



Preface

Within the ranks of amateur astronomy, the phrase “What’s up?” isn’t a greeting. It’s a call for help. Loosely, it translates as, “What should I look at?” or, “What can I see through my telescope?” And, it’s not only beginning observers who pose these questions.

In September 2000, I attended the Great Plains Star Party near Kansas City, Missouri. One night near midnight, as I was walking across the observing field, a friend called down from his observing ladder, “Hey, Michael, I’m out of things to look at. Got any ideas?”

I was taken aback because my friend wasn’t a newbie. He was a dedicated amateur astronomer, a long-time member of a large astronomy club, and a telescope owner. In fact, on this night he was using his new 24-inch Starmaster Dobsonian-mounted Newtonian reflector with full go-to capability. And yet, basically, he was asking, “What’s up?”

I wrote this book to help answer that question.

I selected each of the 1,001 objects from past observations. Several go back more than 30 years. To choose these particular objects, I consulted personal observing logs, talked to friends about their favorites, and scanned my previous writings. Picking the first 218 targets was trivial — 109 came from Charles Messier’s list and the other half originated in Sir Patrick Moore’s Caldwell catalogue.

Two resources from *Astronomy* magazine also helped. One was Arizona amateur astronomer Tom Polakis’ excellent series “Celestial Portraits,” which ran from April 1998 to March 2004. If you missed it, the whole series is available for purchase (as PDF files) online at www.Astronomy.com. Also at *Astronomy*’s web site, you’ll find the other resource I used: StarDome (or StarDome Plus for magazine subscribers). I incorporated almost every object from StarDome brighter than magnitude 11, and a few fainter ones as well.

A quick tally of the objects shows 357 galaxies, putting that class of celestial object at the top, number wise. Of those, I included 214 normal spirals, 61 barred spirals, 57 ellipticals, 19 irregulars, and six galaxy clusters. Star clusters took second place with 325 entries. Of those, 225 are open clusters, and 100 are globulars. You’ll also find 140 nebulae, 114 double stars, and more. Because I envisioned beginning observers also using this book, I included nine constellations and 15 asterisms.

I made a serious effort to select objects from all over the sky, but I must admit to a Northern Hemisphere bias because most of my observing occurs north of the equator. Even so, I somehow

managed to include at least one object in 86 of the 88 constellations that cover the sky. Only the star patterns of Phoenix and Pictor lack a target.

On the other end of the scale, 14 constellations each contain more than 20 of the 1,001 objects. Leading the way are Ursa Major (42), Sagittarius (38), and Virgo (33). Cassiopeia, Cygnus, Ophiuchus, and Puppis each contain 29 objects. Then come Leo and Scorpius (28 each), Cepheus and Monoceros (24 each), Coma Berenices (23), Orion (21), and Canes Venatici (20).

Not all deep-sky objects are equal. Some descriptions, like those of double stars, are short. To other descriptions, especially those of the true standout objects in the group, I dedicated more real estate. Along the way, I also defined some concepts and included a few historical notes. None of the descriptions, however, give all details about any object. That's because I intended this book as a beginning, not an end.

So, use this guide with a pencil in your hand. If you recognize a feature I describe (for example, "three times as long as it is wide"), put a small checkmark by that phrase. If you see a detail I didn't mention, by all means add it to that page. In so doing, you'll take what I started and make it your personal observing log.

If you find a mistake (I take full responsibility for any), or if you'd like to comment on an object, description, or omission, please feel free to e-mail me at m_bakich@yahoo.com.

I organized this book for easy use throughout the year. That's why the 12 chapters carry the names of the months. You'll find the objects in each chapter at their best during that month. You'll be able to observe every object, however, several months before or after the month in which it falls.

Finally, a word about object numbering. Although you could start in January and observe each object in the listed order (at least those in your hemisphere), you also can approach the list in a less formal way. Feel free to skip around in whatever way you choose. Perhaps for your next observing session, you'll select the objects in one constellation. A subsequent session might highlight spiral galaxies or planetary nebulae. It's all up to you.

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The Best Sky Objects for Star Gazers

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