

Comet Visible During Brief Visit

June 21 2010



Comet McNaught C/2009 R1, one of 56 comets discovered by Robert McNaught. (Credit: Michael Jaeger, Australia)

(PhysOrg.com) -- Comet McNaught is quickly approaching the sun this week, but it is visible with binoculars or telescopes in the early hours before dawn. The best views are away from city lights, according to UA senior research scientist Carl Hergenrother at the Lunar and Planetary Laboratory.

It won't be around for very long, but with a pair of binoculars you can catch Comet McNaught as it nears the sun during the next few days.

The best place to see it is well away from city lights, and the more powerful the [binoculars](#) (or telescope) the better the view, according to University of Arizona senior research scientist Carl Hergenrother at the Lunar and Planetary Laboratory.

The comet, he said, is now in northern Auriga, just a few degrees to the northeast of the 0th magnitude star Capella. It is visible very low in the northeast sky about a half hour before the start of dawn.

Hergenrother, whose work centers on comets, asteroids, has been keeping tabs on McNaught, officially C/2009 R1, and writes about this and other [night sky](#) phenomena in his [blog](#).

Comet McNaught is one of several comets named for its discoverer, Robert McNaught.

Like other comets, McNaught is essentially a ball of ice and dust, remnants of the earliest days of the formation of our solar system. As they approach the sun, comets develop signature "tails" as solar winds cause them to shed their dusty outer layers.

McNaught will appear lower and lower in the morning sky in the [Northern Hemisphere](#) as it heads to perihelion, its closest approach to the sun, on July 2. Hergenrother said the [comet](#) may be visible low in the evening sky later on, but will be very close to the horizon and not very visible for most people.

And the window for morning viewing, he added, is closing rapidly. Still to come, though, is Hartley 2, which will be bright enough to see with the naked eye come this fall.

Provided by University of Arizona

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