

Comet Q2 Lovejoy flies past the globular cluster M79

30 December 2014, by Bob King



Comet C/2014 Q2 Lovejoy photographed overnight December 28-29, 2014 remotely from Siding Spring, Australia as it swooped within 1/6 degree of the globular cluster M79. The coma glows green from fluorescing carbon molecules while the narrow ion tail, composed of carbon monoxide gas, glows blue in UV sunlight. Credit: Rolando Ligustri

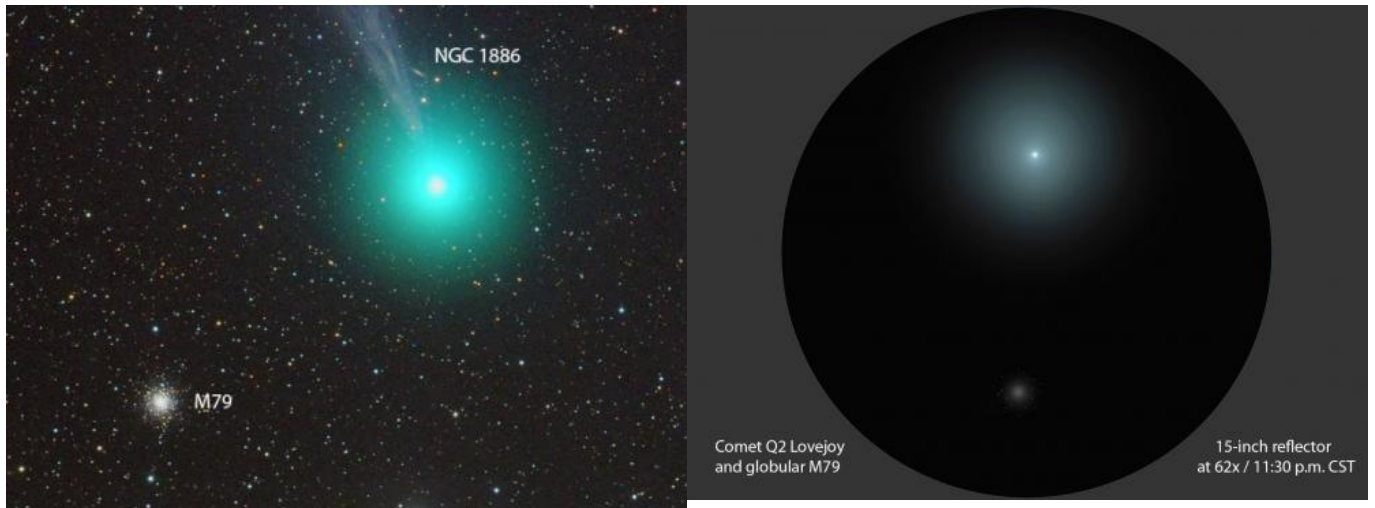
Oh my, oh my. Rolando Ligustri captured this scene last night as Comet Q2 Lovejoy swished past the globular cluster M79 in Lepus. If you've seen the movie *Wild* or read the book, you'll be familiar with the phrase "put yourself in the way of beauty", a maxim for living life adopted by one of its characters. When I opened up my e-mail today and saw Rolando's photo, I felt like the beauty truck ran right over me.



Another striking image of the comet's juxtaposition with the globular cluster M79. Lovejoy is presently 48 million miles from Earth; the cluster lies at the immense distance of 410,000 light years. Credit: Chris Schur

More beautiful images arrived later including this one by Chris Schur of Arizona.

Even with the Moon at first quarter phase, the [comet](#) was plainly visible in binoculars last night shining at magnitude +5. I used 8x40s and had no problem seeing Lovejoy's blobby glow. With a coma about 15-20 arc minutes in diameter or more than half the size of a the Full Moon, it really fills up the field of view when seen through a telescope at low to medium magnification.



A tighter view of the top image shows not only the star cluster but also shows 13th magnitude NGC 1886, an edge-on spiral galaxy. Credit: Rolando Ligustri

Using Photoshop I made this drawing of the comet and cluster that captures its visual appearance through the telescope last night December 28th. The nuclear region is very intense and bright and about 10 arc seconds across. Credit: Bob King

If you love the aqua blue hues of the Caribbean, Lovejoy will remind you it's time to book another tropical vacation. In both my 15-inch (37-cm) and 10-inch (25-cm) reflectors, the coma glowed a delicious pale blue-green in contrast to the pearly white cluster. I encourage you to look for the comet in the next few nights before the Moon is full. Starting on January 6-7, the Moon begins its move out of the evening sky, giving observers with dark skies a chance to view Lovejoy with the naked eye. I'm looking forward to seeing its long, faint tail twist among the stars of Eridanus as the comet rapidly moves northward over the next week.

For a map on how to find the comet, check my recent article on Lovejoy's many tails. Cheers to finding beauty the next clear night!



Comet Lovejoy was bright enough to nab in a 15-second time exposure with a 200mm telephoto lens last night. Details: f/2.8 at 13 seconds. Credit: Bob King

Source: Universe Today

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