

SPACEWATCH

the newsletter of the Abingdon Astronomical Society

May 2002

“Visual Observation Compared With CCD Imaging”

by Paul McGale & Paul Warren

and the Annual General Meeting

I really hope you have all seen the great planetary grouping of the last few weeks. If you haven't ever seen Mercury, you really just haven't been looking. Last week I managed to photograph Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Venus and Mercury in the same 50mm lens shot. How often can you do that? Well, about every 70 years apparently. That's once in a life-time!



8 sec. Exposure at f1.8, Canon 50mm lens, ASA 400.

If you've missed all of the many clear nights we've had recently, then shame on you, but you do have a few more days before Mercury sinks away from view back towards the Sun. If you see a “star” to the lower right of bright Venus, it probably is Mercury. In a telescope it will show a small pink disk. In the next few weeks all except Venus will disappear into the twilight. Venus will continue to brighten and move away from the Sun for the next few months.

Did you all see the occultation of Saturn by the Moon on the 16th April at 10pm? The weather was clear over most of Oxfordshire so this was an easy sight. Brian James took this series of photographs:



The photos were taken on a Casio QV3500 Digicam: ISO 100; 0.4sec exposure at f2; using 12x digital zoom.

The Night Sky this Month

The planets

Mercury reached greatest eastern elongation (i.e.: furthest from the Sun) is on May 4th, and the planet should be on view until about the middle of May. Look to the lower right of Venus.

Venus - Venus is now, low and very bright in the west. It will get higher and more obvious over the next few months.

Mars - While Mars is not very bright now, it is still fairly easy to see low in the west. The Moon will be close on the 14th May.

Jupiter - In Gemini, high in the west after sunset, will not set until the early hours. Later, on June 3rd, Jupiter and Venus will be at their closest. It will be no surprise that you will see little of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars after June until they reemerge from behind the Sun into the morning sky in another month or two.

Saturn is close to Mars, and brighter. The rings are favourably orientated towards us so even a small telescope will show them.

On 13th/14th May, the crescent Moon is close to the group of five planets, with a particularly good grouping of Venus, Mars and the Moon on the 14th.

From about May 19th for a couple of days, there is a fairly straight line of planets - Mercury, Saturn, Mars, Venus, and Jupiter. This is an excellent chance to watch the planets move relative to one another (especially if we have several clear evenings), so get out there with your binoculars.

Later on, on June 3rd, Jupiter and Venus will be at their closest. It will be no surprise that you will see little of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars after June until they reemerge from behind the Sun into the morning sky in another month or two.

Moon Phases:

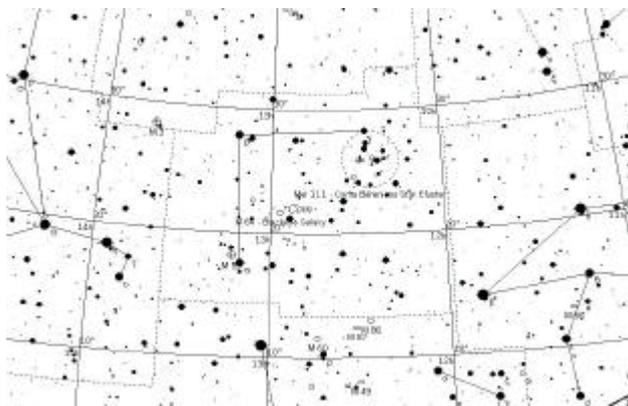
Last Qtr: 4th May; New: 12th May; First Qtr: 19th May; Full: 26th May; Last Qtr: 3rd June; New: 10th June.

This month's Deep Sky Object

By Paul Warren

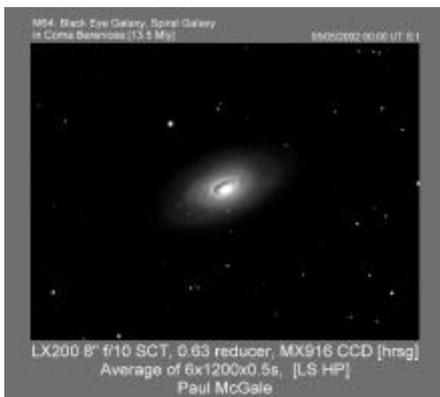
This month's DSO has obviously been involved in a bit of a scrap and the results of the scrap show too! The DSO in question is the galaxy M64, often referred to as the Black Eye galaxy!

M64 is a nice bright galaxy, glowing at magnitude 8.6, and is fairly straightforward to find. Start off by locating γ Com in your finderscope. Now move up and to the right and you run into the (comparatively speaking) bright star 35 Com. Now move up and to the left by about a degree and you run into M64.



On a good night you should be able to see the dark dust band which gives the galaxy its nickname. I have seen this with a 5 inch scope, and I think that it should be visible with a 4 inch scope under the right conditions (i.e. a good dark sky). The dust band looks like a comma (“,”) to me. As this galaxy is quite bright, so it can take magnification reasonably well, and higher magnification can help to increase the contrast

and thus increase the visibility of the “black eye” of M64.



M64 is believed to be about 25 million light years away and this

would make it about 50,000 light years across. Despite its proximity to the Virgo cluster of galaxies, M64 is not believed to be a member of the cluster. M64 is a spiral galaxy which, while

not obvious to the eye through a telescope, shows up quite nicely in images of it.

This is a good time of year to observe this galaxy, but because of the lengthening days, the observing season for it tends to be cut short. So the lesson here is not to miss this galaxy when you have a chance to see it.

NOTICES

Please note that admission charges for non members will increase to £2 per meeting, starting from the September meeting. The first visit by a non-member will remain free.

The Webb Society is holding its AGM on May 18th at the Rutherford Appleton Labs. Speakers are James Binney (Galaxies), Helen Walker (Infrared Astronomy), David Ratledge (Imaging), Nick Martin (Visual Spectroscopy). Trade stands attending. Entrance £7. Non members welcome. It is usually a good day out.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The society's e-mailing list is used by members to comment on all things astronomical, as well as other related subjects.

The list is also used to publicise “first-clear-night” observing evenings and for alerting members to hot observing news.

To subscribe: send an email to abiastro-subscribe@topica.com. You will then receive all e-mails sent to the list. To post e-mails on the list: send an email to abiastro@topica.com. To unsubscribe send an email to abiastro-unsubscribe@topica.com

WEB SITES

Don't forget our web site:- <http://www.abingdonastro.org.uk>

Our webmaster, Chris Holt, would welcome any material for the members' observation page – particularly photographs. Some pretty stunning pictures have been added recently.

ISS/Iridium data: <http://www.heavens-above.com/main.asp>.

Space weather & aurora forecasts:

<http://www.pfrr.alaska.edu/~pfrr/AURORA/INDEX.HTM> & <http://www.skypub.com/news/astroalert/astroalert.html>.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

20th May: Beginners' mtg. in the Perry Room. 8pm.
10th June: “The Effects of Precession” by Robin Gorman (Hampshire. Astronomical Group), 8pm.
N.B. There are no observing evenings in June, July or August.

The editor of “SpaceWatch” is Andrew Ramsey, who would very much appreciate your help and contributions. Please send any news, observations, photos, etc. to:
SnailMail: A.T.Ramsey, 35 Cope Close, OXFORD, OX2 9AJ.
E-mail: AbiAstro@ATRamsey.com
Phone: 01865 245339