

SPACEWATCH

the newsletter of the Abingdon Astronomical Society

September 2002

“Early Results from the Gemini 8m Telescopes”

by Dr Pat Roche (Oxford University)

Welcome back to the 2002-3 season of Abingdon Astronomical Society’s meetings. I hope you all had a good summer. The nights are drawing in again now, which gives us astronomers the opportunity to do some star-gazing at a more convenient hour instead of staying up into the early hours of the morning.

We start this season with Dr Pat Roche of Oxford University who is going to tell us a little about the new Gemini 8m telescopes in Hawaii and Chile, which give us an unobstructed view of both the northern and southern hemispheres.

I’m sorry that SpaceWatch is a little rushed this month - I’m getting married on Saturday and there’s rather a lot to do!

The Night Sky this Month

By Bob Dryden



Venus is very low in the south west immediately after sunset. The crescent Moon will be in the vicinity on the 9th.

Mars is hidden in the glow of sunrise.

Jupiter (magnitude -1.9 , in Cancer) shines brightly in the east before and during dawn. Above it are Pollux and Castor. It’s noticeably brighter than Sirius, magnitude -1.4 twinkling in the southeast.

Saturn (magnitude $+0.1$, between Taurus and Gemini) rises around midnight daylight saving time and shines high in the southeast by dawn. It’s positioned about midwa between Capella (to its upper left), Orion (to its lower right), orange Aldebaran (to its upper right), and Pollux and Castor (to its lower left).

Moon Phases:

New: 7th Sept.; First Qtr: 13th Sept.; Full: 21st Sept.; Last Qtr: 29th Sept.; New: 6th Sept.

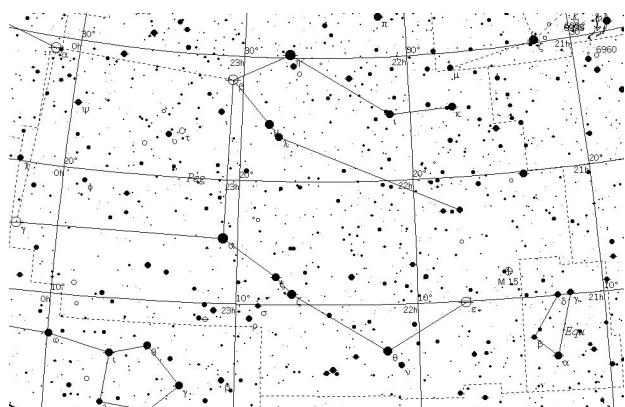
This month’s Deep Sky Object

By Paul Warren

I’m going to start off the new season with the last of the great globular clusters. I usually associate the globular cluster M3 in Canes Venatici with spring, and so I also associate M15 in Pegasus with Autumn.

The easiest way to find M15 is to locate theta (θ) Peg and epsilon (ϵ) Peg. Now project a line running from theta past epsilon and carry it on for half that distance. This takes you to the immediate vicinity of M15, and it should show up easily enough in the finder scope. For those of you with GoTo scopes, just let the technology do the work for you!

M15 is one of the best globular clusters in the northern hemisphere. It is quite bright, with a magnitude of around 6.5, so it should be possible to see it naked eye from a dark sky site.



M15 lies some 30,000 light years away from us. At low power (40x), the 12.3' disc appears as a milky glow, while higher power (100x) resolves it edges into dozens of tiny pinpoint stars. It is a good specimen and well worth more than just a cursory glance.

M15 is an unusual globular cluster for several reasons. It is an intense X-ray source, leading some astronomers to speculate that it contained a central black hole. The Hubble Space Telescope dispelled this by resolving the cluster down to its core and revealing nothing extraordinary about it. Astronomers now believe that the x-ray energy might be coming from one or more supernova remnants. It contains a huge number of variable stars (in excess of 100). It is the only known globular cluster to contain a known planetary nebula (too faint to be picked out with backyard scopes).

meeting. The first visit by a non-member will remain free.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The society's e-mailing list is used by members to comment on all things astronomical, as well as other related and not-so-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

23rd Sept.: 8pm. Beginners' Meeting in the Perry Room.

7th to 9th Oct. (FCN): Observing Evening 8pm. Britwell Salome. Contact Bob on 01491 201620 to confirm. Ask Bob tonight for a map if you want directions.

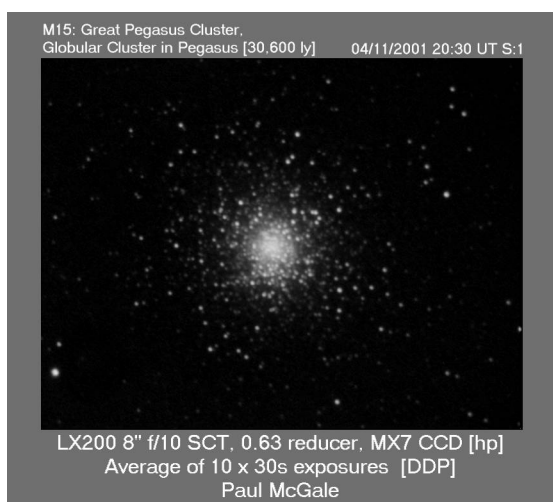
14th Oct.: 8pm. "Searching for Life in the Solar System" by Dr Julian Hiscox (Reading University).

28th Oct.: 8pm. Beginners' Meeting in the Perry Room.

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.

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NOTICES

Please note that admission charges for non members have increased to £2 per meeting, starting from this