

UNA Planetarium Newsletter

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Saturn is now lying low in the eastern sky right after sunset. It is paired up with the bright star Spica in the constellation Virgo. The word planet means "wanderer" and refers to the movement of the planets through the fixed stars that was long ago noticed by many cultures. Saturn is famous for the bright rings which can be seen even in small telescopes. In fact, Saturn was the first object I ever saw through my backyard telescope when I was growing up.

Part of growing up is traveling and exploring new things and experiences. Saturn is an excellent reminder of that as mankind grew up to understand the Universe, we explored as well. From the first satellites to interplanetary probes, we have sought to see new things and to understand what we see. Saturn has played and part in the history of space exploration. The Pioneer and Voyager probes flew past Saturn and studied the rings and moons of the planet. The Voyager craft are now the most distant objects from Earth that were made by humans.

Even now, the Cassini mission has an orbiter studying the planet, its moons and rings. It is producing new data every day that is poured over by astronomers. It is amazing that as we watch the planet in the sky there is a craft in orbit sending back data. As the planet wanders through the sky we explore and wander with it.

UNA Planetarium and Observatory,
is operated by the Dept. of Physics
and Earth Science

Image of the Month



This image of the asteroid Vesta was taken by the Dawn spacecraft on July 1st on its way to the asteroid. The Dawn mission aims to orbit around Vesta for one year before departing for the asteroid Ceres. Both asteroids lie in the main belt of asteroid which lies between Mars and Jupiter. The larger asteroids are relatively unchanged since the beginning of the solar system and should provide clues to the types of objects that created the planets. The spacecraft was about 100000km from Vesta when this image was taken. **Image courtesy NASA.**

Astro Quote:

*"Look deep, deep into
nature, and then you
will understand
everything better." —*

Albert Einstein, 1951

August tours start at 7:30PM on Tuesday and Friday evenings. Tours consist of a "Stars Tonight" constellation discussion and a multimedia presentation. If weather allows we then observe using the UNA observatory's telescope. Tours are intended for a general audience. \$3/person.

