



The observing guide to the Messier Marathon – a handbook and atlas

by Don Machholz

Cambridge University Press, 2002.
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£18.95 (hbk).

Hardly a month goes by without another book being published on deep-sky observing. This one is slightly different and, although based around the popular Messier objects, is concerned with trying to see them all in one night – the so-called Messier marathon. Much of the background material to the objects themselves will be found in more detail in other books.

The idea of a Messier marathon became popular after Walter Scott Houston discussed it in *Sky & Telescope* in 1979. There is a period around March when it is just possible to see them all between sunset and sunrise. It is the morning and evening objects that cause most trouble, in particular M30 which rises in morning twilight.

This is a book about how to find the objects, rather than about how they look: there are only a couple of images included and no sketches. A major part of the book is taken up with maps and charts. Large scale maps show the visibility of all Messier objects from latitude $+55^\circ$ north to the equator for various dates. More detailed charts give the objects in suggested order of observation. These are laid out with constellation maps on one page and finder charts facing. A table gives ideal marathon dates from 2001 to 2050.

Like Messier himself, the author is a

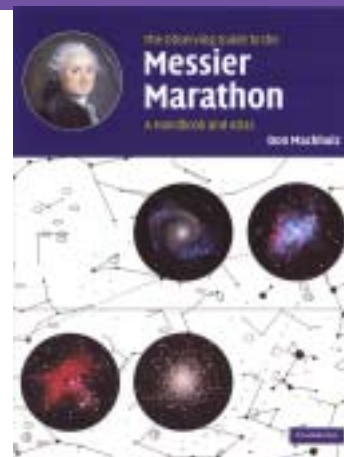
noted comet discoverer, and this shows in the biographical section. Much more detail is given about Messier's comets than in similar books. There is also a good section on the 'missing' objects. A comprehensive list of references and web-site addresses is included. There is also a section on other possible marathons, such as a Lacaille marathon for more southerly observers. As with many books originating from the USA, UK readers may find that the style grates at times.

There are a few errors. These mainly involve objects being given incorrect symbols or incorrect names on charts. For example, on p.123, M97 is listed as a galaxy instead of a planetary nebula and on p.139, M5 is called a galaxy instead of a globular cluster.

This book will probably have limited appeal in the UK, where observers traditionally like to look at fewer objects in more detail rather than see how many they can find in one night. If you want to take part in a Messier marathon this book could help you succeed, but if you want a general book on observing the Messier objects there are better ones around.

Stewart Moore

Dr Stewart Moore is an active visual observer of the deep-sky and planets. He is Chairman of Farnham Astronomical Society and a committee member of the Webb Society. Having recently retired from the oil industry he is moving to darker skies in rural Dorset to continue his observations of planetary nebulae.



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