



STARRY TRAILS

MARCH 2018

Wow! We have another Blue Moon this month! There will be a Full Moon on March 1st and the Blue Moon will be on March 31st. By the way, the real definition of a Blue Moon is when we have four Full Moons in one season. The third Full Moon is considered the Blue Moon. Other happenings for March: We will celebrate the first day of Spring on March 20th! Our dazzling planet, Venus, returns to the evening sky after sunset. Mercury will join the evening show and reach its highest altitude on March 15th (Illustration 1). Then on March 28th, Venus and Uranus will be less than a degree apart (Illustration 2). It may be hard to locate Uranus in the glow of the sun. In the morning sky, we still have the awesome lineup of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars (illustration3). By month's end, Saturn and Mars will continue to get closer together (Illustration 4). Mars also continues to get closer to Earth. At the beginning of March, Mars will be 130 million miles and 103 million miles by months end.

Remember that Daylight Savings Time starts on March 11th, so the sun sets later. Our hike will begin at 8:30pm, bundle up, hats, gloves, and coats and grab your Starry Trail Map and binoculars. Maybe on a warm night we will hear spring peepers! Our magnificent, Orion, the Hunter will be our guide for the hike. To meet up with Orion, face west or direction of the sunset. Turn to the left. There you will see Orion's star pattern. See the three stars in a row? That is the belt of Orion. The bright red-orange star up and to the left of the belt is Betelgeuse. The bright blue-white star down and to the right of the belt is Rigel. Now with your binoculars scan just below the belt. You will notice a small fuzzy area. That is the Orion Nebula (M42). New stars are forming in that hydrogen gas cloud! We call this a stellar nursery. Now let's find Orion's best friend. Journey back to the belt of Orion. Draw a line down and to the left, to the brightest star in that part of the sky. You have reached Sirius, the Dog Star (Illustration 5). Sirius is the number one brightest star in the night sky. Sirius always follows Orion through the night!

Head back to Orion's Belt. Hike up and to the right and you will see a bright red-orange star. This is Aldebaran, the eye of Taurus, the Bull. Continue slightly to the right and you will notice a small cluster of stars. These stars are the Pleiades or the Seven Sisters. The Pleiades has to be my favorite group of stars to gaze at through my binoculars. Take a look! What a treasure!! We are going to continue on a counter clockwise loop while looking overhead. Next stop, up and to the left, is another bright star, Capella. Swing to the left to the two stars that look almost identical (Illustration 6). These are Gemini, the Twins.

Hike to the opposite part of the sky, or north. You will notice the Big Dipper up on its handle. By the way, look at the second star in the handle, with binoculars. It is a double star! Head to the cup of the Big Dipper. Take the two stars at the end of the cup and draw an imaginary line to the next bright star. You have reached the North Star! The North Star, or Polaris, is at the end of the handle of the Little Dipper.

Trek to the left and you will see a group of stars that are in the shape of a "W". This is the constellation Cassiopeia (Illustration 7). Grab your binoculars again. From the top point of the W shape, scan slowly up and to the left. You will come upon the Double Cluster in Perseus. Find the bottom point of the W. Scan once again

to the left. You will need to have a good view of the northern sky. Do you see a fuzzy circular shape? That is the Andromeda Galaxy (M31). It is 2.5 million light years away!

Finally, we will skip over to the cup of the Big Dipper. Locate the flat part of the cup. Look slowly to the right for the shape of a backwards question mark. This is the head of Leo, the Lion (Illustration 8). A sure sign of spring! How about a challenge? Take your binoculars and scan between Leo and Gemini, the Twins. Do you see the beautiful Beehive Star Cluster (M44)?

Looking forward too many stargazing nights ahead as our weather gets warmer!!

Next month, more signs of spring and brilliant Venus & the Pleiades together!

Highlights

March 1 – Full Moon. According to folklore it is the Full Worm Moon of Full Crow Moon.

March 7 – The Moon passes north of Jupiter in the predawn sky.

March 9 – Last Quarter Moon.

March 9 – Moon passes north of Mars in the predawn sky.

March 10 – Moon passes north of Saturn in the predawn sky.

March 11 – Daylight Savings Time begins at 2:00am.

March 15 – Mercury reaches its highest altitude after sunset in the western sky.

March 17 – New Moon.

March 18 – The Crescent Moon passes south of Venus & Mercury after sunset.

March 20 – Spring Vernal Equinox begins in the Northern Hemisphere at 12:15pm.

March 24 – First Quarter Moon.

March 28 – Venus & Uranus less than a degree apart in the western sky after sunset.

March 31 – Full Moon, the second for the month, also known as the Blue Moon.

Brightest Stars: South to Southwest – Sirius, Betelgeuse, Rigel, Aldebaran, Procyon. **Overhead** – Capella, Castor, Pollux. **East** – Regulus.

Binocular Highlights The Moon, Andromeda Galaxy M31, Double Cluster near Perseus, Pleiades, Orion Nebula M42, Beehive Cluster M44, Deep sky objects around Capella (M36,37,38) thru the Milky Way to Cassiopeia.

Telescope Highlights The Moon, Venus, Mercury, Uranus, M1, M31, M41, M42, M44, M51, M81, M82, M35,36,37,38 (near Capella), NGC869 & 864.

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Night Sky Illustrations created by Suzie Dills using Starry Night Backyard & Stellarium.

Illustrations courtesy of Cassandra Dills

Written by Suzie Dills – Remember to download your Illustrations & Star Map!