

# Tier is in the dark about flying object

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The object that's been brightening Broome County skies continues to keep residents and sky-watchers in the dark.

Theories abound about the object that was reported overhead since Thursday. Meteors, the planet Venus, and a military helicopter that landed at Edwin A. Link Field Monday night have all been linked to the sightings.

"You have to take all observations with a grain of salt," said E. Jay Sarton Jr., Kopernik Observatory director. "Most people are inexperienced observers and they may draw conclusions based on what they see."

Sarton believes Sunday's sighting was a meteor. The Quadrantid meteor shower, which peaked in the east at the beginning of the month, could still be shooting stray space rocks into Earth's atmosphere, local authorities said.

However, observers claim the object changed direction, hovered and presented a ball of light rather than a meteor's characteristic streak.

A Windsor woman yesterday reported a blinding ball of light 3 feet in diameter Monday evening. Two other observers made their sightings Thursday.

Victoria VanOstrand of Blatchley Road, Windsor, said she saw the object while driving 1½ miles from home. It was 20 feet above the treetops silently traveling north to south across Trim Street about 7 p.m. when it suddenly veered west, she said.

"I was nearly underneath it. The light was so blinding, I had to jam on the brakes," VanOstrand said.

VanOstrand watched the object hover over the trees in her back yard before she went inside. It was gone yesterday morning.

Edwin A. Link Field officials yesterday confirmed a military helicopter landed briefly Monday before lifting off that night. Witnesses say the copter was traveling unusually low.

"There were two bright white

lights, and they were too high to be street lights," said Celeste Pazzaglini-Mack of Binghamton. "It wasn't moving at all; it was just sort of hovering."

Pazzaglini-Mack said she saw the bright object about 6:15 p.m. Thursday as she was driving on Hooper Road in Endwell.

Peter Santangelo, a field investigator for the Texas-based Mutual UFO (unidentified flying object) Network and a member of the board of the Roberson-Kopernik Observatory in Vestal, said he's going to take a closer look at the latest sightings.

As far as Santangelo can determine, the object seen Sunday was probably nothing more than a fireball — a large, brilliant meteor that may trail light sparks, he said.

Once the object exploded, possibly leaving fragments somewhere in Pennsylvania, a burst of red, green, blue and other colors resulted, Santangelo said.

"I was at the observatory at the same time (of the Sunday sighting)," he said. "It was one hell of a fireball. There's no doubt in my mind that's what it was."

A Chenango County sheriff's deputy and the Village of Sherburne police chief, William Excell, reported seeing "bright" "white light" shortly after 7 p.m.

A sighting by two Conklin women between 6:30 and 7 p.m. Monday in the west was probably the planet Venus, Santangelo said. The blinking reported by the women was apparently caused by clouds hiding and revealing the bright planet.

One of the women took three pictures of the object before it disappeared, Santangelo said. The pictures will probably show the planet, he said.

Binghamton resident Claudia Wilkins and her children are sure they saw flashing red and white lights on what looked like a blimp. She saw the "huge" object just before 6 p.m. Thursday.

"We watched it for 10 or 15 seconds," she said yesterday. "We're not nuts."