

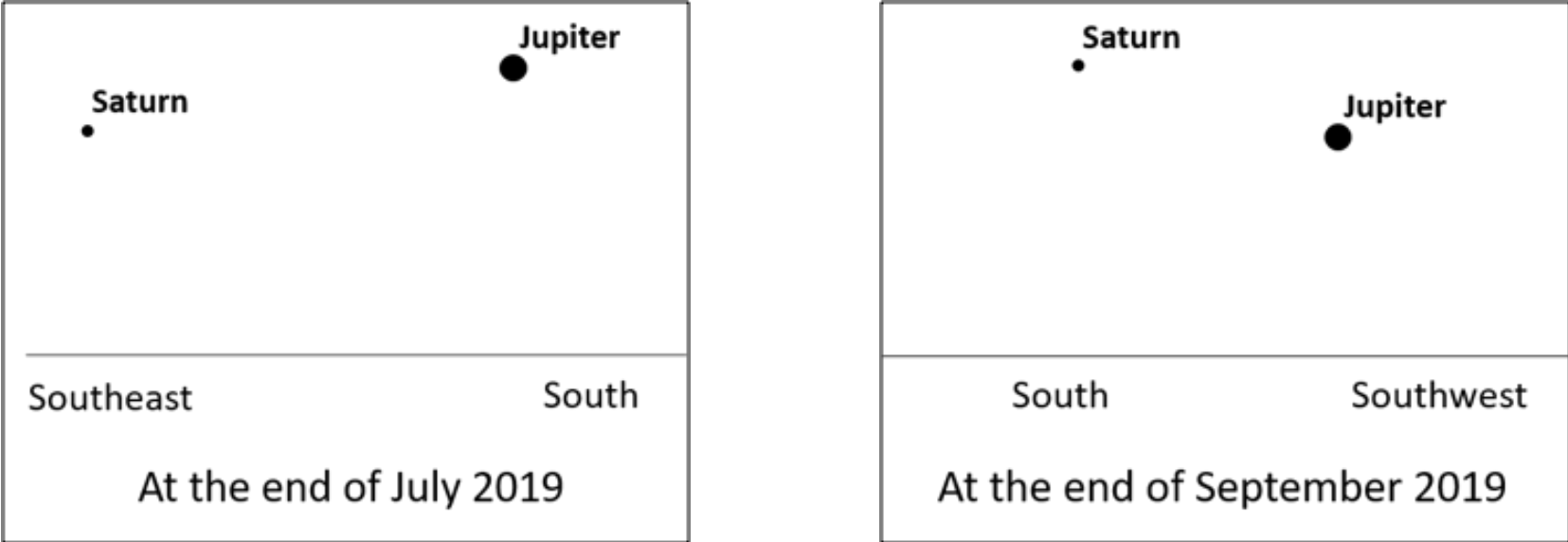
What's Up?

BY BARRY DECRISTOFANO





As we enter October, when the evening begins, we will find that Jupiter has moved lower and westward (closer to the setting sun) and Saturn appears in the South (about 24 degrees high or, 2 ½ fists). That’s a big change since the first What’s Up? just over two months ago.

