

## SKYNOTES for February 2017

An easily printable version to encourage active observing among members of the Nottingham AS

*All times given below are in Universal Time (Greenwich Mean Time)*

### PHASES OF THE MOON

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Date and time</i>
First Quarter	4:19 am on February 4 <sup>th</sup>
Full Moon	12:33 am on the 11 <sup>th</sup>
Last Quarter	7:18 pm on the 18 <sup>th</sup>
New Moon	2:58 pm on the 26 <sup>th</sup>

This month the Moon is closest to the Earth on the 6<sup>th</sup>, and furthest on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Penumbral Eclipse of the Moon, February 11<sup>th</sup>.**

The Moon will pass almost completely into the Earth's penumbral shadow on February 11<sup>th</sup>, with maximum eclipse at 12:44 am. Consequently the Full Moon will look a little dimmer than usual, but this will not be apparent at a casual glance.

### THE PLANETS

**Mercury** spends the whole of February as a morning object, beginning the month 21 degrees from the Sun but more than 22 degrees south of the equator, so very difficult to observe from the UK. As the month progresses Mercury moves steadily toward the Sun until it disappears completely.

Spectacular **Venus** adorns the western sky as the Sun sets. At magnitude  $-4.6$  it can be observed long before the sky is fully dark, and can even be found in broad daylight. Through a small telescope it appears as a bright white crescent, which thins but increases in diameter as the month progresses. Throughout February, Venus will be moving steadily closer to the Sun, beginning the month at an elongation of 45 degrees and ending it at 32 degrees. Greatest brilliancy will occur on February 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Mars** continues to accompany Venus in the constellation of Pisces in the evening sky, although it is fading (down to magnitude 1.3 by the end of February) and shrinking in apparent diameter (only 4.6 arcseconds at the end of the month). On the 27<sup>th</sup> it will be less than one degree NNE of Uranus, making the ice giant easy to find.

**Jupiter**, close to Spica in the constellation of Virgo, will be due south at 4:50 am at the beginning of February and at 3 am at the close of the month, and by then will have an equatorial diameter of 42 arcseconds. It will reach its first stationary point on the 7<sup>th</sup>, after which it will move westwards until mid-June. At magnitude  $-2.3$  it will be the brightest object (other than the Sun and the Moon) in the morning sky.

**Saturn** is not yet well placed for observation, as it spends the whole of February more than 22 degrees south of the equator in southern Ophiuchus, and so will be very low in the southeastern sky before sunrise.

**Uranus**, in the constellation of Pisces, can still be observed in the evening sky, as it doesn't set until 6 hours after the Sun at the start of February; but observation will become increasingly difficult toward the end of the month.

**Neptune**, in the constellation of Aquarius, is now disappearing from the evening sky, ready for conjunction with the Sun next month.

### METEORS

There are no notable meteor showers in February.