

THE STARRY SIDE

Morning glory and shooting stars

BY GREELEY WELLS

Here it comes: fall! Seemed like a short summer, and slow coming. Now we're looking at cooling down already—I'm writing this in late July during rainstorms and cool weather! What is going on?

At the end of August, though, when you get this issue, summer is still in the sky, thank goodness. Look up tonight: there's the famous summer triangle I talk about before, during and after summer every year. And Pegasus is near the top of the sky attached to Andromeda, leading to Perseus and Cassiopeia and their wonderful stories I've repeated in this column a few times. In September these two share the top of the night sky; by October the huge square of Pegasus is straight overhead. That's Arcturus bright and low in the west-northwest. And the big dipper, known in England as the plough, is swinging under the North Star, Polaris. Summer is leaving the sky but the summer triangle is not gone, and will still be visible at Halloween. Even in November when it's getting wintry, the summer cross is not quite down in the west yet.

At the same time in late summer, winter constellations are rising in the east. As I write this in July, I can see Orion and company rising early in the morning (between midnight and dawn), they are coming—we morning risers are witness!

By October, Pleiades and Taurus are showing up in the east around 10 pm, leading the winter constellations. By 10 pm in November, Orion is up in his usual horizontal, lazy, lying-down posture, which he will improve as the season progresses. Over his head, to his left, are Castor and Pollux, the Gemini twins. The two bright stars named Castor and Pollux are their heads; their feet are just over Orion's club

(which is just above his head). Out in front of Orion that beautiful "V" is Taurus the bull's face. And further up are the Pleiades, the seven sisters of Greek lore. (Can you see seven? It's a Greek eye test. Many not-so-good eyes see only six.) The bright star further left is Capella, part of the five-sided constellation Auriga. The Pleiades, Taurus, Gemini, Auriga: you could say

closing in on a golden-yellow Regulus. On the morning of October 3, they are at their closest, with morning Regulus fading but Venus still bright enough for a daytime view after sunrise! This is pretty rare—the key to seeing a "day star" is knowing where it is. So if you sit or stand in one spot at dawn noting what's close to the track of the planet, you'll figure out approximately

Venus.

Have you noticed I don't talk about Pluto (is it even a planet?), Uranus or Neptune? Well, though you can see them sometimes with a telescope, and even occasionally with binoculars, they never really offer naked-eye images, which is what I'm interested in and try to share with you.

OF NOTE

Full moons this season include the Fruit Moon (September 30) and the Harvest Moon (October 29). The full moon on November 28 has three name choices: Frosty, Beaver or Hunter's Moon. The crescent moon will be quite close to Mars after sunset on September 19. On November 11, a crescent moon makes a triangle with Venus and Spica in the dawn.

The autumn or fall equinox is on Saturday, September 22. Days and nights of equal length mark this midpoint between the winter and summer solstices.

Meteor showers seem to be prevalent this season. I hope you caught the Perseids on August 12, the most impressive



To see more accurately, swing the illustration around to match your horizon line direction. Illustration from Guy Ottewell's Astronomical Calendar 2012 (www.universalworkshop.com).

that these are the 'leading edge' of winter's constellations, with Orion as the king.

THE PLANETS

Venus is the glory of the sunrise throughout the fall! In early September (the 1st), it passes right between the Gemini twins after rising three hours before the sun. By mid-September (the 12-13th), it passes the dim Bee Hive Cluster in Cancer at dawn, with a nearby moon to heighten the experience.

October finds a blue-white Venus

where it will be next. As the sky brightens keep looking and pretty soon you'll be looking at a "day star"—a planet, actually.

In November, Venus almost kisses Saturn from the 26th to the 28th. The rings of Saturn are also open so they are easily seen in telescopes, and may appear as bumps in binoculars. Both planets are so close they may well be in one field of view—a great comparison possibility. Give a look at all these close encounters if you have the tools.

Jupiter begins this season visible from late night till dawn. In September, it rises earlier and earlier; at month's end it's rising after about 10:00 pm. October finds Jupiter rising ever earlier, getting brighter, and beginning to dominate the evening sky. In November, the planet is rising a couple of hours after sunset and is bright all night and into the dawn, when it's visible with Venus and Saturn and even Mercury [even lower] and reddish Aldebaran in Taurus's "V". On November 1, Jupiter is right next to the just-full moon.

Mars fades below the dusk horizon line in September. Saturn holds a dim, low position for the whole month.

Mercury rises from obscurity at the end of September's sunsets. It makes a low dawn appearance at the end of November, to the left of Saturn and lower-left of

and most consistent shower of the year. This year the sometimes spectacular Northern Taurid's may include some possible fireballs. They extend from late October to mid-November, but there's a full moon near the beginning of this period so the latter part will provide the best viewing. The peak of the showers is after the moon "interruption," so that's good news. Some are predicting a swarm of bright meteors and fireballs that may overwhelm even a full moon! But listen, this is theoretical so don't put much money down on a bet. The meteors will seem to radiate from Taurus, that "V" shape, in the east. Wish us all luck. I love meteors, they make me feel special somehow.

Orionids may also be good this year around October 20-21, as the moon will set before their 11 pm or midnight peak. The radiant will be around Orion, moving outward. The Orionids are usually bright meteors with persistent trails. This year's have been labeled "very favorable." Oh boy!

Halloween is October 31. All Saints Day is November 1 and November 2 is All Souls Day.

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