

## Comet PanSTARRS is looking good for March

After a period when northern hemisphere observers have had to manage with relatively faint comets it looks like 2013 will bring us two bright ones.

In last August's *Journal* (122(4), p203) we noted that comet C/2011 L4 (PanSTARRS) appeared as if it might be a reasonable object in late 2013 March. Recent observations as the comet has reappeared after solar conjunction confirm that it is on track to become a naked-eye object in the western evening sky in the last two weeks of March.

At present the comet is around 8th magnitude and only visible in the southern hemisphere, but it is brightening rapidly. Perihelion occurs on March 10 and the comet will probably be around magnitude  $-2$  (with a current uncertainty of  $\pm 3$  magnitudes) at that time and around  $9^\circ$  in altitude at sunset from UK latitudes. Any observations near to the perihelion date will be challenging but it will be worth finding a location with a clear western horizon and using a pair of binoculars after the Sun has set.

Imagers may have better luck since multiple short exposures can be stacked and processed

**Right:** Comet 2011 L4 should be visible in the western evening sky around an hour after sunset in late March. Begin looking low in the west as soon as the sky starts to darken. (Background image courtesy Stellarium).

to bring out the comet from the bright background sky. The comet moves into a darker sky as March advances, although the waxing Moon will become more of a problem. By March 16 the comet will be  $11^\circ$  up an hour after sunset and possibly at magnitude zero or brighter with a nice tail. It continues to fade and move away from the Sun and on April 5 it passes close to

M31, but by then it will probably be about 4th magnitude.

The prospects for C/2012 S1 (ISON) are also looking very good at the moment and, if we are lucky, this could be a truly spectacular object in December. Watch this space.

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