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When Darkness Falls

NIGHT VISION BINOCULARS



Newcon Optik
Newcon Optik BN-5
\$5,995, www.atncorp.com.

Twilight hikes, nocturnal wildlife observation, reenacting tense scenes from Tom Clancy novels - all perfect excuses to pick up a pair of see-in-the-dark binocs. Photocathode tubes magnify existing light so you can explore the gloom in all its eerie, green-tinted glory.

SPLURGE

ATN Night Shadow Gen 4

The 2.2-pound Night Shadow offers stunningly clear images that exceed anything else on the market, thanks to military-grade technology that's thrillingly illegal to export. Also included: 5X magnification, digital controls, an infrared mode that most people won't need, and a proximity sensor that turns the glasses off when not in use. Details like individual blades of grass are as plain as day after dark. Excessive? Never.

BEST BUY

Newcon Optik BN-5 (pictured)

The tough little BN-5 has a rubber-armored body to resist weather - and take abuse from butterfingere users. Though it's heavier than some (2.65 pounds), it has a smart, no-nonsense design that places buttons and adjustable eyepieces exactly under your index fingers. While the BN-5 has only 2.4X magnification, it makes the most out of its basic optical tubes for great clarity - despite a slight fish-eye effect.

\$699, www.newcon-optik.com.

OVERRATED

Night Owl Night Hawk

With its sleek one-piece construction, the Night Hawk weighs a mere 2 pounds. Unfortunately, the flimsy plastic shell isn't adjustable, and the eyepiece comes from the Fisher Price school of design. Magnification is 4X, but details aren't as sharp as the Optik's, and infrared washes out anything nearby. The Night Owl line is easy to find at chain stores, but take the time to seek out better-quality products elsewhere.

\$499, www.nightowloptics.com.

- Alison Willmore