Objects of the Month—Virgo

TAREGETS FOR EVERY LEVEL OF OBSERVER

June—2012

Finder chart

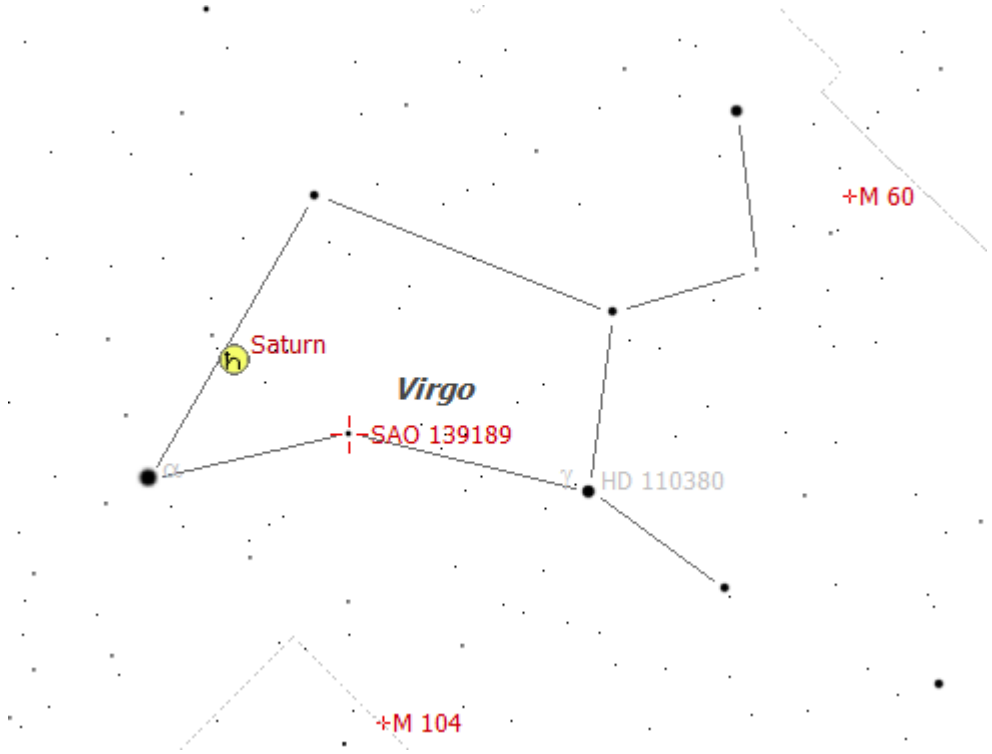
Virgo is slowly sliding to the Western sky and will soon be setting not long after Sol has set. June will be one of the last chances to take advantage of many of Virgo fine sights.

Virgo is a galaxy hunter's dream. With enough aperture, the area between Virgo, Leo and Coma Berenices teems with galaxies. This month we are featuring three of these galaxies in our target list.

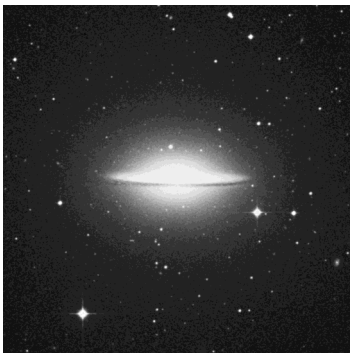
We have listed M104 as a binocular object, but don't miss the chance to see this target through a telescope as it is true eye candy to the night sky observer.

M60 and NGC 4647 are a great interacting pair for the intermediate telescope.

Finally, Theta Virgo is a fine multiple with at least three members partially visible.



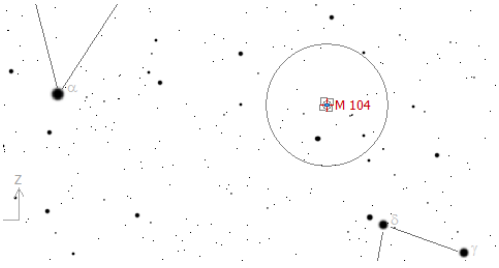
Binocular Object—M104, The Sombrero Galaxy



Messier 104 is a highly luminous spiral galaxy that is nearly edge on to us. There is a dark dust lane that bisects the galaxy and gives it the appearance of a Sombrero.

M104 was discovered by Mechain in 1767 but was not included in the Messier list until 1921 when Messier's personal hand written list of objects was discovered.

