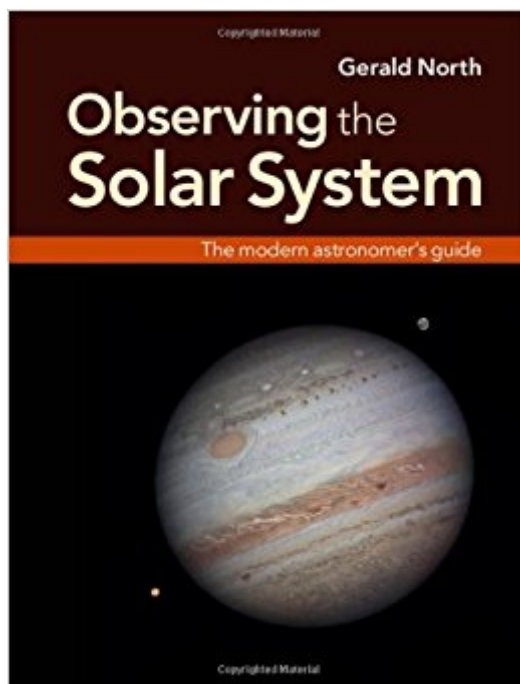


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Observing The Solar System: The Modern Astronomer's Guide



Synopsis

Written by a well-known and experienced amateur astronomer, this is a practical primer for all aspiring observers of the planets and other Solar System objects. Whether you are a beginner or more advanced astronomer, you will find all you need in this book to help develop your knowledge and skills and move on to the next level of observing. This up-to-date, self-contained guide provides a detailed and wide-ranging background to Solar System astronomy, along with extensive practical advice and resources. Topics covered include: traditional visual observing techniques using telescopes and ancillary equipment; how to go about imaging astronomical bodies; how to conduct measurements and research of scientifically useful quality; the latest observing and imaging techniques. Whether your interests lie in observing aurorae, meteors, the Sun, the Moon, asteroids, comets, or any of the major planets, you will find all you need here to help you get started.

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Customer Reviews

"The list of people mentioned in the acknowledgements is itself enough to whet your appetite!...quickly realised that this book can be used in more than one way...I would recommend this book for an interested amateur astronomer." - John Chuter, Journal of the British Astronomical Association
"Gerald North is a well-established and very experienced astronomer who has published many books over the years...there is a useful set of appendices covering telescope collimation, testing optics and polar alignments...this is an excellent book you can either dip into or immerse yourself in, as the mood takes you." - Paul Money, Sky at Night, March 2013
"This book provides

useful information which will interest both the observer and the armchair 'student' of practical astronomy." Spaceflight

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This book is the best! Yet.

Very well done. My best book on the topic.

"Observing the Solar System" is a fairly complete (a relative term when discussing the Solar System) guide for an amateur astronomer to start viewing the night sky. It has a strong focus on planets and comets, and not as much attention to galaxies and some of the Messier objects. There are twelve chapters: 1. Earth and Sky - half is about basic geology of the Earth and the other half discusses meteors. 2. Moon and planet observer's hardware - this whole chapter is about what type of telescope setup you need for observing the moon and planets. 3. The Solar System framed - discusses CCD cameras for amateur astrophotography. 4. Stacking up the Solar System - this whole chapter is about "focus stacking" with astrophotography to get better images. 5. Our Moon - This is one of the better chapters of the book and is very comprehensive for an amateur lunar observer. It discusses lunar characteristics and what you can expect when viewing the moon. I found some very useful info in it that I didn't already know. 6. Mercury and Venus - You're not going to see much in a telescope when observing these two planets due to their size and apparent magnitude, but it discusses their orbits and phases and has some interesting info on transits. 7. Mars - a decent chapter on observing through a telescope, and with the naked eye, as well as the orbit of Mars and its moons. 8. Jupiter - One of the better chapters of the book and that I've found in an amateur astronomer's guide, with information on observing the planet and its moons. 9. Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune - Half about Saturn and its moons, and half about Uranus and Neptune. 10. Small Worlds - Asteroids, Pluto, binocular observing, asteroid photography, and photometry (which I feel is a bit dry and could have been left out). 11. Comets - 1/3 discusses comet behavior, and the rest is about comet photography and photometry. 12. Our daytime star - solar characteristics, tips for safe solar viewing without setting your eyeballs on fire, and sunspots.

This is a book for the dedicated nighttime sky watcher. It contains abundant information on using a telescope, choosing one and considerable material on photographing the bodies in our system. Chapters include; the earth and sky, the moon and observer's hardware (costs are included for the most part), photographing the solar system, Mercury and Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune, asteroids, comets, the sun. There is good information in the appendix section regarding telescopes and there is a detailed index. I do wish more of the illustrations were in colour.

Sometimes, some information is not illustrated, that needed to be, like that on noctilucent clouds. There are only 8 pages of colour plates. The many line diagrams are good and there is abundant common sense advice on observing the solar system. The history of many of these bodies and that of unmanned spacecraft is given. The 'old-fashioned' idea of drawing the planets you observe is interesting and a challenge to those who are fascinated by this. The reliability of solar filters is stressed with some sites included and some suggested excellent books for further investigation on viewing solar eclipses. This book is for your committed sky gazer. The information is somewhat technical, but explained in a simplified fashion. This is the solar system, including visitors such as comets, asteroids and meteorites - not the stars or constellations..

Planetary observation can be highly addicted but equally highly frustrating. A productive visual or imaging session requires a seemingly impossible confluence of vital factors such as atmospheric stability, accurate optical collimation, proper polar alignment, thermal equilibrium of optics, etc. For folks who live in parts of the country where the jet stream is prevalent, observation can be quite frustrating. This book, written by an experienced and knowledgeable astronomer, does a good job in balancing observational, imaging, and foundational information for intermediate amateurs interesting in taking a more serious step in this area. Three things that would have been nice to mention more:

1. Thermal equilibrium of a telescope. It takes a bit of effort to get a Schmidt-Cass or Maksutov to get into thermal equilibrium. Taking it out of storage with a huge thermal differential with the ambient will guarantee a pretty much useless night of productive observation. Bringing huge optical surfaces from a cold indoors into a warm night will likewise create a huge amount of dew on the optical surfaces.
2. There are, for those starting in the hobby, very nice iPhone observational apps that will help one locate the planets. Other programs will actually show correct real-time features that will allow one to correlate to what is being observed.
3. The choice of a proper equatorial mount and tripod are as vital as selecting the optics. Too often, people get stymied by cheap shaky import mounts and tripods with low stability and poor tracking. Some of these can be surprisingly

expensive but useless for serious work. All in all, a good book and recommended read.

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