

CAS Sky Notes for May 2023

May will not be a great month for observing planets, but I advise you take advantage of the nights getting dark at a reasonable time to do some observing of deep sky objects, such as clusters or galaxies. By next month the skies will never get truly dark all night.

Planets:

Mercury: Mercury reaches greatest Western elongation on the 29th and is moderately well placed for observing in the morning sky. The end of the month and the start of June is your best time to pick it up, when it is around 17 degrees from the Sun and has a fair northerly declination. However, it is not very bright until the start of June and may be tricky to find. Use binoculars to hunt for it as this gives a better chance of seeing it.

Venus: This is now a very prominent evening object and becoming much brighter and higher in the sky. The apparent diameter is rapidly increasing as the phase drops to about 50% by the end of the month.

Mars is still visible in the evening sky in Taurus. The disc size drops to less than 5 arc seconds this month and it is getting low in the western sky by the time it gets dark. It is a difficult object now.

Jupiter is now becoming a morning object.

Saturn is also a morning object, but very poorly placed this month, rising around 3 a.m.

Uranus and **Neptune** are morning objects, but very poorly placed this month.

The Sun

Solar activity is still increasing and solar observations are a good idea. **Take great care to never look directly at the Sun, or directly through an optical instrument.**

Ensure a proper filter is in place or project the image onto card.

Aurora: The increased solar activity raises the possibility of seeing the aurora borealis even at our southerly latitudes, as has happened recently. Keep alert and look online, or maybe download an App that warns you of auroral activity.

Moon

There will be a penumbral eclipse of the Moon on the 5th May, but it will not be visible in the UK as it occurs during daytime.

Another challenge is the occultation of Jupiter on the 17th May at 13.40 BST. The occultation is only visible in Scotland, but it will be a grazing pass here. As it is in the day, you will need to use a telescope to see this, but as Jupiter is bright and the Moon easy to find, it's worth a try.

5th May: Full Moon.

19th May: New Moon

12th May: Moon is at last quarter.

27th May: Moon is at First Quarter