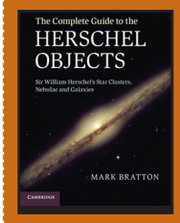
The Complete Guide to the Herschel Objects



Author: Mark Bratton
Publisher: Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 978-0-5217-6892-4
Price: £45 (Hb) 584pp

It's time to dust off your telescopes and binoculars, leave your laptops behind and go outside under the stars, for Mark Bratton has set a fantastic challenge – to find over 2,400 objects from the Herschel catalogue. It's a challenge that will appeal to beginners and experts alike.

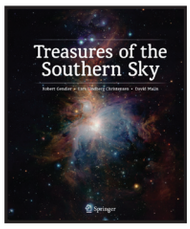
Why? For beginners, it will help identify classic rich fields-of-view and thus will increase the interest at a critical learning time. For experts, it will sharpen observation techniques at the telescope and draw together experience in tracking down objects for an often renewed look after many years.

As a Herschelian historian, I was particularly interested in Bratton's stance on chronicling the original observations and identifying the correct 'survey' and equipment used. I am pleased to say, Bratton is spot-on with every reference. The Herschel story of a musician turned astronomer has been written up many times, however, Bratton has taken the practical route: context of observing sites, telescope maker and observer. This is unique and gets straight down to business. Caroline Herschel also receives good billing and all the crucial milestones are contained in the narrative. Illustrations are well researched and superbly distributed within the text.

So what of the catalogue? Constellations are alphabetically listed, NGC numbered, Herschel numbered and classed according to size and depth of object with each entry carefully described, giving the astronomer every chance of planning a great evening's observing. I have recently returned to observe NGC 6826, the 'Blinking Planetary Nebula' in Cygnus for the first time in nearly 20 years – Herschel's observation was in September 1793. My observation is reasonably good. Bratton's observation is assured. I am impressed with the line drawings sketched at the eyepiece of a 15-inch Newtonian reflector. Even for those with lower apertures, there is much to glean from this book. It is meticulously researched and there is an outstanding attention to detail throughtout.

Ian Welland

Treasures of the Southern Sky



Authors: Robert Gendler, Lars Lindberg Christensen and David Malin
Publisher: Springer
ISBN: 978-1-4614-0627-3
Price: £40.99 (Hb) 190pp

This large format coffee table book written by the experienced and legendary imagers David Malin and Robert Gendler, along with science writer Lars Lindberg Christensen is an example of what Springer can do if it tries. The book starts with a brief history of astronomy of the Southern Hemisphere as experienced by western Europeans. This section includes the first sightings of the Coal Sack and Southern Cross by the early Spanish and Portuguese explorers along with later data from observatories in Australia and South Africa. There are also brief vignettes on some of the first European southern sky explorers such as Lacaille, James Cook, John Herschel, Edmund Halley and others which gives a perspective on how the southern sky was opened up to scientific study.

The bulk of the book is divided into four sections covering objects that are visible each season in the Southern Hemisphere. The images illustrating the objects are from a wide variety of sources including the Hubble Space Telescope and some of the large telescopes from Chile and Australia. The quality of the image reproduction along with the quality of paper used is exceptional for a book of this price. Each object has a short piece on some of the astrophysics and history associated with it. You do find the expected objects such as Eta Carinae and Orion but also included are some more obscure objects such as IC 2220, the Toby Jug Nebula. The images themselves are reproduced mostly full page and the authors have resisted the annoying temptation to spread images over two pages so a large part is missing down the spine of the book. Overall I think this is an excellently produced book and even if you are not thinking of taking an astronomical trip to the Southern Hemisphere it is a book well worth buying just to see what deep sky objects you may be missing. There are still a number of objects covered that will be visible to observers at northern latitudes. I only wish that some of Springer's other books were reproduced to such a high standard.

Owen Brazell

Turn Left at Orion

Authors: Guy Consolmagno and Dan Davis
Publisher: Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 978-0-521-15397-3
Price: £22.99 (Pb, spiral-bound) 256pp

Turn left at Orion has enjoyed enormous success with amateur astronomers and rightly so, since it brought 100 celebrated celestial objects within easy reach of the novice star gazer, with its exceptionally clear guidelines on how to find and observe them. By popular demand, authors Consolmagno and Davis have teamed up again to produce this thoroughly revised fourth edition.

Those familiar with earlier versions will see some major changes to the new edition. For example, the cover has changed to dark blue, it has larger pages and is soft bound for easy use in the field. The biggest changes are to be found inside though. The original philosophy of the book centred on those objects easily seen in very small telescopes (up to 80mm apertures), but in light of the Dobsonian revolution, which enabled throngs of amateur astronomers to buy large telescopes in the 200–300mm aperture range, at modest cost, there was no longer any need to restrict the observing list to smaller apertures. The result is a greatly expanded and enriched text, featuring hundreds more subjects that are a must see; more open and globular clusters, more planetary and emission nebulae and more variable and double stars.

Like the earlier editions, the book retains much of its classic features. Excellent (and sometimes humorous) advice is given to the caring and maintenance of the telescope and its accessories. The same great commentaries on lunar and planetary observing are in place, as well as a fully updated list of tables of the celestial real estate covered in the book. There's even some space devoted to observing geostationary satellites!

This is an exceptionally useful text, irrespective of whether you are a novice observer or a seasoned veteran. The changes that have been made to the book are so substantial that even those who own earlier editions will find it refreshingly new. It's not just recommended, it's simply a must have!

Neil English