

# WEEKLY SKY REPORT

April 28 – May 4, 2024

## ASTERISMS

While you're looking for novae (see below), check out the sweet asterism right overhead. An asterism is an unofficial constellation that resembles some fanciful shape or other. The Big Dipper (perhaps the most famous asterism) in Ursa Major (the Big Bear, an official constellation) will be at the zenith before midnight with the constellation Leo the lion strolling right beneath it. Halfway between these two carnivorous creatures are the fleet footprints of their would-be prey, the Three Leaps of the Gazelle. Look for three sets of pairs of stars with the middle pair right above Leo's unsuspecting head.

## STARS

The recent solar eclipse was a fun sight, even with our partial viewing. Now we can look forward to another stellar event sometime in the coming months. Every 80 years or so a pair of stars in our galaxy have build-up of tensions. They are really too close to each other for a healthy relationship. One, a red giant, keeps shooting gas at the other, a white dwarf star. The white dwarf can only take so much of this and finally it has a thermonuclear explosion of its own, which we call a nova. Fortunately, both parties should survive this exchange and live peacefully for another 80 years. You can watch for this neighborhood squabble in the constellation Coronae Borealis, which is right next to Boötes, the Hunter who also looks exactly like an ice cream cone. Coronae Borealis is the upside down crown to the left of Boötes. It also looks just like a fallen-off scoop of the ice cream cone. At the base of the cone is the star Arcturus, which is the fourth-brightest star in the nighttime sky. Boötes and Coronae Borealis are almost directly overhead at midnight. Astronomers predict the nova will occur between now and September, so keep an eye out. Astronomers figure there are 5 or so such pairs in the Milky Way but seeing a nova like this with our own eyes is a once in a lifetime experience for us.

# Telescopes @ Berkeley Public Library!

We have 5 Orion StarBlast Astro Reflector Telescopes that you can borrow! Each BPL Branch has a telescope, which may be borrowed for 1 week. Place a hold on it and then pick it up from your branch when it is ready. It is fairly easy to carry at 13 lbs., and stands about 2 feet tall.

Here's what you get:

"A great compact grab-and-go telescope designed for entry-level and intermediate astronomy enthusiasts. Substantial 4.5" aperture and fast f/4 focal ratio provides bright, detailed views of solar system targets like the Moon and planets, as well as wide-field celestial objects like nebulas and star clusters."



Much of the information for this report comes from the wonderful web site, Heavens Above. You can enter your home city location and bookmark it for easy access: <http://www.heavens-above.com>. Other stellar sources include: <http://www.space.com> and <http://www.nasa.gov>. And check [spacex.com](http://spacex.com) for launches.

# Binoculars @ Berkeley Public Library!

Thanks to a generous donation from the Cal Falcons program, we have 9 Vortex-Raptor binocular kits that you can put on hold and pick up at the location of your choice.

Here's what you get:

Porro prism performance in a mid-size, wide-angle design, the Raptors deliver a bright, crisp image with excellent color fidelity - even in low light conditions. With a wide range of interpupillary distance, they can easily be adjusted to fit anyone in the family, making them ideal for serious, hard-core youth hunters. The kit comes with a copy of The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western America and a pocket guide to local birds of the SF Bay Area. But it is also great for looking at planets, the moon and the stars!

