

Dreaming of Stars

Feb 18, 2016 edition of Zoe's Blog



Only Sirius is not visible in this John H. image of the winter sky taken Jan 23, 2014. Jupiter was the brightest object in Gemini then but it mimics the brightness of Sirius which was still below the horizon at the time of this image. Canon 60Da image on tripod, 10 seconds, 10 mm focal length, f/2.8 ISO 1250.

A thick blanket of snow covers the earth; and we gardeners dream and plan for the season ahead. We dream of plants.

In Grey County, we astronomers dream too. Our dreams lie not below, but above - high above - the thick blanket of clouds that covers the winter sky. We dream of stars.

Perhaps Grey County astronomers are the most tenacious on earth, given the many missed opportunities for stargazing due to overcast skies or poor “seeing” - but that’s no excuse to be idle. Like planning a garden, the long, dreary winter is the perfect time to bone up on your astronomy knowledge; to study, plan, and dream of the summer skies ahead.

Study

If you’re a beginner, grab a copy of *Nightwatch*, by famed Canadian astronomer Terence Dickinson, and study the winter constellations. Learn the directions where you live, so when that rare clear sky or “sucker hole” appears, you can grab a coat, a hat, and binoculars, and run out onto the deck to gaze at Orion, the Pleiades, dazzling Capella or brilliant Sirius, without wasting time locating them before the clouds snap shut again.

Download this month's free copy of The Evening Sky Map from www.skymaps.com This two-page guide is chockfull of helpful information, including a sky chart specific to the current month, and a "Sky Calendar" listing dates of upcoming celestial events of interest that month. It's also got night-sky observing tips; an astronomical glossary (because a "Variable Star" is not a star with mood swings); and lists of objects that can be seen with the naked eye, seen easily with binoculars, and those that need a telescope. All this for the low, low, price of – FREE!

Study the latest SkyNews Magazine (it's Canadian, eh?). The January/February issue lists the top 10 sky sights for the year, and reading about them will give you a better understanding of what's coming up so that when the event arrives, you'll be able to make the most of it (clear skies allowing), including knowing when, where, and how (with what equipment and what company) you can best enjoy it.

Plan

Mark your calendar. Make plans. Book a B&B or campsite near a Dark Sky preserve and, like any good gardener, hit the ground running when the opportune weather arrives.

And don't forget to check our Bluewater Astronomical Society online events calendar. We've got public viewing dates, or join the club and come camping with us on our special BAS weekends.

Dream

Dream big, because Grey County is famous for its microclimates, which means, if you don't like the weather - go five kilometres down the road and the sky might suddenly be pristine and bursting with stars - so have those binocs with you so you can pull over (somewhere safe), and enjoy.

Sweet starry dreams everyone!