

Collins Atlas of the night sky

by Storm Dunlop, Wil Tirion & Antonin Rukl

Collins, 2005. ISBN 0-00-717223-0. Pp 224, £20.00 (hbk).

A good star atlas is an essential part of any observationally-minded amateur astronomer's library. Basic guides to the constellations abound, but few offer the somewhat more detailed maps which would make them useful to the amateur who has got beyond the 'beginner' phase of simply recognising the major star patterns and wishes to delve deeper. For as long as most of us can remember, the venerable *Norton's* has been the standard. This new atlas, put together by former BAA President Storm Dunlop with star maps drawn by Wil Tirion and lunar charts by Antonin Rukl, presents itself as a strong alternative.

Unlike *Norton's*, the *Collins Atlas of the Night Sky* doesn't have a detailed reference section. Instead, Dunlop provides a brief introduction to celestial coordinates, magnitudes and the various classes of deep sky objects. A set of 20 full-page (18.5x24cm) charts covers the sky at a reasonable scale, with comprehensive lists of variable stars, double stars, nebulae, galaxies and clusters on the facing page. These are useful for planning a night's observing, showing stars to the naked eye magnitude limit of +6.5.

Following the wide-view maps are larger-scale constellation-by-constellation charts, accompanied by detailed descriptions of the notable features in each. An observer setting

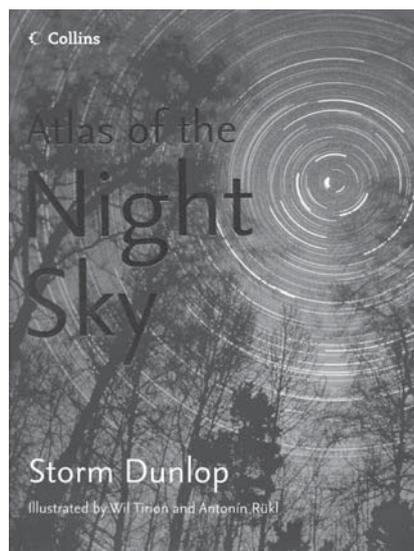
out on a tour of Perseus, for example, is offered a list of ten interesting objects, and a detailed binocular field chart for the variable star X Persei. The constellation charts plot stars down to mag. +7.5, making them useful for binocular location of fainter objects.

The constellation and wide-scale charts are drawn in Tirion's comfortable, familiar user-friendly style, as seen elsewhere in, for example, the deeper (fainter stars), more advanced *Sky Atlas 2000.0*. Under red-torch illumination in the field, the Milky Way stands out on the charts as a graded lighter shade against the dark background. Star plots are good and clear, but the plots of deep sky objects require a bit more attention from the user.

A few pages of basics on the various telescopic lunar features are followed by a set of 16 detailed maps showing the Moon in small sections. Again, rightly, Rukl's clarity of style is already well-reputed, and these maps are extremely user-friendly. A nice touch, for users of star diagonals, is presentation of slightly smaller-scale versions of the lunar charts, mirror-reversed, on the facing page, where descriptive notes on the visible features are also given.

Finally, the *Atlas* offers brief notes on Solar System observing (principally the planets and meteor showers), and a set of annual charts showing planetary positions until 2009. Lunar observers will find the index of named features useful, and there is also a good list of further resources and contacts for the major astronomical organisations.

I found only a few relatively minor quibbles. Jupiter doesn't 'sometimes reach about magnitude -4.0' (p.7), Corona Australis is



the Southern Crown (not 'Crow'; p.83), M93 is an open, not globular cluster (p.130) and it was surprising to find M13 and M92 omitted from the list of objects in Hercules (p.98). None of these really detracts from the *Atlas's* utility.

This is certainly the best new intermediate-level star atlas I have seen in a long time. The clear maps are excellent for general use, and the robust binding will stand up to long-term exposure to observing conditions. *Norton's* has a serious rival in the *Collins Atlas of the Night Sky*, and I can see this becoming an atlas which will see a lot of use under the sky as well as on amateur astronomers' desks.

Neil Bone

Neil Bone is Director of the Association's Meteor Section, and has spent more than 30 years navigating around the sky with a variety of star atlases.

This review is copyright © the *Journal* of the British Astronomical Association, www.britastro.org/journal. If you wish to reproduce it, or place it on your own Web page, please contact the Editor: Mrs Hazel McGee, hazelmgee@compuserve.com

Order your books via the BAA Journal web page!

Don't forget that you may order books and other items by post by logging on to the BAA *Journal* web page at www.britastro.org/journal. An arrangement with Amazon.co.uk means that the BAA is paid a small commission for **everything** (including videos, CDs and electronic equipment) that is ordered directly from Amazon by clicking on a link from our site. So whatever you are thinking of buying, go first to www.britastro.org/journal and help the BAA at no cost to yourself!

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
