

NOW

SKYCAST

*Overhead this month
in parts of the world*

April 15
Look for Saturn

April 22
Lyrids meteor
shower at peak

*Hearing-loop systems
use copper wires such
as this to channel a
single source of sound
directly to hearing aids.*

Sound Effects

Imagine flipping a switch to cut out muddling background noise so all you hear is a speaker's voice. For millions of people with hearing difficulties, it's now possible with hearing loops—a simple technology appearing in U.S. airports, churches, auditoriums, and other venues. Already widespread in the U.K. and Scandinavian nations, the system takes advantage of a common hearing aid component called a telecoil. Loops don't require headsets or receivers like other assistive methods; the magic lies in wire loops installed at the site. These relay magnetic signals to the telecoil from an amplifier linked to the audio source, typically a microphone or public address system. Activate the aid's "T" setting (originally for "telephone mode") and it's like a voice crystallizes inside your head. This year New York City expects to have all 455 staffed subway booths looped, joining the London Underground in enabling the hard of hearing to rise above the clatter and din. —Luna Shyr