let’s Talk About” sessions scattered around the venue. Topics ranging from how to bird-safe your home, light your home responsibly, use telescopes and binoculars for sky watching, or taking night sky photos. Activities will range from a children’s celestial art contest, cooking solar marshmallows, and giant bubble blowing to

¹ There is always the potential to spot a random meteor under a naturally dark sky. A meteor shower occurs when the earth passes through a stream of dust usually left by a comet in the past producing a number of “falling stars” that emanate from a particular area in the sky. Most meteor showers are best viewed after midnight. The Orionids typically peak at around ten to twenty meteors per hour. These are fast meteors, often leaving lingering trails and sometimes bright fireballs. The festival nights will be just past the predicted peak.

an adult art lesson (how to paint the milky way) and making pocket solar systems, learning about and examining meteors, and much more for all ages.

PREPARATION

Dress warmer than you think. People so rarely spend time out of doors after dark anymore that they fail to realize how much colder it feels when the sun goes down. Also, bring something warm to **drink and a snack**, especially if you plan to stay up past the guided star party to view the meteor shower or pursue the celestial scavenger hunt. Except for the scavenger hunt, all you need to observe is **your eyes**.²

It takes twenty minutes or more to **fully dark adapt your eyes**. Exposure to white light will erase deep dark adaption in a flash. So, white light flashlights and cameras with flashes are not to be used on the observing field. Unless you want to use a sky chart or record observations, none of which is essential to enjoy the constellation tour or the star party, you can do without a flashlight. But, if you want one, it needs to be either a **red or amber light**. These can be readily purchased online and in some larger retail outlets that carry flashlights. You can also stretch a red balloon over a white light, and art stores often carry a red film that you can apply to a regular flashlight. However, the easiest solution is to buy one of the little keychain flashlights on the Festival webpage, which come with a neck lanyard and sky chart of the October sky. Order now online, and we will have them at the Spring Hill location for you to pick up. Don't count on picking these up if you have not pre-ordered.

Binoculars are great for sky watching but not needed during the organized program. However, after the program, they could be used with a sky chart or smartphone app to do your own exploring or to participate in the celestial scavenger hunt.

Anyone planning to observe after the program, meteor shower watchers especially, will want some kind of **ground blanket, sleeping bag, mat, or reclining chair**. The circle in front of the visitor's center will be available for meteor watchers to lay out, as will the Homestead field at the top of the ridge, if it has been mowed.

Tentative Schedule Outline:

- ❖ Friday
 - Silver Hill - 3:00 to 7:00 PM
 - Check-in, information, purchase and pickup merchandise, etc.
 - Tyler Bend Pavilion
 - 4:00, let's Talk Show-N-Tell opens. Visit with knowledgeable volunteers about all manner of sky-watching activities, as well as light pollution effects on birds, insects, the sky, and how to mitigate, image, measure, and witness it all.
 - 5:45 PM, brief Welcome remarks.

² The only telescopes allowed on the field are those brought by the volunteers who are sharing views with the public. Telescope volunteers are welcome. If that interests you go here to [register as a volunteer](#).

- 6:00 PM, Dinner break.
 - 7:30 PM, Constellation tour (civil twilight ends 6:53, Nautical ends 7:23)
 - 7:50 PM, Telescopic Star Party begins (astronomical twilight ends 7:52)
 - 10:00 PM, Guided star party ends, meteor watch and celestial scavenger hunt continue on-your-own.
- ❖ Saturday
- Silver Hill - 11:00 – 1:00 PM & 4:00 – 7:00 PM
 - Check-in, information, purchase and pick up merchandise, etc.
 - Pavilion
 - 1:00 PM
 - H-Alpha Solar Scope
 - Adult Program – presentations on a host of night sky-related talks and presentations such as:
 - The birth and death of stars
 - Using binoculars for celestial observing
 - Learning the Constellations in tonight’s sky
 - Planning for and observing the 2024 solar eclipse
 - How to self-certify your home as night sky friendly
 - Light pollution and pollinators
 - How to monitor your own sky and report it as a citizen scientist
 - Birds After Dark -Learn what birds are doing during a typical October night
 - Beginning nightscape photography
 - The Resurrection of a Giant Refractor
 - Observing meteor showers
 - Gilbert’s quest for responsible lighting
 - Lights out Heartland, and protecting bird migration
 - Night Sky Photo contest
 - Children’s programs & activities:
 - Children’s celestial drawing contest
 - Giant bubble blowing
 - Solar cooked marshmallows
 - Stomp rockets
 - Various hands-on science activities
 - The pocket Solar System
 - 6:00 PM, Dinner break
 - 7:30 PM Constellation tour begins (civil twilight ends 6:53, Nautical ends 7:23)
 - 7:50 PM, Telescopic views begin (astronomical twilight ends 7:52)
 - 10:00 PM, Guided star party ends, meteor watch and celestial scavenger hunt continue on-your-own.
 - Art Gallery
 - 10:00 AM Adult programs
 - Celestial art class