

Travels on the Celestial Sphere

Late Winter Objects

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For February's newsletter we list a selection of fine objects often neglected by observers but are worthy of viewing. Tired of looking at the showpiece objects over and over - If you like looking at something different you should enjoy our sky tour this month. If you don't have a GOTO scope, use a good star chart to locate the following objects.

19-Beta Orionis, Rigel, Double Star Spectral Type B8
Mags. 0.1, 6.8, Separation 9.5", P.A. 202°, R.A. 05^h14.5^m, Dec. -08°12'

Forming the right foot of Orion, the Hunter, is Rigel, the seventh brightest star in our sky. Rigel lies 900 light years from us but if it were the same distance as Sirius, the brightest star in our night sky, at a distance of eight light years, it would be as bright as a first quarter moon. Rigel is a brilliant star appearing like a blue-white diamond with a tiny blue companion next to it. Rigel would be much more difficult if it weren't for the generous separation between its components.

19-Pi Canis Majoris, Double Star Spectral Type F2
Mags. 4.7, 9.7, Separation 11.6", P.A. 18°, R.A. 06^h55.6^m, Dec. -20°08'

Pi CMa, lying south of Sirius, has a yellowish-white primary with a bluish companion. Also look for 17 Canis Majoris which lies SSW of Pi, it is a quadruple star with a 5.8 magnitude white primary and three widely separated 9th magnitude bluish companions.

NGC 2301 Open Cluster 80*, Tr Type I 3 m, Monoceros
Size 12', Mag. 6.0v, Br* 8.0v, R.A. 06^h51.8^m, Dec. +00°28'

NGC 2301 is a nice cluster for small telescopes with two star strings extending east and south from a concentration of some 30 to 50 stars depending, of course, on your aperture and power used. An 8-inch telescope will show about sixty 9.5 to 11th magnitude stars. An 8-inch instrument will reveal three colorful stars, a gold and blue pair with red star nearby.

NGC 2324 Open Cluster 70*, Tr Type II 2 r, Monoceros
Size 7', Mag. 8.4v, Br* 10.4v, R.A. 07^h04.2^m, Dec. +01°03'

NGC 2324 is a nice granular 7' patch of faint stars in a fine field of bright stars. Small scopes may resolve about three dozen stars at medium to high power while a 12-inch scope will detect about 50 or more stars. Five 10th to 11th magnitude stars stand out against the fainter members. A Y-shaped asterism composed of seven 9th to 9.5 magnitude stars lies just NE of the cluster. Look for a bright double (Otto Struve 82: m6.7, 7.4; sep. 90"; P.A. 318°) lying 22' north of the cluster.

NGC 2359 Emission Nebula, "Thor's Helmet", Canis Major
Size 9' x 6", Photo Br. 2-5, R.A. 07^h18.6^m, Dec. -13°58'

NGC 2359 is a fairly faint emission nebula in small scopes but a UHC filter will really bring it to life. Its irregular shape looks like "Thor's Helmet", however the Helmet is upside down for northern hemisphere observers. Some observers see a duck with a large beak, but I see the "Energizer Bunny" which is more or less right side up. The duck's beak or bottom of the Helmet forms the Rabbit's ears. Medium-sized telescopes should show a lot more very faint nebula extending east and north from the brighter portion.

NGC 2367 Open Cluster 30*, Tr Type IV 3 p, Canis Major
Size 3.5', Mag. 7.9:v, Br* 9.4v, R.A. 07^h20.1^m, Dec. -21°56'

NGC 2367 is another rarely observed cluster well worth finding. In small telescopes it is a faint glow lying 10' north of two 7th magnitude stars forming a triangle with them. The glow is overlaid with four stars forming a Y-shaped asterism. In 8-inch and larger telescopes the cluster is fairly

bright with eighteen 11th to 14th magnitude stars elongated 9' x 4' N-S. A conspicuous 9th magnitude double star may be seen at center and a nice little clump of four stars is visible just 7' north.

NGC 2383 Open Cluster 40*, Tr Type I 3 m, Canis Major
Size 6', Mag. 8.4:v, Br* 9.8v, R.A. 07^h24.8^m, Dec. -20°56'

Although not bright, NGC 2383 forms an interesting pair with NGC 2384. NGC 2383 is a faint but obvious glow at the center of an isosceles triangle formed by three 10th magnitude stars. An 8-inch scope will discern another twenty or so 11th to 13th magnitude stars. NGC 2384, located 8' NW of NGC 2383, is a brighter but sparser cluster divided into two segments: the western segment is somewhat triangular-shaped and the eastern segment looks like a checkmark.

Melotte 71 Open Cluster 80*, Tr Type II 2 r, Puppis
Size 9', Mag. 7.1v, Br* 10.2v, R.A. 07^h37.5^m, Dec. -12°04'

Telescope users may view M46 and M47 but neglect Melotte 71 lying to their north. Melotte 71 is a rich, excellent cluster having the appearance of a loose globular cluster in small telescopes. An 8-inch telescope will reveal at least fifty 11th magnitude and fainter stars embedded in a 9' diameter hazy glow. Its brighter stars lie along the east and west sides with the fainter members concentrated at center. I don't know how Messier missed this beautiful object!

NGC 2506 Open Cluster 150*, Tr Type I 2 r, Monoceros
Size 6', Mag. 7.6v, Br* 10.8v, R.A. 08^h00.2^m, Dec. -10°47'

NGC 2506 is quite rich and concentrated with 75 stars visible in small telescopes. Half a dozen 11th magnitude stars stand out against its fainter members. A 12-inch or larger scope will reveal at least a hundred stars depending on the magnification used. The central concentration is somewhat crescent-shaped with numerous star strings extending outward. The cluster is a pleasing splash of stars and well worth looking for.