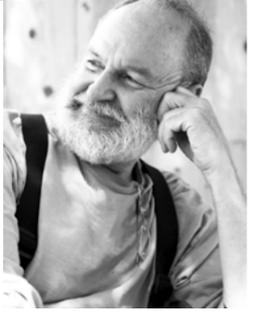


THE STARRY SIDE

Summer thoughts

BY GREELEY WELLS



Greeley Wells

Spring and its floods are over. Summer and its warmth are coming. Clear night skies await. So get out there, get comfortable, and look up.

Directly overhead in June you'll see Bootes (pronounced bo-OH-teez) the Herdsman, marked by the very bright star Arcturus. (Look for the Big Dipper setting in the northwest and "follow the arc" of its handle to find Arcturus.) East of Bootes is Hercules, roughly shaped like an hourglass: two trapezoids, one large and one smaller. Between Bootes and Hercules is an obvious, beautiful "C" shape called Corona Borealis, the crown.

Look to the northwest of this group to find the subtle constellation Coma Berenices. Then look a little farther west to find Leo the Lion. Coma Berenices used to be the end of Leo's tail until an ancient-

Egyptian astrologer got in trouble with his king. To redeem himself, he renamed these stars after the queen's beautiful hair. (The king was happy, and the astrologer got off free!) Tail or locks, it's an attractive, dim group of stars. The darker your sky, the better it looks.

Each night these constellations move slightly west. To measure that movement, extend your fist at arm's length at the same time and place each night. Every night the sky progresses about one fist west, so these constellations will end up in the same place at this time next year.

Summer solstice

June 21 is summer solstice, the longest day and shortest night of the year. The sun is the farthest south on the eastern and western horizon lines and at its highest point in the sky all day.

You might wonder why summer solstice is not the hottest day of the year. The answer is a phenomenon called "the lag of the seasons." It's like a huge ship changing course: the pilot throws the wheel over to the desired side, but, as on the Titanic, almost nothing happens. Even when the ship starts to change course, the change is minute at first and very slowly gains with time. With the lag of the seasons, the land, water, and air have to soak in the heat for a while to warm up. So it'll be months later—in August—before we see the hottest days.

A similar thing happens when we try to address climate change. It's such a huge worldwide thing, it will take years, dare I say decades, for our mitigating actions to truly affect it. It's like the lag between turning a ship's wheel and the actual

turning of the ship. It's like the lag of the seasons. It's the lag between our actions and their effects.

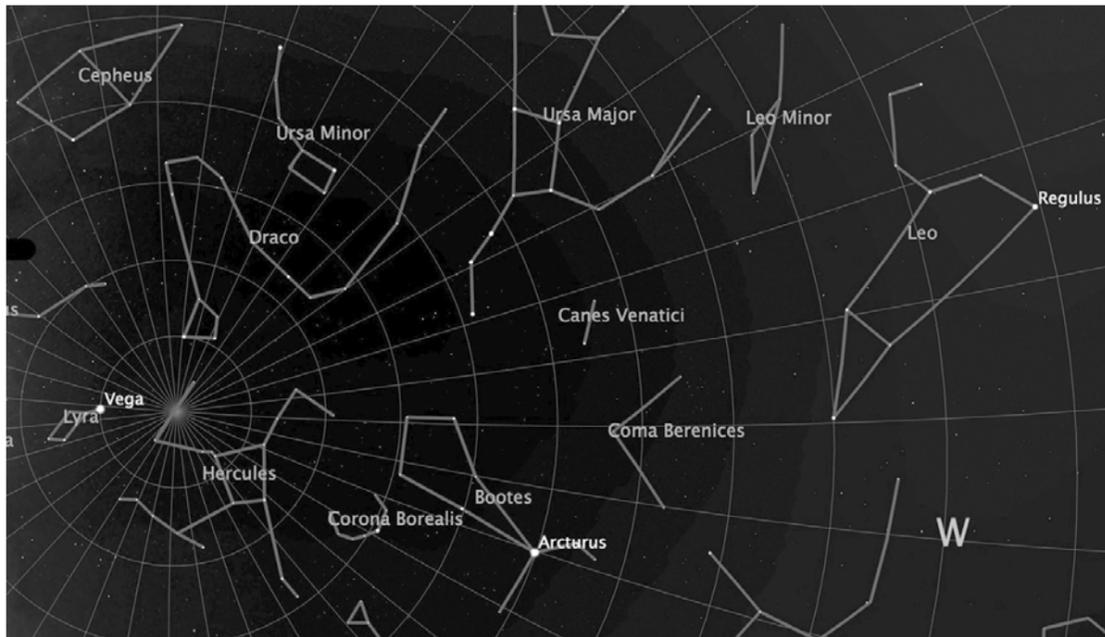
Meanwhile, the earth is steadily warming, and it makes sense to minimize our carbon footprint *now*. If we do, and if scientists' predictions turn out to be right, we'll save humanity and life on this beautiful planet.

Even if predictions turn out to be wrong, no harm done. We'll have a cooler earth, and we'll have cleaner night skies for seeing and appreciating our stars and planets. And that's not a bad thing. Hmm...seems like a no-brainer.

Happy dark, clear, warm nights!

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Photo: Stellarium (stellarium.org).



Of Note

Mercury is in the sunset until 10:30 pm in June and July. By August he is almost invisible.

Venus rises in the east in June at about 4:30 am for a brief morning view. In July she rises at approximately 5 am (good luck!), and in August she's invisible in the sun.

Mars sets about 10:30 pm in June and 9:45 pm in July.

Jupiter is perfectly visible after 8 pm in June and after 6 pm in July. By August Jupiter is still visible in the late evening, setting about 1 am.

Saturn rises about 10:20 pm in June; in July and August Saturn rises around sunset and stays up almost all night.

Meteor showers

July 27 - 30. Look for Delta Aquariids meteors before dawn, 15 to 20 meteors per hour in a dark sky.

August 12 - 13. Look for Perseid meteors late evening to dawn. Although the peak of this shower will be marred by the brilliant waxing gibbous moon, it will probably still be one of the greatest showers of the year. (Stand in the shadow of a tree or building to block out the moonlight.)

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