

# Stars above: Waiheke skies put on a show

Have you noticed the stars above twinkling red, green and blue? Waiheke stargazers have been in a spin lately with colourful displays of scintillation in the night sky.

Xan Hamilton has been astonished by the colourful spectacle, which she and her family have observed from their front porch in Surfdale. "They looked like geostationary LED disco lights," she told *Gulf News*.

Meanwhile, others have taken to social media, reporting the same strange phenomenon.

Gareth Davies of Dark-Sky Waiheke Island, which recently set up an observatory at the Waiheke Resources Trust in Oneroa, says it is scintillation.

He says turbulence in the atmosphere causes this twinkling, with pockets of hot and cold air affecting the amount of light reaching your eye. Basically the atmosphere is refracting the light to cause the stars to flash in the colours of the rainbow.

"I have noticed a lot of astrosintillation, and that happens when the light enters the layers of the earth's atmosphere. When the light comes through there may be wind, a difference in temperature, air density. All of these things will impact the light coming

through and it tends to impact stars, rather than the planets. That's the thing that really makes the stars twinkle," he said.

"The stars are so far away, light years away from Earth - Jupiter I see relatively clearly and it's 600 million kilometres away. The nearest star is 44 trillion kilometres away and that's the closest one. Jupiter is much larger and you see it as a big disc."

As for the colours, "Generally, these colours are the result of different surface temperatures of stars. Most of the stars are either blue white or red orange. The blue white are the hotter stars, with a shorter wave length. The older stars have a longer wave length and we see that as red and orange.

"It's unusual to see green in a star, our eyes, usually when they see that colour, try and turn it into white."

Gareth says he has noticed Arcturus scintillating a lot. "It's the fourth brightest star in the sky, it's also the brightest star in the northern hemisphere.

People on Waiheke are lucky they can look up into the night sky and see this without a scope." • *Liza Hamilton*



A stunning show above Rocky Bay. Peter Rees Photography



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