

Our Night Sky for the week of September 10

By the second week in September, we enter some of the very best opportunities for night sky viewing for perhaps the entire year. The air temperature is reasonable and it's dark enough to enjoy a nice evening finding some gems in our night sky. But best of all the new moon rises after midnight.

All this week if you look south two bright objects will catch your eye immediately. They are wanderers in our night sky, coming and going on mysterious schedules. If you visualize an arc between these two objects this would be called the ecliptic, the path that several wanderers always follow across our sky, along with a couple more puzzling bright object that seemed to tag along before and after the sun. The ancient Greeks gave these objects their word 'Planetes' for wandering star. Over the years this has become planets, and two of the grandest planetary sights are in our southern sky this week.

As Saturn moves along its orbit we will be more and more straight on to the rings, and by 2025 they will be edge on and nearly invisible from earth.

But a little left is another bright object, Jupiter, king of the planets. If you look closely with your binoculars you will see as many as four of Jupiter's moons. These helped Galileo piece together how our solar system actually works and the mechanics of planetary orbits and got him in a lot of trouble.