

# Atlas of the Messier Objects: Highlights of the Deep Sky

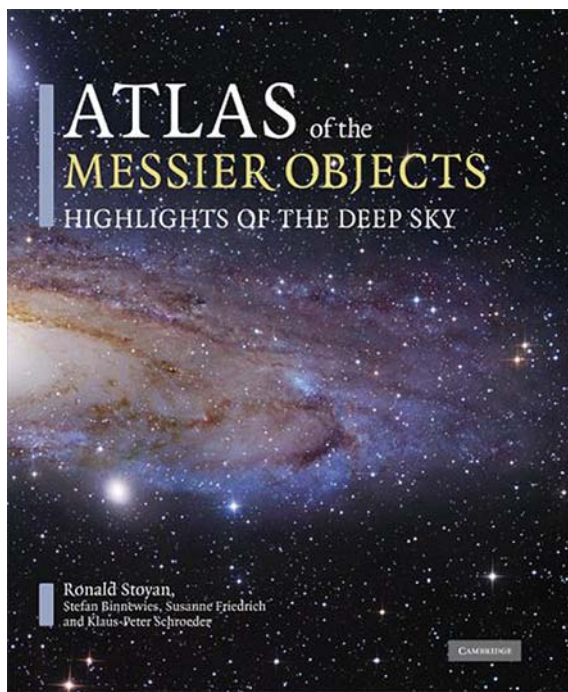
by **Ronald Stoyan et al.**

**Cambridge University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-89554-5. Pp 370, £35 (hbk).**

There are several good books that cover Charles Messier's famous catalogue of Deep Sky objects, but none are as beautiful or comprehensive as this spectacular volume from Cambridge University Press. Ronald Stoyan, with Binnewies, Friedrich & Schroeder, released the book in a German edition in 2006 and this English version should grace the book collection of amateurs and professionals alike for the foreseeable future.

It is a comprehensive volume, and in glorious colour. There is a very fine biography of the 'ferret of comets' himself which not only brings the man to life, but also places him in context of the turbulent times in which he lived, and shows the achievements of his contemporaries, particularly Pierre Mechain who discovered 30 of the 110 objects in the catalogue. There is also a very interesting discussion of visual observers of objects now in the Messier catalogue, from before and after Messier and Mechain. While the historical aspect may not be quite detailed enough for pure historians of astronomy, it will certainly interest most observers.

The 110 objects themselves are dealt with in much detail, from how and when the catalogue was compiled, the descriptions of the observations by Messier himself, and then the large remainder of the book which is devoted to each in turn. There is a summary showing basic data, a historical note, useful astrophysical comments, and observational details to help most amateur visual



observers. Each Messier object is accompanied by a spectacular amateur photograph in colour; some of the best of the objects have historical drawings too, and some have drawings by Stoyan himself. There are a few Hubble Space Telescope images, illustrating the odd point here and there, but these are almost overshadowed by the truly remarkable images provided by Stoyan's German colleagues, from a variety of locations (Chile, Namibia, Greece and the Alps etc). These are images of the highest order, beautifully reproduced.

Stoyan includes the SO galaxy NGC 5866 in Draco as Messier's No. 102, rightly in

my view, but at variance with O'Meara who has M102 as a duplicate observation of M101. So Stoyan gains a fine galaxy for the catalogue. Reasonably, he treats Messier's 40 (a wide optical pair) and 73 (a poor grouping) with more respect than enthusiasm, and mentions some recent research into each.

There can be very few quibbles about such an impressive book. The yellow annotations on some black and white photographs can be somewhat difficult to read; those on the sublime colour photographs can mar them slightly, especially when only one image of the object is on offer. However this is balanced by the fascinating additional challenges offered; as an example, we have Messier 7, the fine open cluster in Scorpius, which is annotated in its only picture, but we are advised of three tiny planetary nebulae in the field. For the connoisseur, to be sure, but wonderful additional information.

Ronald Stoyan and his colleagues are to be congratulated for putting together a most beautiful and helpful volume on Messier and his catalogue, one that all Deep Sky enthusiasts will wish to own, and which is unlikely to be surpassed for many years.

**Nick Hewitt**

*Former President, and Director of the Deep Sky Section, of the BAA, Webb Society member Dr Nick Hewitt has been an avid observer of Messier's treasures with eye, film and CCD for some 40 years.*

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