

# Comet posing beside crescent moon in cool photo op

March 11 2013, by Marcia Dunn

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In this Sunday, March 10, 2013 photo taken with a 600-millimeter telephoto lens, comet Pan-STARRS appears between the clouds low in the western sky as seen from Harrells, N.C. The comet, which was closest to the sun on Sunday, is expected to become more easily visible to observers in the Northern Hemisphere during the coming week. (AP Photo/The Fayetteville Observer, Johnny Horne)

Now's your chance to see the comet that passed within 100 million miles of Earth last week. Twilight on Tuesday will provide the best photo op for the comet called Pan-STARRS. It will be visible in the Northern

Hemisphere just above the western horizon—right next to a crescent moon.

California astronomer Tony Phillips said the glare of the setting [sun](#) may make it difficult to see the [comet](#) with the naked eye. But he encourages casual sky gazers to give it a shot. The [moon](#) will provide an easy point of reference.

"All by itself, the slender moon will be super-beautiful. If you can see a comet right beside it ... what a bonus!" he wrote in an email from his home and observatory in the [Sierra Nevada](#).

Remember your binoculars, but be certain not to point them at the setting sun, he warned.

Next week, the comet should be easier to spot. It will be higher in the western sky and therefore visible for longer once the sun sets. The surrounding darkness, versus twilight, will make it stand out if the sky is clear.

"Not a great comet, but still a pretty good one," Phillips noted.

Pan-STARRS was visible for weeks from the [Southern Hemisphere](#) before popping up on the upper half of the globe in recent days.



This image provided by NASA shows the comet PANSTARRS as seen from Mount Dale, Western Australia on March 5, 2013. According to NASA on March 10, it will make its closest approach to the sun about 28 million miles (45 million kilometers) away. As it continues its nightly trek across the sky, the comet may get lost in the sun's glare but should return and be visible to the naked eye by March 12. (AP Photo/NASA)

Although billions of year old, Pan-STARRS is making its first-ever cruise through the inner solar system. The ice ball passed within 28 million miles (45 million kilometers) of the sun Sunday, its closest approach to our star and within the orbit of Mercury.

Phillips said the comet did not appear to decay during its brush with the

sun, even though it encountered 10 times more intense solar rays than what we're used to here on Earth.

Last Tuesday, Pan-STARRS made its closest approach ever of Earth.

The comet's name is actually an acronym for the telescope in Hawaii used to discover it two years ago: the Panoramic Survey Telescope and Rapid Response System.

Astronomers believe Pan-STARRS somehow got kicked out of the Oort Cloud that is full of icy bodies beyond the orbits of Neptune and Pluto, and propelled into the [inner solar system](#).

It will be visible in the [Northern Hemisphere](#) for weeks to come.

Have no fear: Pan-STARRS poses no threat to Earth. Neither does comet ISON, which promises to outdo Pan-STARRS.

Astronomers believe ISON will rival the moon in brightness, come November.

**More information:** Space Weather: [spaceweather.com/](http://spaceweather.com/)  
NASA: [www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/ast...s/comet20130307.html](http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/ast...s/comet20130307.html)

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