

The Night Sky This Month – May 2022



Total lunar eclipse of April 15, 2014

For deep-sky observers, May means galaxy season as we stargazers get a view out of the plane of the Milky Way into the intergalactic void. The Eta Aquarid meteor shower peaks in the first week of the month, and for much of the world, a total lunar eclipse occurs at mid-month during the 'Full Flower Moon'. Here's what to see in the night sky this month...

Beginning of the month: Explore the globular cluster M5

The last day of April brought with it a new moon, so the start of May is the best time to view fainter, deep-sky objects like nebulae and galaxies. The globular cluster M5 is ideally placed at this time of year and will be visible through a pair of binoculars. A globular cluster is a collection of stars tightly bound by gravity, and M5 contains anywhere between 100 and 500 thousand stars.



It sits around 25,000 light years away from us, forming part of a halo around the centre of our galaxy. It will be visible throughout the month, becoming visible after sunset in the eastern sky. It can be found just to the right of the constellation of Serpens, the snake held by the constellation Ophiuchus, which borders it. The sun will rise before M5 sets, meaning that it will be up all night long.

6 May. Eta Aquarid meteor shower peaks. The shower runs from April 21 through May 20 each year, with many meteors still visible for several days on either side of the peak. The Eta Aquarids occur as Earth passes through a stream of icy and dusty debris from the famous Comet 1/P Halley, more commonly called Halley's Comet. We pass through a second stream of the comet in late October during the Orionids meteor shower. Look for the meteors anywhere in the sky, preferably after midnight. They trace their paths back to a point near the star Eta Aquarii which rises in the eastern/southeastern sky before dawn. The only catch is that the shower will only be visible from the UK between around 2:30 and 4:30am, with the radiant point of the shower rising from the eastern horizon at 2:37 and dawn breaking just over two hours later at 4:42.

9 May. First Quarter Moon,

16 May. Full Moon,

15-16 May. The 16th of May will present us with a total lunar eclipse. This occurs when the full moon moves into the Earth's shadow, meaning that the only sunlight that can reach the Moon is the red light that is unaffected by the Earth's atmosphere as it passes through, unlike blue light which is easily scattered by the gases in the air. As a result, during a total lunar eclipse the Moon appears to turn an eerie shade of red.

These events are also sometimes known as blood moons. This lunar eclipse is definitely one for the late-nighters and the early starters, since it will begin at around 3:30am on the 16th, reaching its totality one hour later at 4:30, before setting below the horizon just after 5am. From Pembrokeshire, the Moon will never be higher than 5 degrees above the horizon during totality, so be sure to find a clear south-western horizon if you're planning to view this eclipse of our mighty Moon.

22 May. Last Quarter Moon,

30 May. New Moon

Stargazing Tips

When looking at faint objects such as stars, nebulae, the Milky Way and other galaxies it is important to allow your eyes to adapt to the dark – so that you can achieve better night vision.

Allow 30 minutes for our "older" eyes to become sensitive in the dark and remember not to look at your mobile phone or any other bright device when stargazing.

If you're using a star app on your phone, switch on the red night vision mode.

Geoff Winterman.

1st May 2022