

## June Skies

This month features a close inspection of the hive by two planets! No, this is not a Star Trek episode about the Borg! The hive in question is the famous “Beehive Star Cluster” and the two planets involved are Mars and Saturn.

On the evening of June 13th, Mars and Saturn will be located about one degree either side of the cluster and on the 15th Mars will be smack in the center of this open cluster. On the 17th the two planets will be the closest to each other, a mere  $\frac{1}{2}$  degree apart, with the cluster now 1.5 degrees to the west. This is the closest the two planets have come to each other in the sky since 1978!

Binoculars or small telescopes will give a good view of this event. Indeed on the 17th both Mars and Saturn should be in the same field of view in a small to moderate size telescope. However, this event happens only about 20 degrees above the western horizon. Early evening observing is a must to catch this event.

While you're at it, take some time to look at the Beehive. This is one of the few “naked eye” star clusters, the Pleiades being another example. In fact that name “Beehive” is relatively new. In ancient times it was known as Praesepe, or the manger where Jesus was born. The cluster was reckoned to be the straw while the four surrounding bright stars formed the manger or cradle.

Mercury joins the fun about mid month. On the 17th look for it below and to the right of the Mars-Saturn pair. By the 20th Mercury will be at its highest position above the horizon, setting about one hour and forty five minutes after the sun in the west-northwest.

Jupiter continues to shine brilliantly high in the southeastern sky during the early evening. If you have a small telescope it should be rich in atmospheric detail. Don't forget to look for “Great Red” and “Red Jr.” the two storms in Jupiter's southern hemisphere.

Venus continues to shine brightly at dawn's first light. On the 23rd and 24th binoculars will reveal the Pleiades star cluster just above and to the left of the planet. On the 23rd the waning crescent Moon joins the show appearing to the left of Venus and slightly below the Pleiades.

The Moon will be first quarter on the 3rd, full on the 11th, last quarter on the 18th, and new on the 25th.

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