

# THE SKY THIS MONTH

**July 2007**

Have you noticed an extremely bright “star” in the early evening’s western sky? Some think this object is a UFO, a weather balloon or even the International Space Station. This mysterious object is actually the planet Venus! Thanks to its perpetually clouded surface, two thirds of the sunlight hitting Venus is reflected away from it, giving us an unmistakable spectacle!

Venus is the third brightest object in our skies (the Sun is first and the Moon is second). Venus will appear to look like a small crescent when viewed with moderate binoculars or a small telescope. As Venus continues to orbit the Sun, we will see a diminishing crescent until Venus disappears into the Sun’s glare in mid-August.



During the first week of July, you might notice a dimmer “star” very close to Venus. This object is actually the planet Saturn! When two objects (such as planets) appear nearly in the same part of the sky, astronomers call it a “conjunction”. You can easily view both planets with your small telescope! What an amazing sight; Venus’ crescent and Saturn’s rings! If you can, get pictures!

Saturn is a planet that is known to everyone, thanks to its breathtaking ring system. When viewing Saturn with a telescope, you might notice an orange-brown “star” in the vicinity. You are viewing Titan; the largest moon in the solar system!



On July 9<sup>th</sup>, our Moon will get as close as 369,000 kilometres. On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, it will get as far as 404,000 kilometres. If you spot the Moon using your telescope (using the same magnification) on (or near) these two days, you might notice the apparent size difference. For those with cameras, take a few pictures!



Mighty Jupiter starts July with a bang, but on the opposite side of the sky from Venus and Saturn! Look low in the southeastern sky just after sunset, and you will see a very bright “star” that looks nearly the same colour as Venus, but about half as bright. Through the telescope, Jupiter is glorious! You will be able

to see its complicated atmospheric structures and storms. You might even catch the Great Red Spot!



Through the telescope, you might notice several bright “stars” around Jupiter. These are actually Jupiter’s Galilean moons, named after the Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei. Nearly 400 years ago, he first spotted these largest moons of Jupiter with his telescope and pondered why they were orbiting Jupiter at a time when many believed that everything was orbiting the Earth!

Two star parties are being planned for the Mill of Kintail Conservation Area. They are tentatively scheduled for the end of August and the end of September. For more information, see our star party website at [www.castor2.ca/parties](http://www.castor2.ca/parties).

Please send any questions, comments and/or astronomical observations and images to the author at the e-mail address below. I would be happy to talk astronomy with you!

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