



The Binocular Sky

February
2012

Newsletter

Introduction

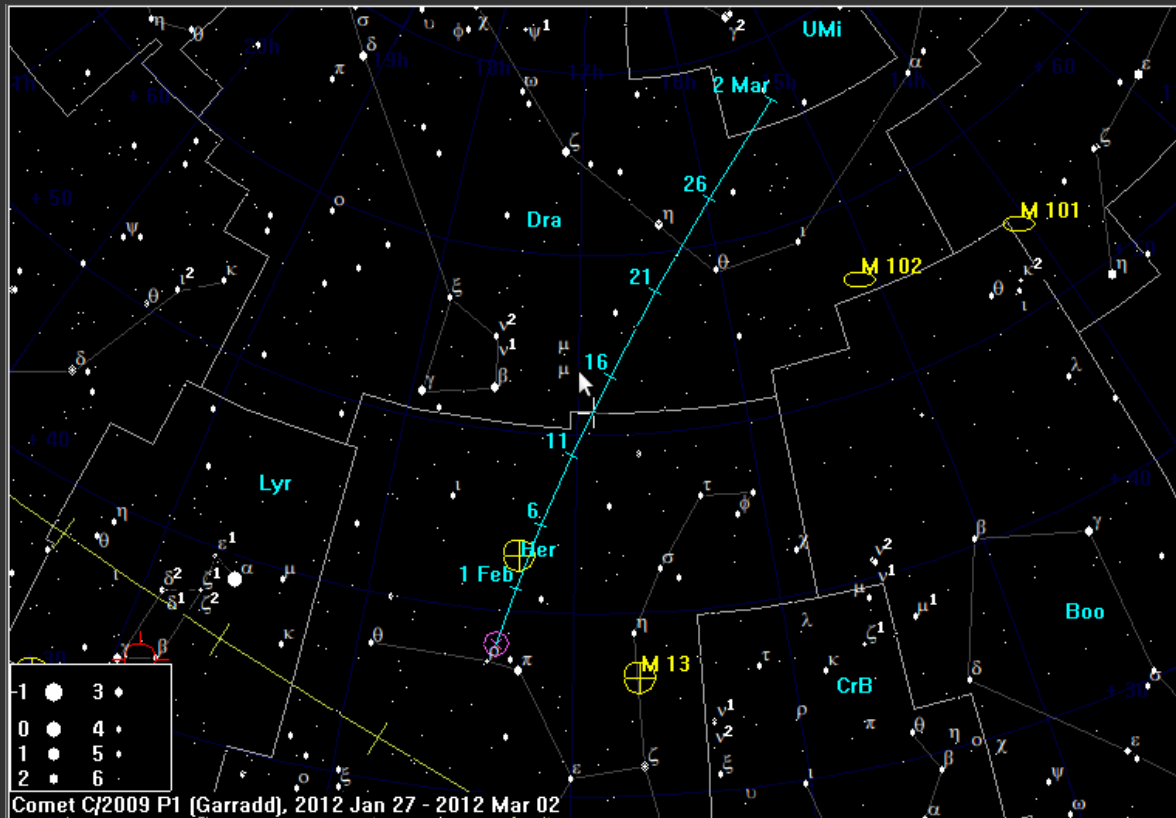
Welcome to the February 2012 *Binocular Sky* Newsletter . The intention of this monthly offering is to highlight some of the binocular targets for the coming month. It is primarily targeted at observers in the UK, but should have some usefulness for observers anywhere north of Latitude 30°N. For this Newsletter to be a useful tool, it needs to have the information that YOU want in it; therefore please do not be shy about making requests – if I can accommodate your wishes, I shall do so.

Transient Objects

The only transient object of note this month is Comet C/2009 P1 (Garradd), which is making its way through Hercules and Draco. Although it is circumpolar, it is best observed in the morning. During the month it rises from about 60° to 75° as astronomical twilight ends, making it more easily visible in small binoculars.

