





# The Binocular Sky

March  
2013

# Newsletter

## Introduction

Welcome to the **Binocular Sky** Newsletter of March 2013. 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.

If you would like me to email this newsletter to you each month, please complete and submit the **subscription form**. You can get “between the newsletters” alerts, etc. via  and 

There is also a printer-friendly version (without the object hyperlinks, which you can download by going to **The Binocular Sky web site** and clicking on the Newsletter tab.

## Transient Objects

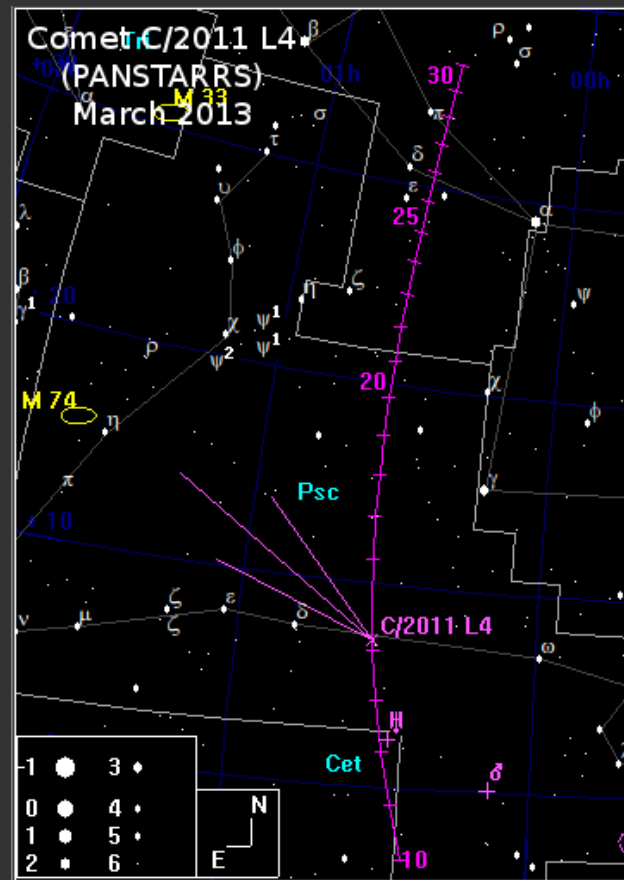
**Comet C/2011 L4 (PANSTARRS)** was initially predicted to be an easy naked-eye comet when it rises above northern hemisphere horizons in the evening twilight from mid-March onwards but, despite an initial brightening, it is not now expected to exceed magnitude 2.5 when it becomes visible in the northern hemisphere. This early brightening is typical of “first-time” comets, which this one is thought to be, as a thin coating of volatile compounds are burned off the nucleus.

## Transient Objects (contd)

Although southern hemisphere observers have been enjoying it, and it is nominally naked-eye brightness, it will not be easy from the UK and similar latitudes, as it will be low in the evening twilight after sunset from about the 10th. As it gets higher later in the month, it is likely to dim to 5th magnitude or fainter. You will need a good low western horizon and binoculars – the bigger the better – will be a tremendous aid.

The easiest evenings to find it are likely to be the 12th and 13th, when a nearby crescent Moon can act as a signpost. The Moon will be above it and to the right on the 12th, to the left on the 13th.

However, comets are notoriously fickle things and C/2011 L4 may still surprise us.



## The Deep Sky

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.*

## The Deep Sky (contd)

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. A galaxy in this region that is often ignored, owing to the lack of nearby bright stars, is NGC 3521, which is bright enough to be sometimes visible with averted vision in a 10x50, although I suggest a minimum of 70mm for ease of observation. It is considerably larger than any of the M95/96/105 trio and is as bright as M96.

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 interactive maps of Deep Sky Objects visible from 51°N, please visit:

[http://binocularsky.com/map\\_select.php](http://binocularsky.com/map_select.php)

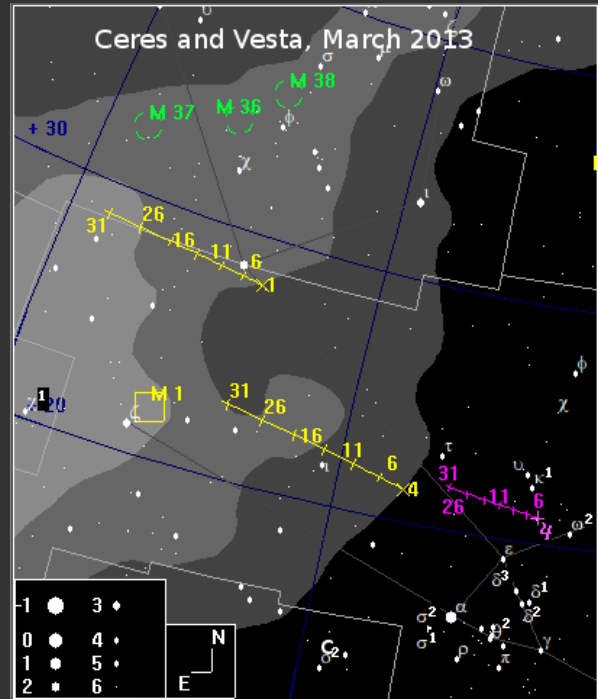
# The Solar System

## Planets

The binocular planets, **Neptune** and **Uranus**, are not observable this month.

## Minor Planets

Asteroids **1 (Ceres)** and **4 (Vesta)** are fading, but are both well-placed for observation after twilight ends. Ceres passes less than half a degree from  $\beta$  **Tau (El Nath)** on the 7th, making it easy to locate. It will be at magnitude 8.4, so should still be visible in 50mm binoculars, given that the Moon will only be three days old and, therefore, not significantly brightening the sky.



## Lunar Occultations

*Times are given **for the UK** and are  $\pm 12$  minutes, depending on your location, and are given **only as an indication**. Variation from this time may be greater elsewhere. Precise timings are available from [IOTA](#), or with good astronomical software. If you are on the southern or northern edge of the occultation zone, you may witness a grazing occultation, where the star winks "off and on" as passes behind mountains on the Moon's limb.*

Date	D	R	Object	Mag	Occultation Zone
4th	02:40	03:09	$\omega^1$ Sco	3.8	Central and Northern Europe, Western Asia
6th	05:25	05:42	$\mu$ Sgr	3.8	Northern UK and Scandinavia (UK graze)
18th	00:17	(set)	$\epsilon$ Tau	3.5	Canada, Northern Europe, Northern Asia

## Meteor Showers

There are no major showers this month.

## The Moon

Mar 04 Last Quarter

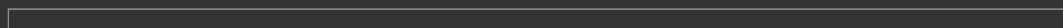
Mar 11 New Moon

Mar 19 First Quarter

Mar 27 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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