

BRIDGWATER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

MONTHLY NOTES FEB - MAR 2011



All times are in UT (GMT), except where stated. 'Month' refers to the monthly meetings of Bridgwater Astronomical Society.

SOLAR SYSTEM SNIPPETS

Moon phases	New	03/02	04/03
	First quarter	11/02	12/03
	Full	18/02	19/03
	Last quarter	24/02	26/03
Sunrise	0725	and sunset	1716 on 09/02
	0639		1805 on 09/03

Mercury is overtaken by the Sun and will become visible in the evening at the end of the month. It also closes with Uranus and on March 9th the pair are extremely close together.

Venus remains in the morning sky and does not significantly change its time of rising, however the Sun does.

Mars remains unobservable.

Jupiter is still in the evening sky but while setting 4 hours after the Sun now, that'll be less than 2 hours by the end of the month.

Saturn in Virgo is now firmly established in the evening sky and rises earlier over the month. About 2215 now and 2020 by the end of the month.

Uranus is in the evening sky, setting earlier and moving to a close encounter with Mercury.

Neptune is becoming unobservable until it reappears in the morning sky but only half an hour in front of the Sun at the end of the month.

CONSTELLATION LINES

Ursa Major, the subject of this month's deep sky recommendations, stands on end high to the north east in the evening sky in the middle of this month. Camelopardalis is high to the north west with Cassiopeia below. Ursa Minor, Draco and Cepheus occupy the rest of the space.

Gemini and Cancer are prominent to the south. Orion lies lower down to the south west while the brilliant dog stars in Canis Minor and Major flank Monoceros. To the south east Hydra straggles down to and below the horizon.

The western sky is occupied by Auriga, Taurus and Perseus, with Andromeda, Triangulum and Aries lower down.

To the east Bootes rises below Ursa Major. Leo occupies much of the rest of the space with Coma Berenices and Canes Venatici tucked in between. Virgo rises later in the night, a reminder that spring is out there somewhere.

DEEP SKY GEMS

Ursa Major is high in the north east, the Plough on end, with Canes Venatici tucked into the curving handle.

Right up at the top of Ursa Major, the galaxies M81 and M82 are relatively easy to find and in a small telescope make an interesting pair in the same eyepiece field. In a larger scope, compare the spiral M81 and the irregular M82. There is a third member of the group, the tiny NGC3077. Most of the stars of the Plough form a group known as Cr285 which may have started life as an open cluster. Not too far from the stars at the base of the 'dipper', Beta and Gamma, lie two more galaxies, M108 and 109. Both are spirals, but whereas M109 is pretty well face on, 108 is pretty well edge on. Out on the other side of the plough handle, M101 is a large and faint face on spiral which makes for a rather stunning photograph.

Over the border in Canes Venatici M106 rewards a large telescope as there is a wealth of detail to be seen in its faint spiral arms. Close to the two stars forming the 'main street' of Canes Venatici, M94 is another face on spiral but the arms are wound so tight that it appears as a round blob, although with a bigger telescope some condensed portions can be made out. Not too far away, M63 is another inclined spiral with interesting structure to see including a prominent dust lane in the very outer reaches. Canes Venatici's best known galaxy is the Whirlpool, the combination of M51 and NGC5195. Having the appearance of two interacting galaxies, NGC5195 is further away and probably not being interfered with. The pair can be viewed in some detail in a small telescope.

Between them Ursa Major and Canes Venatici have a wide range of galaxies, all worth a look for their different view and all rewarding for the careful observer. There is also one globular cluster. Low down in Canes and visible in binoculars, M3 is a stunning example of its type and truly one of the gems of the deep sky.

BITS AND PIECES

A two day old Moon does a close pass of Jupiter on Mar 6th.

Observing Evening Dates

Friday observing 11th February and 11th March. As usual check the web site for confirmation.

Find the Society web site at www.bwastrosoc.org.uk. There's information on the Society, forthcoming events and a link to the Observing Evening site, as well as links to members' sites and other sites of interest.

Follow the link from the Society web site or go to www.astroimagery.net for armchair views of the night sky and astronomical articles.