Date	RA	Declination	Magnitude
2012 Jan 27	17h21m53.75s	+38 06' 20.9"	7.1
2012 Feb 01	17h17m20.45s	+41 17' 19.7"	7.1
2012 Feb 06	17h10m48.81s	+44 52' 32.5"	7.1
2012 Feb 11	17h01m27.01s	+48 52' 23.1"	7.0
2012 Feb 16	16h47m53.38s	+53 14' 51.1"	7.0
2012 Feb 21	16h27m55.46s	+57 53' 17.0"	7.0
2012 Feb 26	15h58m01.44s	+62 32' 46.5"	7.1
2012 Mar 02	15h13m08.46s	+66 45' 07.6"	7.1

Comet Garradd Finder Chart



Note its close approach to the bright (mag 6.4) globular cluster, M92, on Feb 03. Minimum separation is around noon for the UK, so observe it before dawn on that day.

The other comet, P/2006 T1 (Levy), that several sources **still** say would be visible this month, was recovered on 2011Dec 17 at magnitude 19.8, and given a new designation: 2011 Y1. It is now not expected to exceed magnitude 17 at its brightest, unless it has an outburst (which is unlikely).

The Deep Sky (Yellow text is hyperlinked to charts and more information.)

The *Pleiades* (M45) and the *Great Orion Nebula* (M42) culminate in the early evening, as do the *trio of open clusters* in Auriga and *M35* in Gemini.

The Deep Sky (contd)

While you are looking at M35, also see if you can identify two smaller open clusters, NGC 2158, which is half a degree to the SE, and the slightly more difficult IC 2157, which is a degree to the ESE. Also high are **M44 (*Praesepe*)** and **M67**, two fine open clusters in Cancer. Lower in the southern sky are more open clusters **M46 & M47** and, near Sirius, **M41**.

Open (also called 'Galactic') Clusters are loosely packed groups of stars that are gravitationally bound together; they may contain from a few dozen to a few thousand stars which recently formed in the galactic disk.

The rather indistinct open cluster, NGC1502, is brought to prominence by an asterism, that is named **Kemble's Cascade**, in honour of Fr. Lucian Kemble, a Canadian amateur astronomer and Franciscan friar, who discovered it with a 7x35 binocular. He described as "*a beautiful cascade of faint stars tumbling from the northwest down to the open cluster NGC 1502.*" It is one of the most pleasing objects in small and medium binoculars.

While you are observing in the region of the Orion Nebula, take the time to study **R Leporis (*Hind's Crimson Star*)**, which is a candidate for the reddest star in the heavens. To the north of that, just to the SE of Alnitak (ζ Ori) is the multiple star **σ Orionis**.

If you are up around midnight (or later) it is worth looking out for the galaxy trios in Leo (**M95/96/105** and **M65/66/NGC3628**) and **Markarian's Chain** in Coma Berenices. If you have a big binocular, also observe the edge-on **NGC4565 (*Berenice's Hair Clip*)**, which is next to **Melotte 111**, the cluster that gives Coma its name.

