



Sky Events Calendar • February, March & April, 2020

All times listed are in Central Standard Time or Central Daylight Time, according to the time in effect on that date.

For more information, call the Museum at 337-291-5544 and ask to speak with someone in the planetarium. Some of these objects and events can be seen during Planetarium star parties — check the Museum web site to see a list of star parties and other events hosted by the Planetarium. Reminders of some of these events will appear on the Lafayette Science Museum Facebook page as the dates approach.

The Internet and media wildly over-hype non-events like “super moons” and “blue moons” and even some actual events like meteor showers. We’ll give you more realistic information!

February 3: The *moon* will briefly block Acadiana’s view of the medium brightness star *Epsilon Tauri*, an event called an *occultation*. The star will disappear behind the moon’s unlighted edge about 10:51 p.m., one of the most instantaneous events the human eye can see. It will pop out from behind the moon’s lighted edge near Mare Crisium about 11:59 p.m. The times can vary slightly depending on where you are in Acadiana.

February 8/9: *Full moon* will occur at 1:33 a.m. on the 9th, and this evening’s moon will probably be hyped as a “super moon.” In reality, the difference in its apparent size compared to other full moons will be too small to see without very careful measurement. Although pretty as it rises, it will look like all full moons.

February 10: The very bright starlike object rising in the southeast just before the sun for the next few months will be *Jupiter*.

February 12 – 24: During this period *Mars* will be in the same binocular view with *Messier 8*, a star-forming nebula that will appear as a soft glow in the view. Watch each morning between 5:00 and 5:30 a.m. as Mars seems to drift past the nebula.

February 18: The *moon* will pass between Acadiana and *Mars* about 5:55 a.m., an event called an *occultation*. This will occur just as the sky is brightening before dawn, but likely still dark enough to spot Mars. A telescope is required for the best view of this, but binoculars will be better than nothing. This will be only the 4th of these rare events visible in Acadiana since 1971, and the next one will be in 2023—will it be noticeable with the unaided eye? Sharp-eyed observers may also spot the star cluster *Messier 8* in the same binocular, and they *might* all be seen in a low power telescope view.

February 19: The very bright starlike object *near the moon* before dawn will be *Jupiter*.

February 23 – March 5: Binocular observers should look low in the southeast around 5:00 a.m. for *Mars*, as bright as a bright star. During this period Mars will seem to pass the faint globular cluster *Messier 22*. Each morning Mars will be in a slightly different place compared to the cluster’s “faint fuzzy.” M 22 is about 10,000 light years distant.

February 27: The bright object *to the right of the moon* will be *Venus*.

February 28 & 29: *Mars* and the *globular star cluster Messier 22* will be in the same low power telescope view on both these mornings. Look between about 4:30 to 5:15 a.m. After that, the light of encroaching dawn will hide the cluster.

March 1: The object as bright as a bright star rising *below and left of Jupiter* in the next couple of months will be *Saturn*.

March 6: Look at the *nearly full moon* with binoculars. When the moon is in the lower left of the view, can you see the *Beehive Star Cluster* (also called Messier 44) in the upper right of the view? The moon’s brightness might make this difficult. If so, move the binoculars so the moon leaves the view to the lower left, and the star cluster will be near the center. Remember its place in the sky and look again in a few nights when the moon is not up and the sky is darker. Since the Beehive is about 577 light years distant, the light you see has been traveling for 577 years and you see the cluster as it was 577 years ago!

March 6 – 9: About 8:30 to 9:00 p.m., look through binoculars at brilliant *Venus* in the west. Place Venus to the right of center in the view, and the starlike object above and to the left will be the planet *Uranus*! Although faint, it will be the brightest object to the left of Venus in the view. Look each night to see Venus and Uranus change positions as they orbit the sun—each night Uranus will seem lower in the view while staying to the left of Venus. This might be the easiest time to find Uranus all year!

March 8: *Central Daylight Time* begins at 2:00 a.m. Set your clocks *ahead* an hour.

March 8 & 9: *Full moon* will occur around lunchtime at 12:48 p.m. on the 9th. The nearly full moons on both the 8th and 9th will probably be hyped as “super moons.” In reality, the difference in their apparent sizes compared to other full moons will be too small to see without very careful measurement. Although pretty as they rise, they will look like all full moons.

March 12 – 28: *Jupiter*, the brightest starlike object in the predawn sky, will be in the same binocular view with *Mars* (below and to Jupiter’s left).

March 13: The easy double star *alpha Librae (a.k.a. Zubenelgenubi)* will be in the same binocular view as the *moon* between midnight and dawn.

March 18: The two bright objects above the *moon* before dawn will be *Mars and Jupiter*, with Jupiter being the brighter of the two. All three will be visible in the same binocular view!

March 19: The *spring equinox* in the northern hemisphere happens at 10:50 p.m.

March 20: Brilliant *Jupiter and Mars* will be in the same low power telescope view in the southeast as morning twilight begins.

March 25 – April 7: *Mars and Saturn* will be in the same binocular view in the southeast just before dawn begins. Look for them below and to the left of brilliant *Jupiter*.

March 28: *Venus* will be the very bright object below and to the right of the *moon*.

March 30 – April 7: Brilliant *Venus* will be in the same binocular view with the *Pleiades* star cluster, sure to be a spectacular view! Look for them about 9:00 p.m. as the sky is getting completely dark.

March 31: Telescope observers with very wide power eyepieces may see *Mars and Saturn* in the same view in the southeast just before dawn. Look for them below and left of brilliant *Jupiter*.

April 2: Face the south and look at the *moon* in binoculars, with the moon near the upper right edge of the view. Can you see the *Beehive Star Cluster* (also called Messier 44) in the lower left of the view? If the moon’s brightness makes this difficult, move the binoculars so the moon leaves the view to the upper right, and the star cluster will be near the center. Since the Beehive is about 577 light years distant, the light you see has been traveling for 577 years and you see the cluster as it was 577 years ago!

April 3: Brilliant *Venus* will be in the same low power telescope view with the stars of the *Pleiades* star cluster. This will be a beautiful sight in a telescope or binoculars and a great opportunity for astrophotographers. On this date Venus will be about 5.25 light minutes from Earth while the Pleiades are about 444 light years distant!

April 7: *Full moon* will occur at 9:35 p.m., and will probably be hyped as a “super moon.” In reality, the difference in its apparent size compared to other full moons will be too small to see without very careful measurement. Although pretty as it rises, it will look like all full moons.

April 14 – 16: Watch the *moon* appear to pass *Jupiter, Saturn, and then Mars* on these three mornings just before dawn. On the 15th, the moon and Saturn will be in the same binocular view, and on the 16th that view will show the moon and Mars.

April 27: Use binoculars to look at the *crescent moon* tonight. With the moon at the center of the view, look for the *star cluster Messier 35* below and to its right. M 35 is about 2800 light years distant.