



The Binocular Sky

March
2012

Newsletter

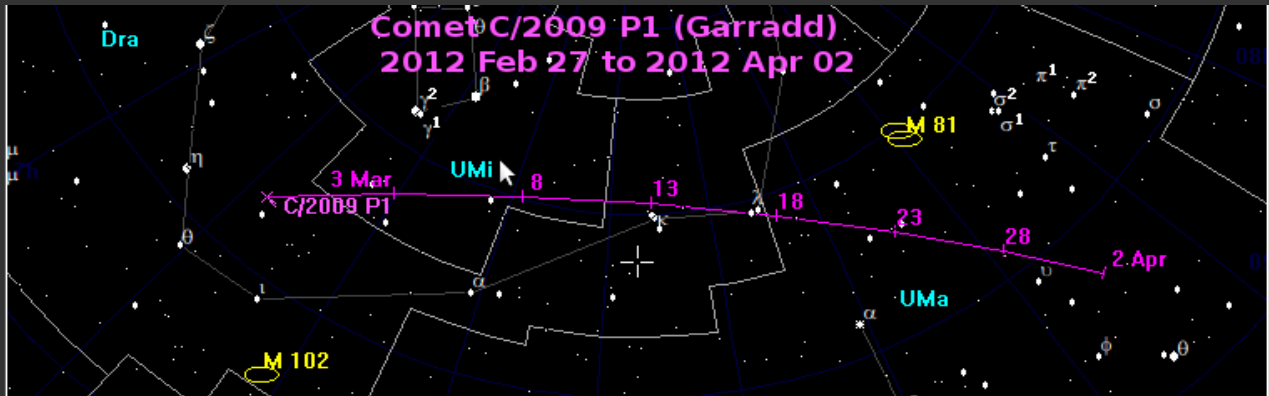
Introduction

Welcome to the March 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 the Draco, Ursa Minor and Ursa Major. It is circumpolar and visible all night. It is best observed around 03:00 at the beginning of the month, midnight near the middle of the month, and 21:00 at month end. During the month its brightness falls by over a half, but it will still be visible in a 50mm binocular in dark, transparent skies.

Date	RA	Declination	Magnitude
2012 Feb 27	15h50m25.21s	+63 26' 39.3"	7.1
2012 Mar 03	15h01m53.67s	+67 28' 38.9"	7.1
2012 Mar 03	13h53m58.05s	+70 07' 15.7"	7.2
2012 Mar 03	12h34m23.08s	+70 34' 18.3"	7.3
2012 Mar 03	11h22m21.40s	+68 44' 55.1"	7.5
2012 Mar 03	10h29m22.61s	+65 23' 45.2"	7.7
2012 Mar 03	09h53m51.64s	+61 21' 30.9"	7.8
2012 Apr 02	09h30m30.07s	+57 11' 12.2"	8.1



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

The *Pleiades* (M45) and the *Great Orion Nebula* (M42) culminate before Civil Twilight ends, but are still fine sights in binoculars, as are the **trio of open clusters** in Auriga and **M35** in Gemini. 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.

If you are up around midnight, 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. (They are visible before this, but are easier to observe when they are higher in the sky. 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.

The Deep Sky (contd)

If you have binoculars of 70mm aperture or (preferably) greater, see if you can find and identify *The Ghost of Jupiter (NGC 3242)*, a planetary nebula in Hydra. It is a difficult object because it is low in the sky, even from southern Britain.

Planetary Nebulae are short-lived (a few tens of thousands of years) masses of gas and plasma that result from the death of some stars. They have nothing to do with planets, but get their name from the fact that, in early telescopes, they had the appearance of giant planets.

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 high 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 its diameter slowly grows throughout the month. It is predicted (by geometry) to be at dichotomy (half-phase) on the 29th but, owing to a phenomenon called the Schröter Effect, this appears about 5 days (± 1 day) earlier when the phase is waning.

Venus is in conjunction with **Jupiter** on the **13th**, at an apparent distance of about six lunar diameters, so the pair may be observed in the same field of view in small and medium binoculars.

The Solar System (contd.)

Mercury is an evening object for the first half of the month; it is best observed about half an hour after sunset. 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

Mar 01	1 st Quarter
Mar 08	Full Moon
Mar 15	3 rd Quarter
Mar 22	New Moon
Mar 29	1 st Quarter

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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