

THE STARRY SIDE

Summer 2020: The absence of people

BY GREELEY WELLS

The general absence of people in public places this spring has had a dramatic effect. Big things, like air quality, have improved. Our water is cleaner. Animals and nature’s other beauties have been given a break from our various good and not-so-good effects.

It’s a moment to muse on what we do to the world around us. We have acted mostly carelessly, without much thought. We say we throw things away, but we can see now that there is no “away.” Things go somewhere and do something, usually something pretty ugly, annoying, and maybe even poisonous. In nature there

is no “away” or waste or anything like it. Spent leaves that fall are good fuel for the next season, the next generation, the other neighbors in nature’s community.

As we discover the consequences of our wasted things and understand them better, we see more and more clearly the harm we have done. Maybe we could shift to a waste-less social framework that designs things the way nature does, uses things efficiently the way nature does, feeds others, and reuses—as nature does so well.

If you have a moment, in your evening, for musing, go outside, get comfortable, and look up. You can find some easy old

friends up in the sky. One is the summer triangle. The harp, Lyra, with the bright star Vega, is up in the east, getting higher and higher in the sky, pushing spring’s favorites into the west and pulling up his two partners in the triangle from the east. He’s also bringing up the Milky Way, with all its stars.

Below, to the northeast, is the bright Deneb, the top of the Northern Cross, or Cygnus the Swan. The end of the swan’s small tail is the top of the cross as she flies south. To the east-southeast and last to rise is the three-in-a-row pattern that makes up Aquila, the Eagle, with Altair, the bright star in the middle. The triangle starts in the east on its side, and by the time it

sets in the west, it’s beautifully and religiously straight up, as the cross should be, sitting upright on the horizon line. Quite cool.

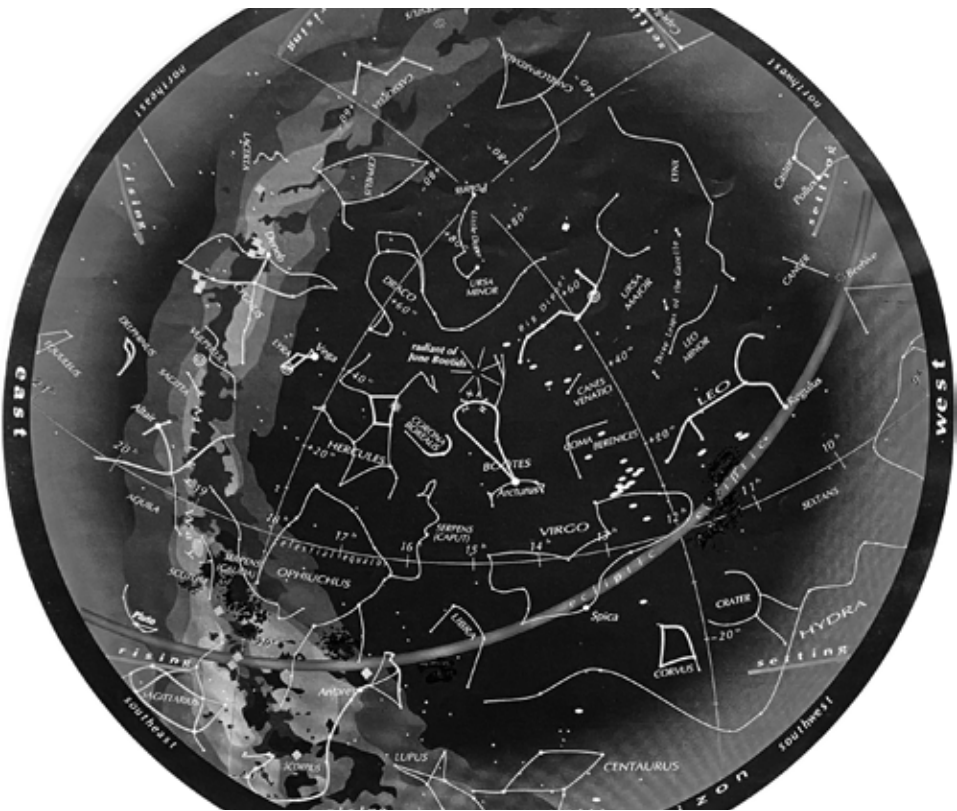
Do you know you can see the stars of the next season in this season’s early mornings? I’ve been watching for them and seeing them for months now. It’s a fun sneak peak into the future. Near the end of summer, fall’s constellations begin to show themselves. They’re fun to see if you can steel yourself to be awake to notice some early morning moments of sky. This works for all four seasons.

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Guy Ottewell’s Astronomical Calendar.



Of Note

Mercury, ever mercurial, is in the dusk in June and the dawn in July. It disappears in August!

Venus, who has been at her brightest for a long time now, is sinking below the horizon in June only to rise in the pre-dawn mornings, higher and higher. She’ll be losing much of her brightness with this change.

Mars has been growing stronger and is now back, and, as usual, is hard to find but for his red color. He stays consistently in the early morning all three months.

Jupiter is in the morning sky in June, up all night in July, and moving to the evening sky in August.

Saturn does the same as Jupiter—part of the team but much dimmer!

Meteor showers

Delta Aquariids, July 27-30, avoid the moon by letting it set before they can be observed. These are dim, medium-speed meteors that go on for long beyond the dates given, with no real peak day. The maximum rate the Delta Aquariids can reach is 15 - 20 per hour.

The Perseids, my favorite, are best between August 11 and 12. But there’s a moon to contend with. They’re worth a watch, anyway, as they are the best of the year, especially if you can avoid the moon. Rated fair.

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Burn reminder

Before burning any time of year, check with your fire district to make sure that day is an official burn day and not a **NO** burn day.

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