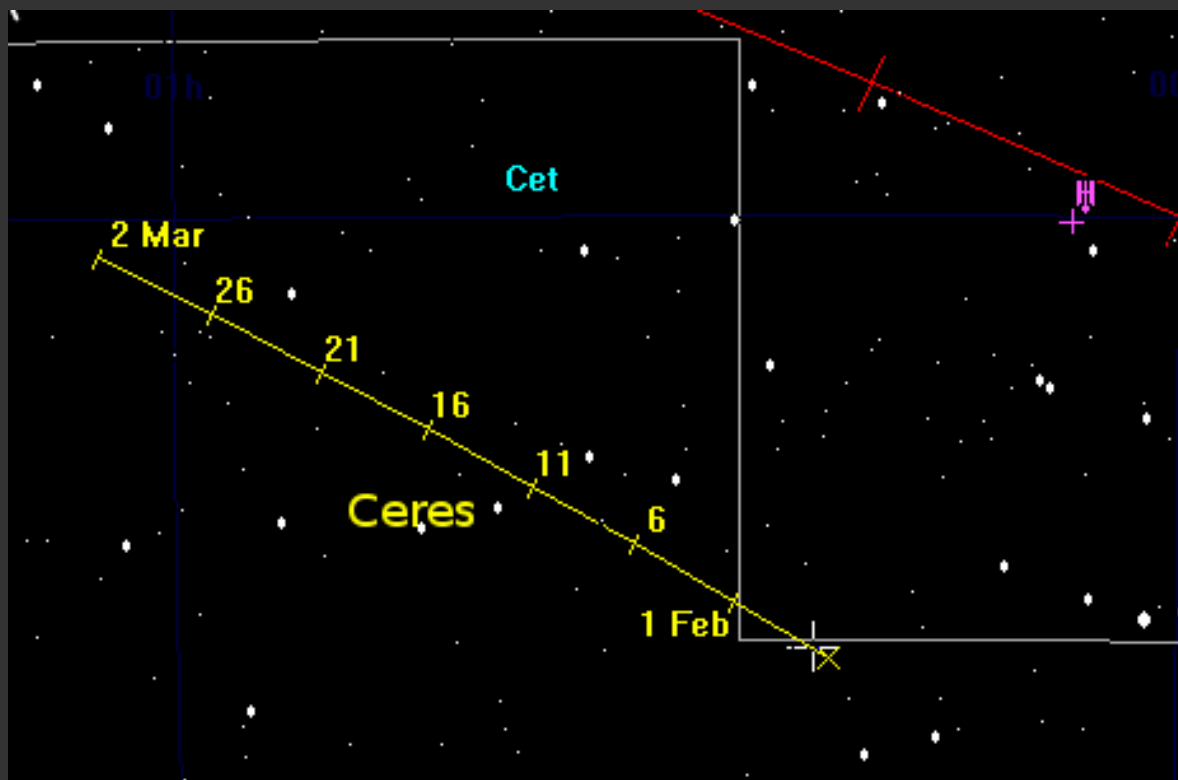
For an interactive maps of Deep Sky Objects visible from 51 °N, please visit:
http://binocularsky.com/map_select.php

The Solar System

Planets

Venus itself is low in the west at dusk. It is difficult, owing to its brightness, to make observations of it in a dark sky but, if you observe it in bright twilight, with good optics and magnification of x15 or (preferably) more, you may be able to detect a change in its phase as it slowly grows throughout the month. It is close to the crescent Moon on Feb 25, so it should be easy to locate – and a stunning sight! – in bright twilight. It passes **Uranus** on Feb 06.

Uranus itself is slightly brighter than 6th magnitude and is theoretically a naked eye object, but will be low in the sky after dusk, so binoculars will be essential as it sinks into the twilight. It is in *Pisces* and moves about 1.5° during the month.



Asteroid **Ceres** is low in the south-west at magnitude 9; you will need big binoculars to see it.

The Solar System (contd.)

Mercury becomes an evening object from the 18th, and climbs in the sky throughout the month. Evening apparitions are best at this time of year, because the ecliptic is steep to the horizon at dusk.

Meteor Showers

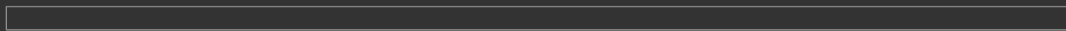
There are no major showers this month.

The Moon

Jan 31	1 st Quarter
Feb 07	Full Moon
Feb 14	3 rd Quarter
Feb 21	New Moon

Wishing you Clear Dark Skies,

Steve Tonkin for *The Binocular Sky*



Acknowledgments:

The charts in this newsletter were prepared with Guide v9.0 from <http://projectpluto.com>

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