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What's a Moon Dog?

While moon dogs may sound like some kind of pet from outer space, they have little to do with man's best friend. Moon dogs are actually the name for colored light that surrounds the moon. They are caused by clouds of ice crystals that surround the earth. Even though the clouds are mostly invisible to the naked eye, the result of the clouds can be very beautiful.

The ice crystals, also known as diamond dust, bend light coming from the moon. You may have noticed how light often appears to separate into different colors when seen through a prism or a jewel. The same thing happens when the light from the moon gets refracted (or bent) by the ice crystals in the earth's atmosphere. This causes the light surrounding the moon to look red and blue instead of the usual yellow and white.

Moon dogs are found not only in our skies but also in our popular culture. In fact, the very famous British band, the Beatles, was actually known as Johnny and the Moondogs for a short while. Your parents or grandparents might also remember the character Moondoggy from the ABC television series *Gidget!* "Moondog" was also the nickname for former saxophone great, Louis T. Hardin.

But nowadays, with the Beatles broken up, *Gidget* off the air, and the great Mr. Hardin now deceased, when someone tells you to look out your window at the moon dog, you'll know exactly what he or she means: the ring of pretty colors around the moon.

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