



## Stargazing basics – getting started in recreational astronomy

by Paul E. Kinzer

Cambridge University Press, 2008.  
ISBN 978-0-521-72859-1. Pp ix + 147,  
£11.99 (pbk).

This book does a good job of covering most of the aspects of starting recreational astronomy, from naked eye observing to purchasing and using a telescope.

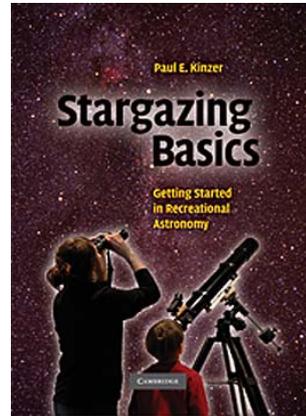
In the introduction the author explains about the movement of the Earth and the observational effect on the night sky, covering the solar system and the constellations. Also mentioned is the effect of light pollution, and a reminder to dress appropriately as well as having something to sit or lay on. There is also a part covering some of the many books, aids and web sites to help the reader learn their way around the night sky.

The book covers the types of equipment. 'Using binoculars' explains about the exit pupil and lenses to help select the correct type to buy, plus what you should be able to observe using them. Next is a section on buying telescopes – what makes there are, plus the advantages and disadvantages of the different types avail-

able. There is a big emphasis on not getting something too big or powerful to start with. The author does not stop at the main equipment but goes on to explain about buying and selecting eyepieces, barlow lenses, star diagonals and view finders. He briefly mentions using coloured filters but there is no real guide about what to use or the benefits of using them. This is followed by a short section on astrophotography, using traditional cameras to CCD including mountings and release cables. It finishes with an 'in a nutshell' section giving a brief summary of equipment, and mentions going to local societies and star parties.

The main concern I have is the lack of warnings for solar observing – it mentions 'use an appropriate filter' but there are no strong warnings of the dangers of looking at the Sun or the importance of supervising children. Under observing the Sun, direct observing is given more coverage than indi-

rect. I feel these should have had at least equal coverage as indirect is a safer method of observing the Sun for beginners.



The second section covers what you can see and when in the year to look for it, covering observing the Sun, Moon and planets, including the phases of the inner planets and (very briefly) meteors, asteroids and comets. It finally touches on some simple deep sky objects to look for such as stars, doubles and clusters, galaxies and nebulae.

The final section provides a useful glossary and appendix covering the Greek alphabet, constellations and simple star charts.

Although most of the content can be found in the many books and guides already available, the author has done what he set out to do by condensing the basic information together into one book as a general guide.

**Hazel Collett**

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