

SKYNOTES for April 2018

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

All times given below are in British Summer Time (BST)

PHASES OF THE MOON

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Date and time</i>
Last Quarter	8:19 am on April 8 th
New Moon	2:58 am on the 16 th
First Quarter	10:47 pm on the 22 nd
Full Moon	1:59 am on the 30 th

This month the Moon is closest to the Earth on the 20th, and furthest on the 8th.

THE PLANETS

Mercury passes through inferior conjunction on April 1st, and is thereafter a morning object, reaching greatest western elongation (27 degrees) on the 29th, but will be extremely difficult to observe from the latitude of the British Isles due to its low altitude in our sky.

Venus continues to increase in visibility in the evening sky as April progresses. Shining at magnitude -3.9 it will be unmissable if you have a clear sky after sunset. Between April 22nd and 26th Venus will be passing close by the Pleiades star cluster, making an attractive pairing through binoculars as soon as the sky is dark.

In early April **Mars** will be rising soon after 3 am and will be close to Saturn in the morning sky (closest approach being on the morning of the 4th, when Mars will be just over a degree south of the gas giant). Both planets continue to be badly-placed in our sky, being more than 22 degrees south of the celestial equator in the constellation of Sagittarius, but will nonetheless make an impressive pairing when viewed with the naked eye, or especially through binoculars.

Jupiter rises before midnight as April begins, culminating at 3:50 am, and by the end of the month will be above the horizon as soon as the sky is dark. By this time its angular diameter will have increased to nearly 45 arcseconds and its magnitude to -2.4 . Even though Jupiter will still be more than 16 degrees south of the equator, it will be a good subject for telescopic observation.

Saturn is now brighter than magnitude 0.5, and rises at about 2 am in mid-month. With the plane of the ring system tilted at 25 degrees relative to the ecliptic plane, Saturn will be an attractive sight through a telescope, provided the 'seeing' is good enough down to 22 degrees south of the celestial equator – which unfortunately tends to be a tall order from our part of the world!

Uranus and **Neptune** must now be regarded as unobservable as they are very close to the Sun.

METEORS

The **Virginids** reach their maximum activity (up to five events per hour) on the night of April 11th-12th, when the Moon will be a waning crescent in the morning sky, so conditions will be fairly favourable this year.

The **Lyrids** reach their maximum activity on April 22nd, coinciding with a First Quarter Moon, so conditions will be favourable this year after midnight. About 10 events per hour are expected under ideal circumstances.