



Patrick Moore's Yearbook of Astronomy 2012

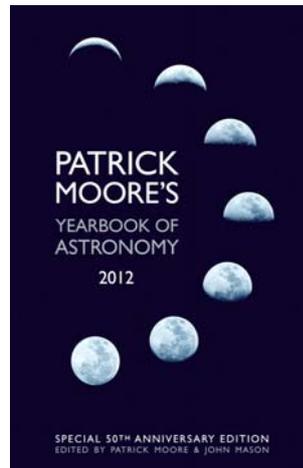
by Patrick Moore & John Mason (Eds.)

PanMacmillan, 2011. ISBN 978-0-230-75984-8. Pp xii + 474, £20.00 (hbk).

Patrick Moore's *Yearbook of Astronomy* has long been an annual favourite amongst amateur astronomers. In a changing and fickle world it is something reliable that always appears, like Orion and the winter constellations, just in time for the next observing year. In fact the *Yearbook* is only five years younger than the record-breaking 'Sky at Night' TV programme, having started, in 1962, under Guy Porter, with Patrick as his assistant. Porter handed the reins to Patrick in 1965 and he edited the book for the next 36 years, with John Mason helping out from 2001. So this year is the 50th anniversary of the *Year-*

book's birth and, not surprisingly, the book is a special one. It is a rare hardback edition, which does make it look a bit out of place on my *Yearbook* shelf, where the previous non-paperback example is the 1992 tome, but then it is a hefty 474 pages long.

Each *Yearbook* is divided into three sections, namely 'Monthly charts and astronomical phenomena', 'Articles' and a 'Miscellaneous' section. With the increasing dominance of the Internet all printed almanac-style publications are at a big disadvantage because they can never alert readers instantly to the sudden appearance of a prom-



ising comet or a near-Earth asteroid. In addition, many amateurs will now use software to track the paths of comets or examine the circumstances of solar and lunar eclipses. Nevertheless, the *Yearbook* pages do, at a glance, provide a concise and accurate summary of the main events of the astronomical year which can be surprisingly hard to find elsewhere, even in this online era.

Despite the *Yearbook's* perceived purpose I rather suspect that for most astronomers it is the highly readable articles section

that will always be the most anticipated. I, for one, always make a beeline for anything produced by those masters of the written word Richard Baum and Allan Chapman, and I was not disappointed this year. Their respective articles entitled 'Curious episodes from the observational history of the planets' and 'The Victorian transits of Venus 1874 and 1882' are as compelling as ever. A special feature of this 50th anniversary issue is the inclusion of articles from each decade of the *Yearbook*, with some revision where necessary. My personal favourite here is Howard Miles' account of the Barwell meteorite of Christmas Eve 1965, first published in 1968.

As always there is something for everyone here and I can recommend the *Yearbook* without hesitation: long may it continue.

Martin Mobberley

Martin Mobberley has been a BAA member since 1969 and was the Association's 55th President. He is the author of eight practical astronomy books, three children's 'space' books and hundreds of articles about astronomy and telescopes.

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