

SKYNOTES for February 2018

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

All times given below are in Universal Time (UT)

PHASES OF THE MOON

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Date and time</i>
Last Quarter	3:55pm on February 7 th
New Moon	9:06pm on the 15 th
First Quarter	8:10am on the 23 rd

Note that there is **NO** Full Moon in the whole of February. This deficiency can happen only in a February, since February is the only month of the year that is shorter than an average lunation of 29.53 days. The last time this happened was in 1999, and it will not happen again until 2037, in accordance with the Metonic Cycle, in which 19 solar years correspond to 235 lunar months, a relationship which is accurate to one part in 50,000.

By contrast, **BOTH** January and March each have **TWO** Full Moons this year.

This month the Moon is closest to the Earth on the 27th, and furthest on the 11th.

THE PLANETS

Mercury must be regarded as unobservable this month, as it passes through superior conjunction (on the far side of the Sun) on February 17th.

Venus is now beginning to emerge into the evening sky after passing through superior conjunction last month, so if you are lucky you may be able to spot it late in February, very low in the southwest after sunset, shining at magnitude -3.9 .

But expect Venus to put on a spectacular display over the coming summer!

Mars, along with Saturn and Jupiter, may be seen among the southern zodiacal constellations in the pre-dawn sky. The approximate magnitudes of the three are Mars 1 (in Scorpius), Jupiter -2 (in Libra) and Saturn 0.6 (in Sagittarius).

Mars was extremely close to Jupiter in early January, but is now racing eastward toward Saturn, which it will pass early in April.

Jupiter is the best placed of the superior planets for observation, in spite of being more than 17 degrees south of the celestial equator throughout February. It will be rising before 1 am by the close of the month, and by then will have an equatorial diameter of 39 arcseconds.

Saturn in mid-February rises at 5 am, but will be a very challenging object to observe, being very close to the horizon even as dawn begins to break.

Uranus, about 10 degrees north of the celestial equator in the constellation of Pisces, can still be observed in the evening sky. By the end of February it will be setting soon after 9:30pm.

Neptune, in Aquarius, must now be regarded as unobservable as it is overtaken by the sunset glow.

METEORS

There are no notable meteor showers in February.