

Rise and shine for great view

By Vernon Whetstone

Amateur Astronomer

The center of celestial attention now shifts to the morning sky this week as bright Venus, who has kept us entertained for several weeks, is now starting an eastward slide which will last until early September when it will sink below the horizon.

You early risers—or those of you who just want to get up early for a planetary peek—will be able to view three planets against the rising Sun.

Bright Jupiter and much dimmer Mars are having a nice meet-up about an hour before local sunrise.

You will need a very clear, unobstructed horizon because both of them are not very high. Presently they are about a degree apart (the moon is about one-half a degree wide) and both appear nicely in a pair of binoculars.

By the end of this week that distance will stretch to two degrees, but they are still viewable in binoculars. Just remember. Jupiter and Mars only appear close. They are actually several million miles apart and both of them are on the far side of the Sun from Earth.

As the week progresses tiny Mercury will be making an early morning appearance. It is directly below the Jupiter/Mars pair and with the glow of the rising Sun in the background binoculars will be essential.

Mercury will be at its highest point on Tuesday, July 30. Then it will begin to sink back toward the horizon.

If you are not an early riser the center of viewing activity right now is the constellation Scorpius, the Scorpion, riding low on the southern horizon best viewed about an hour after local sunset.

Scorpius is easy to find, it looks like a scorpion with the distinctive “J” shape and bright orange Antares at its heart.

Scorpius and Sagittarius (which we will discuss next week) are the prime constellations of summer, just as Orion is the prime constellation of winter. That is why you will never see Scorpius and Orion in the sky at the same time.

Well, of course, there is that thing from mythology that says since Scorpius used its stinger to kill Orion they were placed on opposite sides of the sky so they would never see each other again.

There are several Messier objects located in Scorpius, notably M4, the Cat’s Eye, globular star cluster which is located just right of Antares. It can be viewed in the same binocular field of view.

Two other clusters, M6, the Butterfly cluster and M7, Ptolemy’s cluster, are located just above and left of the scorpion’s stinger. Both can be seen in the same binocular field of view.

There is another really nice pair of open star clusters that Messier seems to have missed. They are located at the bottom of the scorpion where the shape turns left to form the “J” shape. They

are best viewed with binoculars.

SKY WATCH: Third quarter moon, Monday, July 29. Now is a good time for those of you wanting to observe the moon during daylight hours to begin watching. Since you will be up early anyway to view the Jupiter/Mars meeting, look to the southeast for the moon.

NEXT WEEK: Sagittarius, the Archer and more astronomical blathering