



The Binocular Sky

August
2012

Newsletter

Introduction

Welcome to the August 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. There is a printer-friendly version: <http://binocularsky.com/newsletter/201208p.pdf>

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

As the sky darkens at twilight, in the North are [NGC 457 \(the Owl Cluster\)](#) and [NGC 633](#) in Cassiopeia and the [Perseus Double Cluster](#). More open Clusters are visible in the southern sky in the region of Ophiuchus. These include [Melotte 186](#), [NGC 6633](#) and this months Object of the Month, [M11, The Wild Duck Cluster](#), all of which are easily visible in 50mm binoculars. [M11](#), which is a cluster of over a thousand stars, benefits enormously from larger apertures and the higher magnification that permits more stars, including the “V”-shaped grouping that gives it its common name, to be revealed. Even further to the south, culminating at around local midnight, is a group of open clusters in Serpens and Sagittarius that includes [M16 \(the Eagle Nebula\)](#), [M17 \(the Swan or Omega Nebula\)](#), [M23](#), [M24 \(the Sagittarius Star Cloud\)](#), and [M25](#).

The Deep Sky (contd)

Also worth enjoying in this region of sky is the denser part of the Milky Way that forms the *Scutum Star Cloud* as a backdrop to this cluster.

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.

While you are in this region of sky, see if you can find **Barnard's Star** in Ophiuchus. This has the largest known proper motion of any star. (***Proper motion*** is motion with respect to the celestial sphere.) Although it is visible in 50mm binoculars from a dark site, it is considerably easier in larger glasses and I recommend a minimum of 70mm.

In August, we are able to look out of the plane of the Galaxy during the evening. This makes more globular clusters and galaxies available for observation. Very well placed this month are **M81 (Bode's Nebula)** and **M82 (The Cigar Galaxy)**, both of which are easy in a 50mm binocular. These can be used as a good demonstration of averted vision: if you have them both in the same field of view, you may see that the core of M81 becomes more apparent if you look at M82. If you have good skies, try **M51 (The Whirlpool)** and **M101** which, although it is a large object, is very difficult owing to its low surface brightness. The **Great Andromeda Galaxy, M31**, is also rising into the sky to a reasonable altitude this month. It is large and bright enough to be able to withstand quite a lot of light pollution although, obviously, it benefits from a dark transparent sky.

The two Hercules globulars, **M92** and the very impressive, and very easy to find, **M13** are at a very good altitude for observation. Although M13 is clearly larger than M3, it is easier to resolve the outer stars of the latter one. Also visible

The Deep Sky (contd)

this month is **M5** in Serpens, which is one of the largest globular clusters known, being 165 light years in diameter. Its apparent size is nearly as large as a Full Moon. At a reasonable altitude from the beginning of the month are the very bright **M15**, **M2** (which looks almost stellar at 10x50) and **NGC 6934**. This last cluster is very easy to see and is excellent for demonstrating how globular clusters respond to transparency. In apertures of around 70mm and upwards, almost all of them look larger as the sky becomes more transparent. **NGC 6934** displays to the greatest extent of any globular on which I have tested the phenomenon.

Globular clusters are tightly-bound, and hence approximately spherical, clusters of tens, or even hundreds, of thousands of stars that orbit in a halo around almost all large galaxies that have been observed. They are important for two reasons: Firstly, they contain some of the oldest stars in the galaxy, so studying them helps us understand the evolution of stars. Secondly, they are useful as “standard candles” in establishing a distance scale of the Universe, based on the assumption that the brightest stars in any globular cluster will be approximately the same brightness and that the brightest globulars in a galaxy will be approximately the same brightness.

The easiest planetary nebula, **M27 (the Dumbbell Nebula** – although I insist that it looks more like an apple core than a dumbbell! – is visible in the evening skies in even 30mm binoculars. At the other extreme, if you have binoculars of at least 100mm aperture, see if you can find and identify **NGC 6572**, a planetary nebula in Ophiuchus. Even in large glasses it looks stellar, but it has the distinction of being possibly the greenest object in the sky.

The Deep Sky (contd)

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 disc-like appearance of planets.

There are two other objects which, owing to their southerly declination, are best observed this month. They are the two bright emission nebulae, **M20 (the Trifid)** and the larger, brighter and easier **M8 (the Lagoon)**. They are only about a degree and a half apart, so they will fit into the same field of view of even quite large binoculars.

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

The Solar System

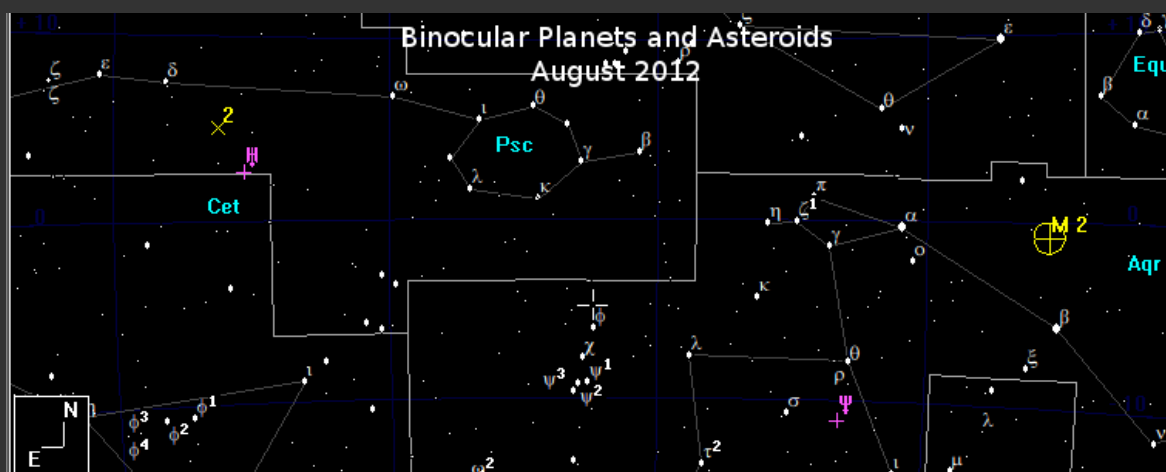
Meteor Showers

The **Perseid** meteor shower is a highlight of August observing. It has been active since mid-July and peaks on August 12th. This year's peak takes place during daylight at the longitude of Britain, but we may still have a reasonably impressive **Zenithal Hourly Rate** of 60 or so on the night of the 12th/13th.

The Perseids are dust particle debris from Comet 109P (*Swift-Tuttle*). As these particles enter the atmosphere, they compress and heat the air in front of them. This heat causes the surface of the particle to ablate and ionise. Binoculars are useful for observing the persistence of these ionisation trains that form the streak in the sky which is what we observe as a “shooting star.”

Planets

Of the two binocular planets, Neptune rises first, and is identifiable as the right angle of a triangle that has σ and θ Aqr as its other apexes. Uranus is on the boundary of Cetus and Pisces; see if you can find the 10th magnitude asteroid 2 (Pallas) nearby.



The Moon

Aug 02	Full Moon
Aug 09	Last Quarter
Aug 17	New Moon
Aug 24	First Quarter
Aug 31	Full 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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