



Galaxy: Exploring the Milky Way

by Stuart Clark

Quercus Publishing, 2009. ISBN 978-1-84724-741-4. Pp 256, £25 (hbk).

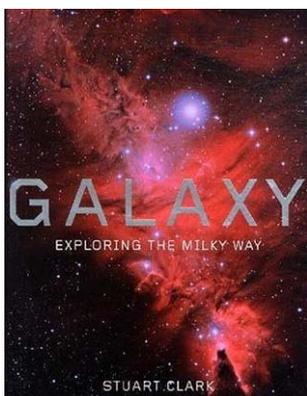
This is a wonderful picture book that would lavishly decorate any coffee table. From the title you might think that that is all the book is about, the Galaxy, and you'd be correct! However, it is not just about the stars that are the main constituents of our Galaxy but includes everything else that goes into making what a galaxy is – stars, gas, dust, planets, asteroids etc.

Dr Stuart Clark is a visiting Fellow of the University of Hertfordshire, former editor of *Astronomy Now* and author of several well known popular books on astronomy.

After an introductory section which places our Milky Way Galaxy in perspective in the universe the book describes galaxies in general and then the birth, life, and death of stars, before concluding with a large section on planets and principally those of our own solar system.

On each page you are confronted with a wonderful image illustrating a particular point, often with smaller images upon it. These are labelled with a small number which is linked to further (deeper) descriptions in the text. The text generally makes up no more and often a lot less than half a page. Personally, I found that it was not always easy to find the image to which the cross references applied as the numbers used are rather small.

The text is written in a very clear and concise manner (typical of the author) and you



won't find any greatly detailed descriptions. Nonetheless, the text is informative and I did come across the odd term I'd not heard before, such as 'yardang' [defined by

Wikipedia as 'a wind-abraded ridge found in a desert environment']. For the novice however, some of the descriptions are a little too sparse.

I noticed very few grammatical or typographical errors (Comet Holmes, stated as discovered in 1862 instead of 1892, being one) and only one real mistake, where the belts and zones of Jupiter are described the wrong way round: lighter bands are referred to as belts and darker

ones bands. However, the description of what is thought to form them is correct.

In some places the text is a little too concise, such as on page 156 where the author mentions that 'the darkening around the edges of the Sun indicates that it is a gaseous body...', but there is no explanation as to why this is so. Also, on the same page, the rotation of the Sun is given for the equator only (25.4d) with no mention of the fact that it is much slower towards the poles. It is a pity also that the binding doesn't allow the book to lay flat, so some of the images (and there are many of them) that span both pages are a little spoilt.

That said, this is a beautiful book and I have tended to leave it lying around for visitors to peruse, often with the remark of how wonderful the images are.

Roger Pickard

Roger is the current President of the Association and Director of the Variable Star Section.