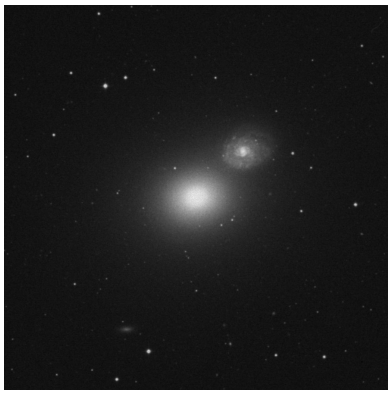
M104 is situated between Virgo and Corvus. Spica and delta Corvi are good sign posts to guide you to the galaxy.



M104 is listed at magnitude 9.1, so it will be faint through binoculars

Objects of the Month—Virgo

Telescopic Image—M60

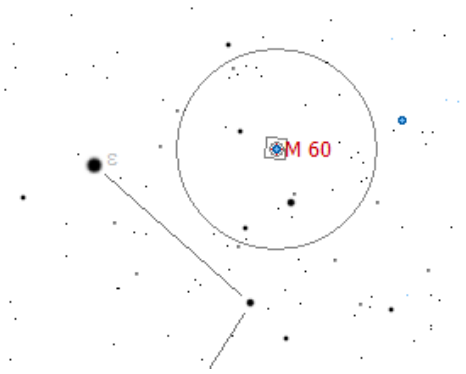


M60 is a giant elliptical galaxy in Virgo. It was initially discovered by Johann Gottfield Koehler April 11th 1779 and then by Messier four days later.

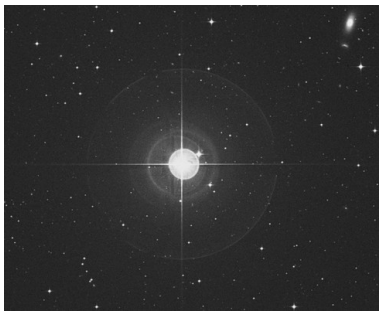
At the heart of this galaxy resides a massive black hole of over 4.5 billion solar masses.

M60 is easy to spot with telescopes of 4 to 8 inches in aperture. It is a visual 9th magnitude making it one of the brighter Messier galaxies in Virgo.

Locating M60 is pretty easy. First locate Epsilon Virgo and then move West-South-West to the little four star asterism shaped like a rocket ship. M60 is just a 1/2 degree to the north of this asterism.



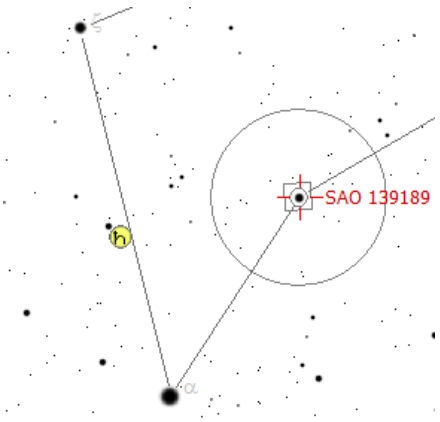
Binary Star—Theta Virgo



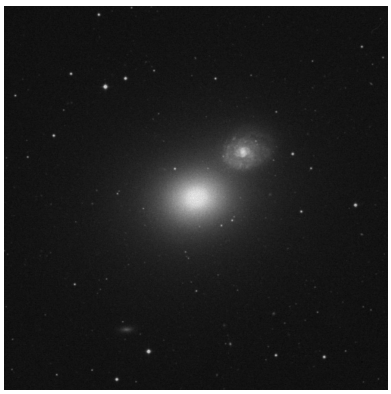
Theta Virgo is a four member system consisting of 4.4 mag Theta, 9.4 mag B, 10.4 mag C and 6.8 mag D star.

All stars orbit Theta. The B and C stars should be visible as their separations are 7 and 71 arc seconds respectively.

While the D star is brighter than its two siblings, the separation is less than 1 arc second, making this an impossible split for most scopes.



Challenge Object - NGC 4647



No, you are not seeing double, this is the same field of view as the Telescope object, M60. The object that we are interested in is the faint companion galaxy, NGC 4647. Unlike its brighter big brother, this galaxy is a spiral.

This pair is also known as Arp 116. Halton Arp described the pair as "an elliptical perturbing a spiral"

NGC 4647 is a 12th magnitude galaxy. Its has a relatively large and bright core making it not too difficult to spot. The spiral arms would be a real challenge in most modest sized scopes.