

STARRY SCOOP

Editor: Kaitlynn Goulette

WHAT'S UP

This May offers astronomers a rare treat: a blue moon. This phenomenon occurs when two full moons appear within a single calendar month, something that happens only about once every three years. Despite its name, the moon won't actually look blue, but its rarity has made it notable and has even inspired the phrase "once in a blue moon."

The Big Dipper is a useful tool for identifying Polaris, the North Star, and can be found at the sky's zenith this month. A line projected from the two "pointer stars" at the end of the basin leads directly to the target. Due to its alignment with Earth's celestial north pole, Polaris remains stationary throughout the evening, maintaining its historical status as an essential navigational anchor. These markers are detailed on the accompanying star map below.

Formed from particles shed by the well-known Comet Halley, the Eta Aquarid meteor shower reaches its peak this month. It occurs annually from April 19 through May 28, with the strongest display expected during the night of May 6 and into the morning of May 7. Although the Southern Hemisphere enjoys the most intense activity, viewers in our area may still catch up to 30 meteors per hour at its peak. The best viewing conditions are after midnight from a dark location.

On May 25, 65 years ago, John F. Kennedy delivered his famous address to the nation

to rally support for the Apollo program. In his speech, he set the ambitious goal of sending astronauts to the moon and returning them safely to Earth before the end of the decade, a project that helped inspire an entire generation of scientists, engineers, and astronomers. That vision led to the success of the Apollo missions and humanity's first steps on the lunar surface. Today, the current Artemis program is building on Apollo's legacy, aiming to return humans to the moon and inspire the next generation of astronomers.

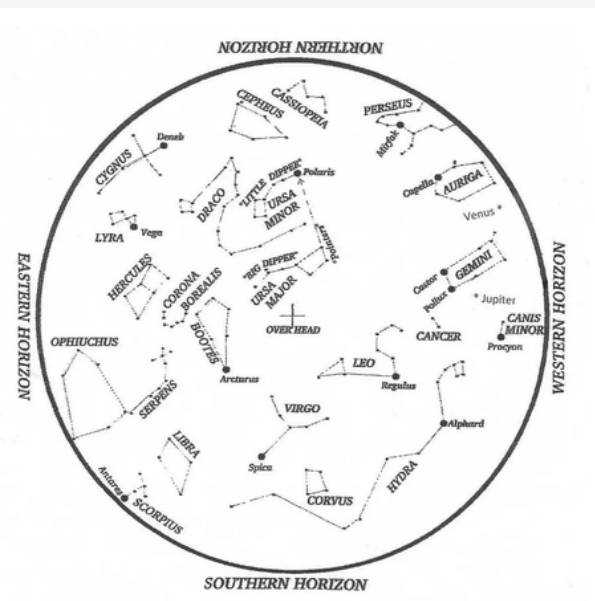
MAY'S SKY

1: Full Moon

6-7: Eta Aquarid Meteor Shower

16: New Moon

31: Full Moon, Blue Moon



Credit: Roger B. Culver

Hold star map above your head and align with compass points.

OBSERVATIONS

The end of the school year is approaching, marking the close of my high school career. During these final weeks, I've been making the most of my time by spending it stargazing with my close friends.

On clear nights, I often set up my 8-inch Dobsonian telescope or my SeaStar smart telescope for both ease and enjoyment. Our targets range from anything we can spot through the eyepiece to objects found on star maps, including the moon, the Sombrero Galaxy, the Whirlpool Galaxy, and several other deep-sky splendors. When we've had our fill of the telescopes, we switch to binoculars, which are new to many of my friends. I've enjoyed teaching them how to star hop to specific targets, such as the Beehive Cluster and the Hercules Globular Cluster, making these nights both fun and meaningful as we share the night sky together.

As we've spent more time observing, I've also started teaching my friends how to actually use the telescopes and navigate the night sky. We began with simple objects like the moon to practice focusing and adjusting the finder scope, then moved on to brighter targets like the Orion Nebula and the Pleiades to learn how to center and track objects. Eventually, we worked our way up to fainter objects like the Andromeda Galaxy, where star hopping became essential.



I have recently launched a new radio show titled "Starry Scoop Live." To watch new episodes, find me on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or contact me at starryscoop@gmail.com. Thank you to all my readers for the support I've received throughout the years.

OBJECT OF THE MONTH

The featured object for May is the Silver Streak Galaxy, formally known as NGC 4216. This intermediate spiral galaxy lies approximately 55 million light-years away in the constellation Virgo and is thought to be comparable in size to the Milky Way. From our vantage point on Earth, it appears almost perfectly edge-on, revealing a striking dark dust lane and a bright central bulge.

Find this object about seven degrees east of Denebola in Leo the Lion. A telescope is needed to resolve details. Good luck!



The Silver Streak Galaxy

Photo Credit: KPNO/NOIRLab/NSF/AURA/Ken Siarkiewicz/Adam Block



My childhood friend, Makayla Ellis, gazing through the eyepiece.

Photo Credit: Kaitlynn Coulette



My friends and I celebrate college decision day.

Photo Credit: Makayla Ellis