

Teenager's party blamed for UFO mystery



By CHRIS MARSHALL

THEIR presence in the night sky stopped onlookers in their tracks and sent the conspiracy theorists into overdrive.

But despite their otherworldly glow, it seems the mysterious orange lights spotted above the Capital earlier this month have a rather more down-to-earth explanation.

It has now emerged that the orange orbs, which were caught on film by walkers in the Braid Hills area, were Chinese sky lanterns let off during a teenager's birthday party.

Several people reported seeing the lights between 8.50pm and 9pm on Saturday, April 12.

The UFO mystery was today solved when a resident of Blackford Avenue, near the Royal Observatory, said the lights were nothing more than lanterns

bought from internet auction site eBay as part of celebrations for her daughter's birthday.

The woman, who did not want to be named, said she was shocked at all the fuss the lights had caused.

She said: "They were called Chinese sky lanterns and they even said on the box that they could be mistaken for UFOs."

One Edinburgh-based astronomer said the growing popularity of the lanterns had led to a string of similar sightings in the Capital in the past few years.

Resembling small hot-air balloons, the lanterns are lit by a naked flame and then float into the sky with a fiery glow.

Russell Eberst, a former information officer at the Royal Observatory on Blackford Hill, said: "We get a steady

flow of calls about UFOs, and Chinese lanterns are making up a bigger percentage of those in recent years.

"There are usually two or three UFO sightings a day reported to the observatory, especially if we get a run of clear nights. The lanterns tend to be used more at times like New Year and the Chinese New Year.

"There are no doubt sci-fi buffs who would love to be in contact with people from other worlds, but there are all sorts of lights in the sky.

It's a big jump from seeing something in the sky to assuming it relates to an alien civilisation visiting the Earth."

A number of people had contacted the Evening News following sightings of the orange lights.

Air traffic controllers had noted nothing unusual and the Army also struggled to come up with an explanation for the strange objects in the night sky.

Last year, the Government opened its records on UFO sightings for the first time, containing eyewitness reports from across Edinburgh and the surrounding regions. Sightings included a series of flashing lights over Corstorphine Hill in 1998.

Investigators said at the time they were puzzled by the lights and urged more witnesses to come forward, but the mystery was never solved. Other incidents, such as two "fuzzy white lights" that danced over Leith in 2001 and a "swirly" object appearing above East Linton in 2006, have also never been explained.

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