

# Venus, Jupiter highlight the April sky

**Editor's note:** The Quad-Cities' Popular Astronomy Club provides periodic columns on astronomical events.

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April is a month of transition for stargazers. The bitter cold of winter is giving way to warmer weather, and the bright stars of winter are getting lower in the sky. Soon, they will not be seen again until next fall, replaced by a dimmer spring sky with fewer bright stars.

While the winter sky offers a number of excellent targets for binoculars, the spring sky requires a telescope to see many of its targets well.

The most significant astronomical event of April was a total lunar eclipse on Saturday. Unfortunately, the Quad-Cities was not well placed to see the entire

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eclipse, but early risers with a low western horizon may have seen part of it.

For people with small telescopes or large binoculars mounted on a tripod, Venus and Jupiter are the "stars" of the month.

Venus is the bright "star" visible in the western sky shortly after sunset throughout the month. Take the time to look at Venus if you have a telescope and note its shape. Venus will display a shape similar to that of the moon near its full phase. It will not look completely round.

Jupiter is the brightest "star" high in the south to southwest at dusk throughout the month. Observers with a small telescope or large binoculars may see one to four points of light

that appear to move back and forth from one side of Jupiter to the other from night to night.

These are the Galilean moons. They were named in honor of Galileo, who first recorded them, and more importantly, recognized their motions as evidence that not all celestial bodies orbited the Earth.

This month, when the moon is down, Jupiter provides a convenient stepping stone for finding one of the spring sky's more notable deep sky objects using small binoculars. Starting at Jupiter, swing your binoculars to the right so that Jupiter seems to just disappear on the left side of your field of view.

Then swing your binoculars up and down to spot a sudden grouping of moderately bright stars. That cluster of stars is known as Praesepe, or the Beehive.

It can be seen without binoculars from a reasonably dark location away from city lights.

Because of its visibility in dark skies, Praesepe was a weather prediction tool for the ancients. If they could see stars in the sky but couldn't see Praesepe, it suggested that rain might be coming in a few days.

For folks without telescopes, members of the Popular Astronomy Club will be at Niabi Zoo from dusk until about midnight on April 18, weather permitting.

The club also will host its annual Astronomy Day from 2 p.m. to closing on April 18, at the Moline Public Library on 41st Street. There will be displays and solar viewing if the skies are clear.

The public is invited to both events.