

Our Night Sky for March 24th, 2025

Last week I suggested you look up a diagram of the magnitudes of the stars in the Big Dipper. You noticed that the stars in the Dipper have subtle differences in brightness. With practice the naked eye can recognize and fairly accurately identify these magnitude values. The human eye is a very accurate device and as you become more familiar with the night sky these slight differences will be easy to spot. Let's take a moment to discuss one of the limitations of this surprisingly accurate measuring device your eyes can be and how to calibrate it. The ease that you can spot the slight differences between dimmer and brighter stars is called "Seeing". The dimmest stars you can see with your naked eye is called "Limiting Magnitude ". Limiting magnitude is affected by several things, the strongest influence is "Sky Glow." Sky glow is caused by lighting used to light up parking lots, play areas and roads for safety. Lighting is a balance, if the light is mainly directed down where it is wanted it serves many useful, necessary purposes. But any light shing sideways into your eyes as you drive or upwards into the sky is simply wasted money. Next week I'll show you how to find a very faint galaxy you can see with your naked eye. If you identify a few easy to find stars and look for them in the city and again away from city lights, you should easily see the degrading influence of city lights and the need to make sure lighting is not carelessly washing out Our Night Sky.