WEEKLY SKY REPORT

August 16 – August 22, 2026

SATELLITES AND SPACE JUNK

A great place to track the comings and goings of human activity in space is the website heavens-above.com. You can enter your town into the location field and bookmark it to track what's passing overhead. If you limit the brightness to objects brighter than 3.0, you will get a list of a dozen or so—*if* you exclude the 150+ Starlink satellites making their way across our sky. Aside from these, usually about half of the objects we can see will be rocket bodies or what is listed as DEB, or Debris of some part of the rocket that launched the actual satellite. Basically, a lot of junk. There are efforts underway to deorbit this debris to burn up in our atmosphere. Also, some of the satellites that are losing altitude may soon be boosted to higher orbit and a longer life. We're still waiting for the space Roomba to launch.

CONSTELLATIONS

Leo the lion's tail is about all that is visible sinking into San Francisco as it gets dark. Just to the north east of Leo, Ursa Major is pointing the way with the two stars on the right of the pitcher to her North Star, her cub Ursa Minor. Mama bear's tail is also pointing to the red giant star Arcturus, known as the Guardian of the Bear. It is the fourth-brightest star in the sky and is an aging star, about 7 billion years old. While it has close to the same mass as our sun, Arcturus is 25 times our star's size and 170 times as luminous. This star rests at the bottom of the constellation Boötes, also known as the asterism The Giant Ice Cream Cone; next to it is Corona Borealis, or the asterism The Scoop of Ice Cream that Fell off the Giant Ice Cream Cone.

PLANETS

Venus is a stunning sight in the western sky as it gets dark. Saturn is making its way back to our evening sky and is visible almost due east just after midnight. Mars will have to wait until November.

Telescopes @ Berkeley Public Library!

We have a Orion StarBlast Astro Reflector Telescope that you can borrow 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."

We also have pairs of binoculars to check out!

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!

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