

WEEKLY SKY REPORT

December 24– December 30, 2023

PLANETS

Venus rises just after 5 a.m. as the Morning Star and is visible high in the east until it gets lost in the glare of the sunrise; it is, in fact, still visible after 6 a.m. Saturn is halfway across the sky towards the south as it gets dark with Jupiter blazing away in the east.

Satellites

There are many satellites to be seen from Berkeley, and good web sites to help you identify them. heavens-above.org has a daily prediction for what is passing overhead. It lists the trajectory, times, brightness, and even information about when it was launched. This Sunday, for example, they have info on 72 satellites you might spy high above you in the night. Of these, 30 are, in fact, space debris, including rocket bodies and fuel tanks, which illustrates the need to deal with this pollution. Another site, <https://www.ucsus.org/resources/satellite-database>, gives a great breakdown of the 6,718 (as of a year ago) satellites, not including the junk. The U.S. has almost 5 times as many as 2nd place China. Most of these are commercial. It is interesting to know what's passing overhead!

LAUNCHES

The next Starship booster is on the launch pad in Texas; the Starship itself is being tested not far away. You can watch the largest, most powerful rocket ever launched as it gets ready for the next test flight by searching for videos: spacex boca chica. SpaceX has been testing the engines of the booster and Starship and they have just installed a giant sign on the side of one of their buildings: GATEWAY TO MARS

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 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!

