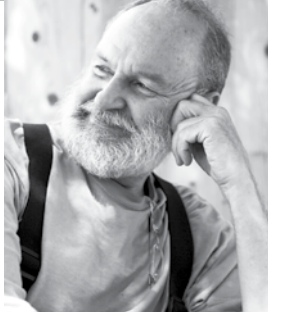


**THE STARRY SIDE**

# Early morning specials, the famous 'W,' a look to the south

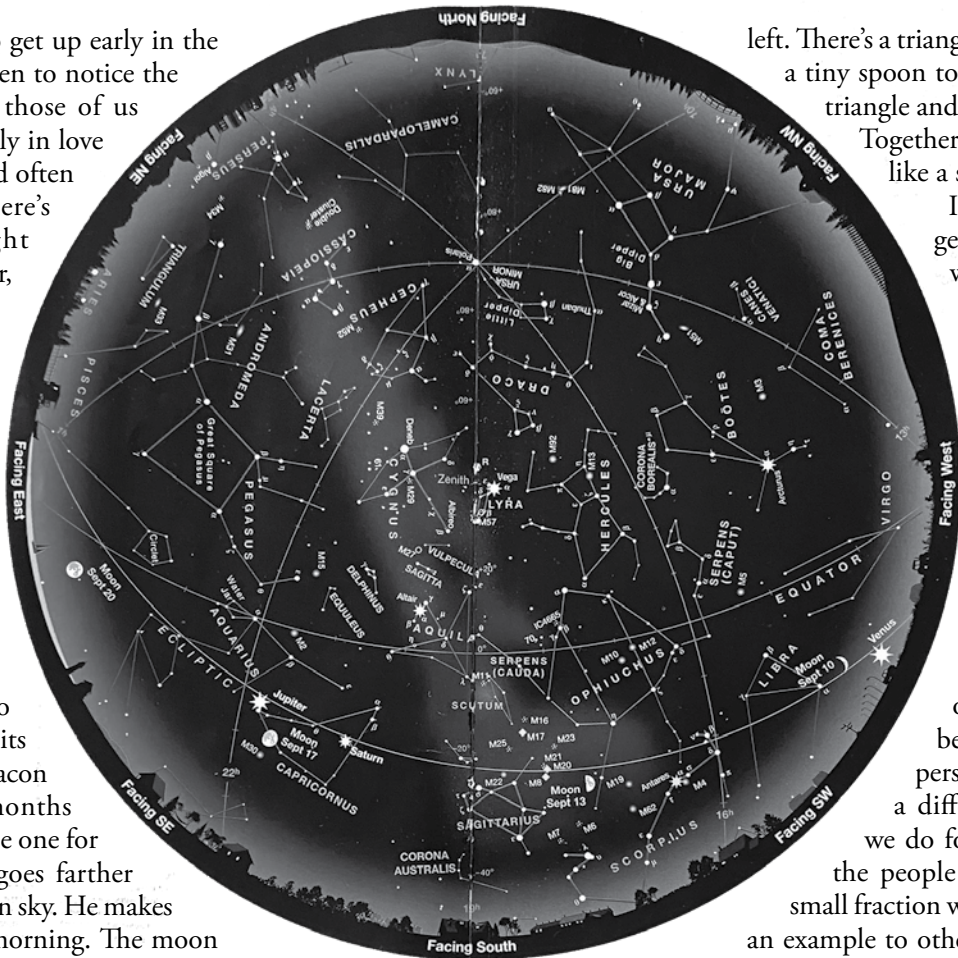


Greeley Wells

BY GREELEY WELLS

For those few who get up early in the morning or just happen to notice the morning sky, or for those of us crazies who are actually in love with the night sky and often notice mornings, there's this beautiful bright "star," the planet Jupiter, which was rising in the east and is going slightly farther south each night as the predawn sky progresses. He is one of our farthest-off and hugest planets and won't be this bright for another 107 years! Being so far away he reflects right back to us all the sun that hits him. He has been a beacon each morning for months and will continue to be one for months more as he goes farther west along the southern sky. He makes for a beautiful early morning. The moon swings close by him on the mornings of September 9-11.

Now that it's the third quarter of the year—fall—we can talk about the sky before bedtime too. Some of my favorite star formations are in this sky, like the bright triangle of stars right over your head, the Summer Triangle. Yes it's finally made it up to the top. Also, if you face north and notice Polaris, the North Star, about halfway up the sky, you can notice the Big Dipper, Ursa Major, to the lower left of it. Opposite, on the upper right, you'll see the W (for Wells) or M



Sky & Telescope (skyandtelescope.org).

(for Matthew, my son), more commonly called Cassiopeia. It swings around the North Star to now be sideways as neither a W nor an M.

Let's look south too. Spin around so the North Star is behind you, out of sight. You are now facing south. Lowish near the horizon is what the British call the Tea Pot, better known as Sagittarius. Can you make it out? Cool, yeah? Slightly tipped to the right, with the triangular spout on the right and the four-sided handle on the

left. There's a triangular top too! And even a tiny spoon to the upper left: a little triangle and another star to its left. Together, they look surprisingly like a spoon.

I hope this is fun and gets you out in this warm weather on a night when our sky is *not* filled with smoke as it is I write this: *no stars at all*, and it sure doesn't smell good! Look, it's clear that no one of us can save the world from climate change and the other calamities ganging up on us. But if each of us will just do the best we can in our own personal lives it *will* make a difference. Because what we do for ourselves influences the people around us. And that small fraction will contribute by being an example to others whom we may not even know. So each of us, by personally trying our best to be ecological and smart and think seriously about who we vote for, will have done everything we *can* do to help turn the tide towards a better future for our children and theirs. I'm once again inviting you to do your part, because it does make some difference.

This year's meteor shower season is certainly interesting—all of our famous and fun showers are mooned out! I kept studying the reports, and each one said the same thing: A moon will visually deafen the shower! Even when there were times

without a moon, the shower itself was at low ebb. I've never experienced more than one or two meteor showers mooned out before.

But there's always a background of stuff in the sky, including a few odd meteors and the International Space Station. So kick back whenever you find that moment with the night sky and just look. Besides the meteors and Space Station, you can observe other sights that just happen all the time: our constellations and sunsets and sunrises and moons going by. And enjoy the company you're joining out there under that magnificent sky, like retired astronomer Bill Wren, who spent decades helping preserve dark skies. He says this about his dark-sky experiences: "It's almost a mystical experience, that sense of being connected, the sense of unity and oneness."

I agree.

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**— OF NOTE —  
The planets**

**Mercury** is at dusk in September, at dawn in October, and nowhere in November!

**Venus** is simply not visible all season, being too close to or behind the sun.

**Mars** is visible early morning and before dawn all season; look for the red!

**Jupiter** is visible all season in the mornings, moving west each night above the southern horizon.

**Saturn** is an evening star in the south, but dim, as usual. I almost always forget about him.

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