The February Sky

For Your Eyes Only

The only naked-eye planet after sunset in February is Jupiter. On March 8, Jupiter is at opposition, that is, on the opposite side of the sky from the Sun, rising when the Sun sets. Near opposition, a planet is at its brightest, and largest in a telescope because it is at its nearest to Earth. As a bonus, on the night of this month’s SkyTalk, Jupiter’s 3rd largest moon will cast a shadow on the planet. If clear, it will be visible from the observatory by 9:30 PM, following the SkyTalk. This isn’t a particularly rare event for any given month, but it is rare to have a shadow event so nicely timed for our viewing.

For Your Binoculars

Near the zenith after dark in February is the bright star Capella. Capella is actually a double star, but the two components are too close together to see separately in an ordinary telescope. Sophisticated techniques from the ground show that the two stars orbit each other every 104 days. That motion can be clearly seen in two images taken 15 days apart with the COAST optical interferometer.

Come and see the sky through many telescopes at one of the Blue Grass Amateur Astronomy Club’s outings at Raven Run. The (Saturday) dates in 2016 are: Mar 5, Apr 9, May 7, June 4, July 2, Aug 6, Sept 3, Oct 1, Oct 29. Call Raven Run an hour before sunset to verify that the weather will be clear.

You will find an all-sky finder chart for this month at our web site.

UK’s MacAdam Student Observatory, designed and built in 2007, was officially opened in 2008. The Observatory is located atop Parking Structure #2 between the W.T. Young Library and the Chemistry-Physics Building, and its dome houses a high-quality 20-inch reflecting telescope plus a variety of state-of-the-art optical instruments. The Observatory is dedicated to serving UK students as well as astronomy enthusiasts of every age and experience level throughout Kentucky.

Are you interested in informal talks on astronomy and astrophysics? Are you curious about telescope design and operation? Would you care to take a look through the eyepiece?

The Department of Physics & Astronomy in UK’s College of Arts & Sciences welcomes you! Join us to experience the excitement of stargazing through a powerful telescope. An up-to-date calendar of events can be found on our website:

https://pa.as.uky.edu/observatory
Monthly Meetings
The MSO hosts monthly public-observing sessions, each with a kick-off 40 minute presentation in the Chemistry-Physics Building. The presentations will take place even on cloudy nights. If the sky is clear, the observatory will open after the talk! Can't make the SkyTalk? Then come after!

Next month:
March 10, 2015 - 7:00 PM - Chem-Phys Room 155

Kentucky SkyTalk

Pluto and the Outer Solar System Revealed
Until recently, the outer Solar System (beyond the orbit of Neptune) was a poorly understood place. It was inhabited by a few known objects seen as faint points of light at the telescope. Today, the number of known objects in the outer Solar System has grown considerably. The surface of Pluto has been revealed in stunning detail by the New Horizons spacecraft. And there is even evidence for a possible new planet far beyond Neptune that is several times larger in diameter than Earth. Suddenly, the outer Solar System has become a very interesting place! We will take a look at this new frontier. What do we know at present? What would we like to know in the future?

Tonight’s Kentucky SkyTalk is part of an ongoing series. These are presented by the UK Department of Physics and Astronomy, and the MacAdam Student Observatory. Held every 2nd Thursday of the month, they are always free and open to the public.