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Look for Venus by night - and day



RAYMOND E. BULLOCK

SKY WATCH
 On the morning of Jan. 14th the moon will form a triangle with Jupiter and Spica, which will be to the left of the moon. (At 11:03 a.m. that night the moon will be at last quarter phase.)

On the morning of the 15th the moon will be below and to the left of Spica; a line drawn from the moon to Jupiter will pass directly through Spica.

The orange-red star to the left of the waning (fading) crescent moon on the morning of the 18th will be Antares in Scorpius, the scorpion. Look toward the south southeast around 7 a.m.

Venus will be at maximum elongation (greatest apparent distance from the sun) on the 19th. The planet will be 47 degrees to the east (left) of the sun and will not set until nearly four hours after the sun. After the 19th Venus will draw closer to the sun from night to night.

New moon will be at 1:27 p.m. on Jan. 22. The moon will be located between the earth and the sun and will not be visible. On the evening of the 23rd you'll need binoculars to spot the waxing (grow-

ing) crescent moon in the west southwest. Try looking around 6:20 p.m. The moon will be only three degrees above the horizon. If you find the moon, look five degrees to the left and you might see Saturn as well.

Moon easily seen

It will be easy to see the moon 45 minutes after sunset on the 24th. It will be 13 degrees above the horizon. That night you will find Saturn about 10 degrees directly below the moon.

Here is a challenge: Try to see Venus in the sky BEFORE sunset. After all, stars and planets are in the sky during the day, you just can't see them because the sun is so bright. Venus, however, is the third brightest object in the sky, and it is possible to see it during the day. The only problem is knowing WHERE in the sky to look. Fortunately the moon makes it easier on the evening of the 26th; it will be located three degrees (six full moon diameters) to the right of Venus. Sunset will be at 5:44 p.m., so give it a try before then.

If you couldn't find Venus on the 26th try again on the 27th. It will be a little more difficult because the moon will have moved farther from Venus. On that evening you will find that planet nine degrees directly below the moon.

Jupiter begins retrograde (backward) motion on Jan. 28. You will find it in the southwest nine degrees to the right of Spica that morning; during the next four months it will move 10 degrees to the west (right). The planet doesn't actually stop in its tracks and reverse direction. What we see is an optical illusion caused by the motion of the faster moving earth as we pass between Jupiter and the sun.

First-quarter moon will be at 6:21 p.m. on the 30th. The moon will have completed the first-quarter of its orbit around the earth. Notice that the first-quarter moon is actually half lighted!

Look for Mars

Go outside around 10:35 p.m. on Jan. 30, face due south and look high in the sky for Mars. The red planet will be very high; its altitude will be 74.7 degrees above the southern horizon. Mars will not be this far north of the celestial equator again until the year 2040! The celestial equator corresponds to the earth's equator in that it divides the sky into a northern and southern hemisphere. A person standing on the earth's equator is directly below the celestial equator.

The ecliptic (the path of the planets) appears to be tipped 23.5 degrees with respect to the cele-

stial equator. (In fact it's the tilt of our axis that is responsible for this.) The planets can appear at least 23.5 degrees above or below the celestial equator, sometimes even more so because of variations in the individual planetary orbits. Mars just happens to be at an extreme position on the 30th.

For comparison, look at Venus' altitude just after sunset. Venus is very close to the point where the ecliptic crosses the celestial equator. (Spring officially begins when the sun crosses this point.)

On the 31st the moon once again will be in Taurus. It will be within a few degrees of its position back on the 4th. The Pleiades will be to the left of the moon, and Aldebaran will be below that cluster.

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 the Abrams Planetarium, Michigan State University, East Lansing, 48824.

Raymond Bullock is former coordinator of the planetarium and observatory at the Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills. He now works at a Troy firm which specializes in laser displays and effects. You can leave a message for him at 953-2047, Ext. 1852 from a touch-tone phone.

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