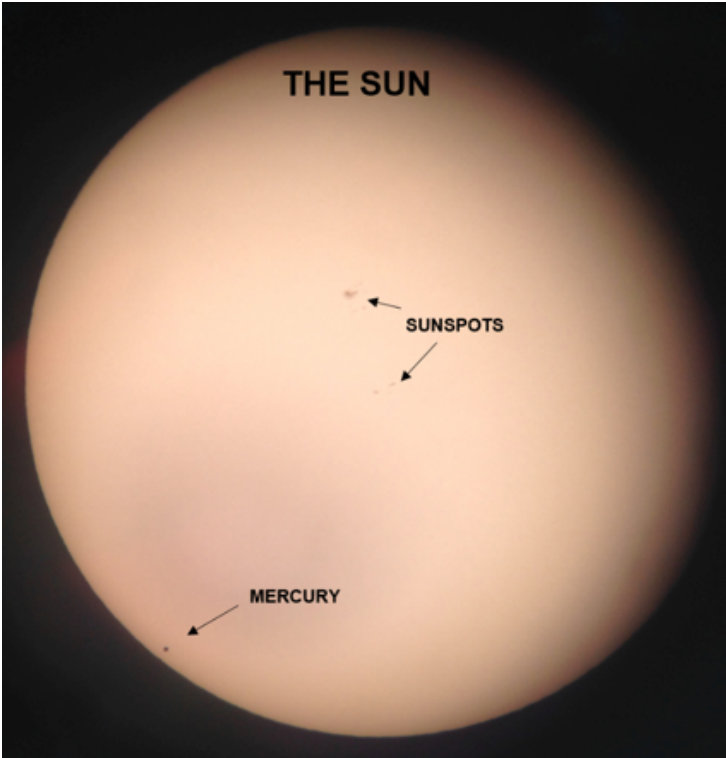


We can also see that the Moon has begun another cycle beginning with the New Moon on September 28th. The First Quarter Moon is on October 5th, the Full Moon is on the 13th, the Third Quarter Moon is on the 21st, and the following New Moon is on the 28th. Around and around it goes. This month’s Full Moon is known as the Hunter’s Moon and, as we saw with the Harvest Moon, the Hunter’s Moon provides extra lighting after sunset. Now that the fields are clear of the crops, hunters can have a clearer view of their quarry.

As you might have begun to realize from reading this column the past couple of months, the term astronomy, covers a wide range of topics and can seem an overwhelming or a “that’s beyond me” subject. But, if taken in small pieces, astronomy can open up the universe to us (literally!). One small piece that I’d like to encourage you to try is to become familiar with the constellations – one at a time. A national club of amateur astronomers, the Astronomical League ([astroleague.org](https://www.astroleague.org)), runs the Constellation Hunter Observing Program. You don’t need to use any equipment other than your eyes. Using maps that you can find in books or online, paper, and a pencil, working through the program can help make the night sky a recognizable sight with recurring patterns that have nightly and yearly rhythms. My wife and I are currently working on this challenge. Why am I doing it? To get to know the night sky even better than I do now. There is ALWAYS something for me to learn about astronomy! You can find out more about the Constellation Hunter program here <https://www.astroleague.org/al/obsclubs/consthunt/const.html> or by contacting me at astroblog@comcast.net. The club that Carolyn and I are members of, the South Shore Astronomical Society, has posted documents that you can use for this challenge at ssastros.org/ConstellationHunter.html. By the way, what do you get for your efforts if you complete the challenge? You get a certificate, a pin, and best of all, a great feeling of accomplishment.

Regarding some of my observing, I just got back from the 11th Annual Acadia Night Sky Festival on Mount Desert Island in Maine. It was first held to celebrate Bar Harbor’s Bar Harbor Ordinance – Light and Glare, approved by voters in 2009. It was a weekend of workshops, speakers, and hands-on experiences. Two star parties (where local amateur astronomy club members set up their telescopes to show visitors planets, star clusters and more) were planned, one on Friday night near Seal Cove and one at the summit of Cadillac Mountain on Saturday night. Based on weather predictions and the logistics of getting our equipment to the summit for the Saturday event (you needed to be in one of the local clubs to bring up your gear), my friend and I set up our telescopes and observed from the summit on Friday night. I had hoped to view some “faint-fuzzies” – my name for objects that aren’t as recognizable as the Moon and the planets are. Faint-fuzzies might be galaxies, star clusters, or clouds of interstellar gases. Lately, I’ve been in search of examples of a particular type of gas cloud known as a planetary nebula. But the wind atop Cadillac mountain was too strong for that because the wind shakes the telescope too much and the image blurs. So, I turned to some of my old standbys – Jupiter, Saturn, the Andromeda Galaxy, and the Double Cluster in Perseus – for viewing and shared my views with about two dozen people who had come to the summit to see the splendor of a very dark night sky. Two other amateur astronomers offered different objects to view through their telescopes. All in all, it was a fabulous night. I love sharing the night sky with others!

In the ‘It’s Never Too Early to Plan’ department, on November 11, we will have the opportunity (weather-permitting!) to view a transit of Mercury. A transit occurs when an object crosses the face of the Sun as seen from Earth. The next transit of Mercury won’t occur until November 2032. In my next article, I’ll give you some specifics about the transit and ways to view it. The last transit of Mercury that we could see from our area was on May 9, 2016. Here’s a picture that I took during that transit. Mercury is the small round spot at the lower left corner of the Sun.



That’s it for this week. In my next What’s Up? I’ll tell you the upcoming Orionid meteor shower and just why we have meteor showers. Please email me with your thoughts and comments! astroblog@comcast.net

Keep looking up.
Barry