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A Science Service Feature

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THE COLOR OF LIGHTNING

The color of lightning has been the subject of systematic observations in some parts of the world, notably in England, where some rather elaborate statistics have been published as to the relative frequency of different colors as apparently related to the kind of lightning (sheet or streak), the height of the clouds, etc. Lightning has been reported of all colors - blue, golden, red, green, etc. Spectroscopic evidence, however, indicates that most lightning flashes are either approximately white or rose-colored. White lightning is seen when the discharge passes through air containing little or no rain, and its color is due to the light given out by oxygen and nitrogen, the two chief gases of the atmosphere. When lightning passes through rain it often has a reddish tinge, owing to the light produced by hydrogen, one of the elements of water.

When lightning is seen at a great distance it may look yellow because the violet and blue portions of the light do not pass through a great extent of atmosphere so readily as do the yellow and red.

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