

August Skies

If you were waiting for August in anticipation of the Perseid Meteor shower, I'm afraid I have some disappointing news. Oh, the shower will take place, right on schedule from August 11th through the 13th. However, a waning Moon will be just about in the worst place possible for meteor watching.

For you die hard Perseid watchers there surely will be a few bright ones that will be visible in spite of the Moon. As always, the best time to view the Perseids is from about 11 PM local time until just before dawn. They will appear from just about every part of the sky so pick an observing angle such that you don't have to stare at the Moon!

Speaking of the Moon, it will be 1st quarter on the 2nd, full on the 9th, last quarter on the 15th, new on the 23rd and 1st quarter again on the last day of this month. Be sure to follow the Moon's progress from the 1st through the 4th as it passes by Jupiter and the constellation Scorpius.

Rapidly moving Saturn will be in conjunction with the Sun on the 7th and emerges into the morning sky by the end of the month. On August 21 & 22, about half an hour before sunrise, Venus, Saturn and Mercury will be visible about 5 to 10 degrees above the horizon in the east-northeast.

Jupiter is still quite prominent in the early evening sky and reaches quadrature (90 degrees east of the Sun) on August 2nd. For those of you with binoculars or small telescopes the significance of this is that eclipses of Jupiter's 4 giant moons will be more readily observable. But hurry, the giant planet will set at 10 PM by the end of the month.

Dazzling Venus will be joined in the pre-dawn sky by Mercury and Saturn. On the morning of the 9th both Venus and Mercury will be lined up almost in a straight line with the bright stars Castor and Pollux in the constellation Gemini, "The Twins."

On the 3rd and 4th of this month you can use the Moon to find the constellation Scorpius. This is one of the most prominent constellations in the summer sky. Locate the bright orange/red star Antares the so-called "Heart of the Scorpion." From Antares follow the line of stars forming the body down and to the left as it curls back up to form the stinger. It is there that you can find the heart of our home galaxy, "The Milky Way."

The name Antares means "The Rival of Mars." Since Antares lies near the ecliptic, red Mars passes by from time to time. Antares is classified as a "supergiant" star and is only a mere 600 light years from us. Because of its size, astronomers believe that it could be a

candidate for a Type II supernova explosion that could happen anytime in the next million years or so. Fortunately it is far enough away so that the explosion would not be a problem for life here on Earth. However, when it does explode, it will be a very spectacular sight in the summertime sky!

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