Upcoming Events

August 5th. Planetarium public night

August 6th. **Vesta Fiesta**

August 9th. Planetarium public night

August 11th. Perseid Meteors Peak

August 23rd. Planetarium public night

August 25th. Shoals Astronomy Club
meeting

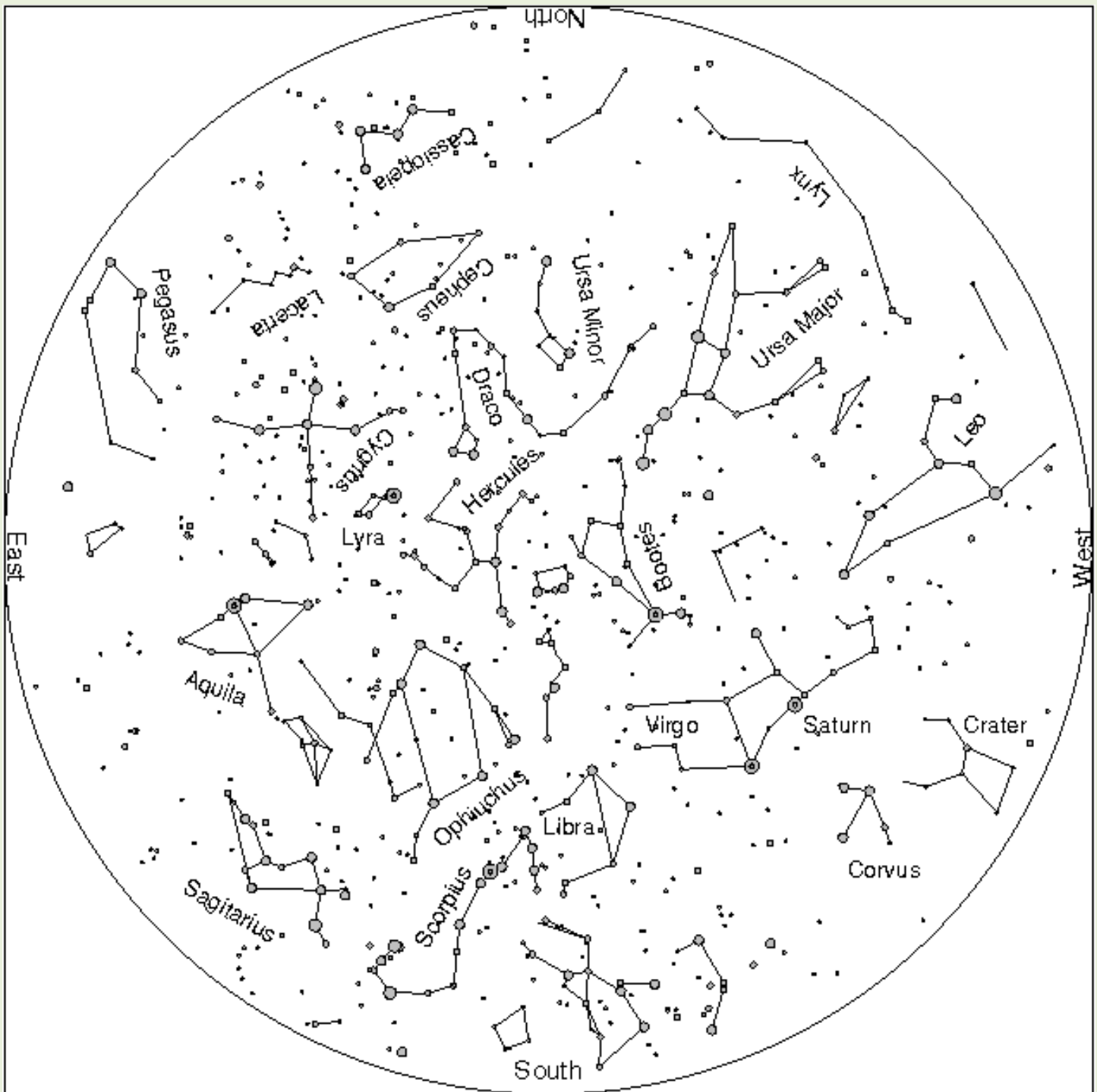
August 26th. Planetarium public night

Observing Highlights

Saturn lies high in the southwestern sky in the constellation Virgo.

The Perseid meteors reach their peak August 13th.

The August 2011 Sky for North Alabama



How to use this Chart: The sky is shown for 8:00PM, August 5th for Florence, Alabama. It will appear this way one hour earlier for each week difference in time. The stars brightness's are represented by different sized dots. The faintest stars you can see are the small dots; the brightest ones are large dots. Hold the chart with the direction you are facing down. So if you are facing north, hold the chart with north down. The circle represents the horizon and the center of the chart the point directly over your head. So an object half-way between the center and edge of the chart is half-way up in the sky. This chart was prepared using the SkyNow software of R. M. Blake. This chart may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes with the following acknowledgement included: Courtesy UNA Planetarium and Observatory. <http://www.una.edu/planetarium/>.

Events

Earth Day 2011

In collaboration with the Shoals Astronomy Club the UNA Planetarium went to Earth Day in May to discuss light pollution. We also brought some physics demonstrations.



Vesta Fiesta!

To celebrate the arrival of the Dawn mission to the asteroid Vesta, the UNA Planetarium will host a Vesta Fiesta as part of a national outreach event by NASA. On Saturday, August 6th starting at 1PM we will have NASA materials on hand about the mission as well as interactive activities about asteroids and meteor impacts. We'll show the latest images from the Dawn mission and live webcasts from NASA.



Perseid Meteors

About 2 tons of material are estimated to hit the earth every day and every year meteorites land and are collected by scientists. Some private businesses make good livings recovering meteorites after a fall. You don't have to be lucky to watch material hit our earth. Meteor showers occur when the Earth passes through the dust left behind by a comet. Dozens and sometimes hundreds of meteors or "shooting stars" can be seen every hour. They have nothing to do with stars really. Little bits of dust hit the atmosphere and burn up. A brief flash of light accompanies this. Summer is a good time for watching meteor showers. The Perseid meteors reach their peak on the morning of August 13th, and appear out of the north east after midnight. This year the full moon will diminish the normally 70 meteors per hour from this shower. When watching a meteor shower don't stare at one spot on the sky but sweep around the general area of the shower. It is also a good chance to get a star chart and learn the constellations. You can get one from our website: <http://www.una.edu/planetarium>