



The casual sky observer's guide

by Rony de Laet

Springer, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4614-0594-8. Pp xiv + 292, £35.99 (A5 format, pbk).

At first glance the *Casual Sky Observer's Guide* was reminiscent of the first book I read on astronomy over 50 years ago. Although this book covers a much narrower field than my first one, I hope it will be equally inspirational. This guide is entirely devoted to deep sky observing with binoculars or a small telescope from the northern hemisphere.

The first chapter introduces the potential observer to basic astronomy and observing techniques such as find-

ing your way in the night sky, the constellations, choice of binoculars, and much more besides. This chapter is nearly a fifth of the length of the book and is generally excellent. As a former teacher I am always interested to see how authors explain quite difficult concepts in a simple and concise way and this

author has certainly passed my test.

Chapter two explains the Milky Way galaxy and here we are introduced to the galactic coordinate system. This is an unusual approach that I have not seen before, and leads into the remainder of the book where all the subsequent chapters use the structure of the Milky Way to indicate to amateur observers which constellations are readily observable. I find this aspect rather confusing, but it does not detract from the usefulness of the book.

Rony de Laet is well known for his 'photo-real computer drawings', that accompany the descriptions of each deep sky object. These excellent illustrations are preceded by a chart to indicate their positions in the respective constellations. Each drawing is designed to show what each object should look like through binoculars or a small telescope. There are no amateur

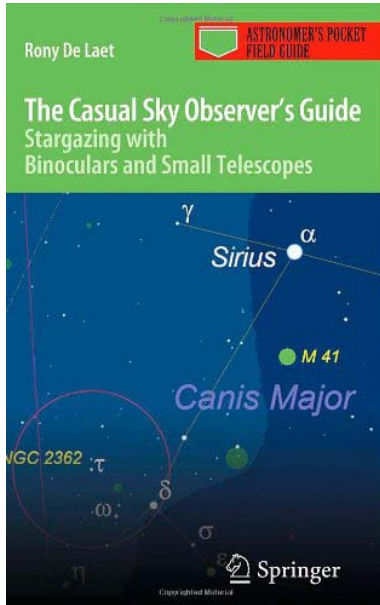
or professional images to give a false impression of what might be expected. Even so you would need a good sky, good optics and excellent vision to see some of the objects as well as the drawings suggest, particularly the galaxies.

Although I consider this book would be helpful to amateurs beginning their observational

interest in the deep sky, I would suggest a good star atlas alongside the book would be an essential accessory.

Geoffrey Johnstone

Geoffrey Johnstone is a retired teacher with experience in observational astronomy for many years, and a particular interest in deep sky photography, imaging and visual observing.



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