

You can tell a lot about stars by their color

A star's color tells us a lot. A red star is like the red part of a gas flame; it isn't very hot. A red star is also very old, nearing the end of its life-cycle. As they age they cool down, swell up and become giants.

Betelgeuse is a supergiant among giants. It is so huge that, if placed where our sun is, it would extend out to the orbit of Jupiter.

The name Betelgeuse is roughly translated as the "arm of the giant." The giant in question is the mighty hunter Orion (oh RYE yan) and Betelgeuse marks the location of his right "shoulder." This star is the 11th brightest in the sky and one of the best examples of a red giant type star.

Observe the moon drift through the gathering cluster of planets on the evenings of May 16-18. On the 16th the moon is three degrees below Venus. On the next evening the moon is located midway between Venus and Mars. On the 18th the moon is three degrees below Jupiter. Jupiter passes the southern edge of the "Beehive" star cluster in the constellation of Cancer the crab on the 18th.

This cluster looks like a swarm of bees when viewed through a pair of binoculars. It is one of the closest and brightest of the star clusters. Galileo, the first person to observe the cluster with a telescope (probably around the year 1610), counted 36 bright stars; observers with better telescopes have counted over 50.

It is estimated that this cluster is 325 light years away from us. The light we see tonight left the Beehive in the year 1465, 145 years before Galileo recorded his own observations.

(Obviously the light that reached Galileo's telescope had left the cluster 525 years before his observations in 1610.) The Beehive cluster is a naked-eye object, but bright lights in metropolitan areas make seeing it difficult. Having bright Jupiter as a beacon makes locating the Beehive very easy.

The moon has passed Jupiter on the evening of the 16th and is four degrees to the left of the star Regulus (REG u lus) on the 20th. Regulus is the "heart" of Leo the lion. Regulus is about 85 light years away. That's much closer than Betelgeuse, but Regulus is not as bright. Regulus is only the 21st brightest star in the sky. It is a blue-white star and, like the blue part of a gas flame, much hotter than a red star. (Cooler Betelgeuse looks brighter because of its great size.)

SATURN begins retrograde (backward) motion on May 17. It has been drifting eastward through the stars of Capricornus all year, but will now appear to back up and move westward from night to night.

Retrograde motion is an optical illusion caused when the faster moving earth passes a slower moving planet as both orbit the sun.

Mars, Pollux and Castor form a straight line on the evening of the 21st. Also note the large triangle

GOP women host Patterson

L. Brooks Patterson, former Oakland County prosecuting attorney, will speak at the Republican Women of West Oakland's membership tea, from 2-4 p.m. Sunday, May 19.

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formed by Castor, Pollux and bright Venus. In two weeks Venus will be located where Mars is and Venus will form a line with Pollux and Castor.

The moon is approaching the star Spica (SPY ca) in Virgo on the evening of the 23rd. On the 24th the moon is three degrees directly below Spica. Spica, a blue-white star like Regulus, is the 16th brightest star in the sky. It is about 275 light years away from us. Since it's much farther than Regulus, but appears brighter, it must be a very hot and luminous star.

Jupiter, Mars and Venus are with-



skywatch
Raymond E. Bullock

In 20 degrees of each other on the evening of the 25th. Just a little more than three weeks until their spectacular grouping!

The moon is approaching the star Antares on the evening of the 27th. Look toward the southeast about one hour after sunset. Antares is the 15th brightest star in the sky and is also a supergiant like Betelgeuse. It is also the same distance from us, about 520 light years. On the following evening the moon is past Antares.

Venus is four degrees to the left of

Pollux on the evening of the 29th. Jupiter is still easy to identify above and to the left of Venus; Mars is still midway between the two, but the distance is closing. In fact, on the evening of the 30th, the three objects are within 15 degrees of each other.

Have a look at the moon on the evenings of the 30th and 31st. Once again it is in Sagittarius, close to the same position it had at the start of the month, but there is a big difference; at the start of the month Sagittarius was due south, now it is in the south southwest. When the moon passes this way in another month,

Sagittarius will be too close to the sun to be visible.

An excellent aid for learning constellations and keeping up to date with the sky is the monthly Sky Calendar. A one year subscription is \$6 and is available from Abrams Planetarium, Michigan State University, East Lansing 48824.

Raymond Bullock is the former coordinator of the observatory and planetarium at the Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills. He now works for a toy company which specializes in laser displays and effects.

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