



Sketching the NGC Catalog

By Brad Young, Astronomy Club of Tulsa

Author's note - though this article is about my experience with the New General Catalog, I hope you will use some of the ideas for when you finish an observing program, or, perhaps, need to take a break from one. Or, if you have no observing plans, it may save you from boredom (by giving you ideas), or insanity by dissuading you from embarking on an enormous list that seemed to never end.

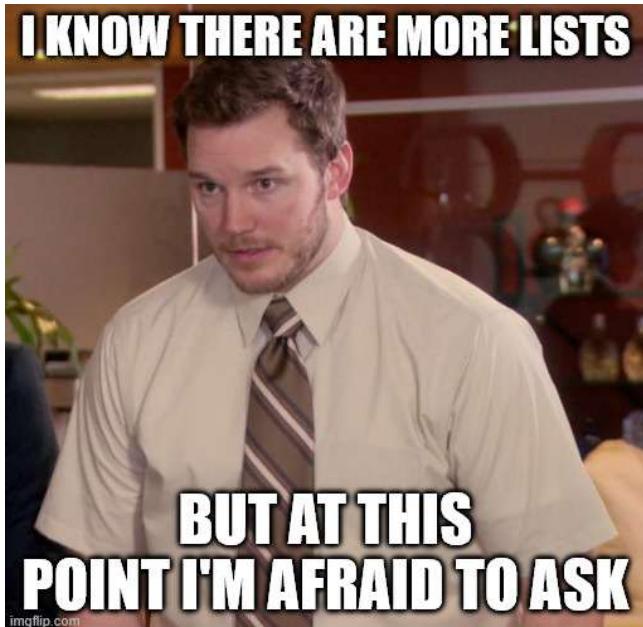
Well, I have finished my project to visually observe all the NGC objects. In November, I visited Australia again for the OzSky Alumni Star Party (my third one of those and seventh trip overall). My intent was to sketch all the NGCs, although I decided not to try to sketch the very complicated central portion of the Large Magellanic Cloud. Speaking to one of the Australians, he had spent a year in the LMC. With these star parties lasting only a week, I backed off this requirement and was happy with sketching all the rest, 98% of the total.

If you're interested in more details of this journey, there are example sketches, object counts and a checklist at [my website](#). There is also an explanation of which objects I included in the list, based on Steve Gottlieb and others' work on the NGC / IC Project. Unfortunately, I did not get to meet Steve on this trip; it seems like we are always in Oz at different times. I also just finished writing "Sketching the NGC Objects" (about the subject at hand) and "Extreme Astronomy". That book is another anthology of recent articles and has original material that examines how to see just a bit more than what you are supposed to be able to. Both new books are available now on amazon.com.

Now we've come to the end of the road, still I can't let go,

It's unnatural...

"End of the Road", Kenny "Babyface" Edmonds / Daryl L. Simmons / Antonio M. Reid, performed by Boyz to Men



Since I wrote a whole book about it, I won't go into the details of doing the NGC project here but instead look at the present situation that I've gotten myself into. As many know, finishing a big observing program is rewarding but can lead to an empty feeling. You had that accomplishment to strive for and now that it's finished, if you're like me, you may have a problem with motivation. Don't get me wrong, I was thrilled to finish. The guys I observed with said I showed visible relief once done. But now, I don't have that list to drive me and must search for new reasons to get out in the cold and dark. Of course, many of the same reasons that were there before are still around, including outreach, temporal events like comets, conjunctions and the like. And there are still plenty of other deep sky objects besides the NGCs for me to see in my 22-in Dobsonian. But having operated from a list for so long, now what?

One obvious path would be to delve further into imaging. I've written about this process many times and have also been doing remote imaging for quite some time. To stick my whole foot in the water, I bought a Seestar 50. I've only had one good night to use it before the proverbial new scope cloudiness poured in, but I was very impressed. Not only did it take me only about an hour to set things up, mess things up and then fix them, but the images on the first night were fantastic. I certainly see this little imaging scope being a big part of my near-term observing.

What better place than here?

What better time than now?

All hell can't stop us now

"Guerrilla Radio" Rage Against the Machine

(When asked if they should start imaging)

As my dissipation worsens and I fall further into imaging, there are the Astronomical League Imaging programs. Not all of them can be done remotely with a large scope. Of course, not all of them can be done even adding a Seestar. At some point, I will have to add another imaging setup to do the planets and other medium-sized targets. But that's further down the road and can be done at leisure. There will still be all the citizen science stuff I've been involved with, but what else might be out there to kick start observing, even visual observing that I haven't done before? No telling what's next, but several stages of concentrating on one type of observation throughout the last 45 years have taught me to have an open mind.

When I first began, tracking the planets was best. Later, it was double stars and splitting as many as I could with my small telescope. When programmable calculators came out, I bought a great book called "Astronomical Formulae for Calculators" by Jean Meeus and began using a TI-55 to work out the positions of asteroids. With sketches from field observations, you can ID them and look at the accuracy of the orbits determined from the formulas. This was interesting but awfully tedious doing it visually especially when I heard tales from my imaging friends about how they had picked up 20 or 30 at night just by taking a few wide field shots.

About the time I started doing AL programs in earnest, one of them caught my attention (tracking satellites) which is still a big deal for me. It's gotten rather strange with all the

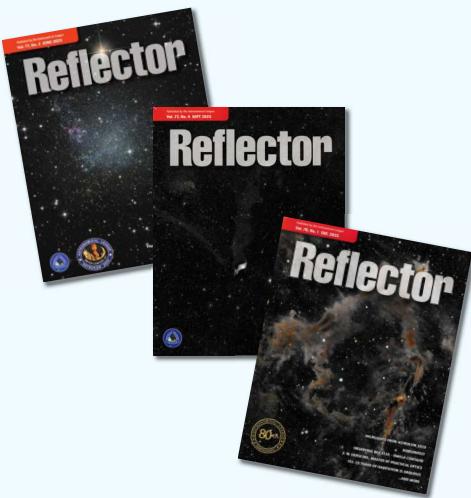
Starlinks up there as you can see from my latest account at [my website](#). I might see a few more by the end of the year, but this is probably good enough indication of where this part of the hobby is going. I still do use remote telescope imaging at Perth to catch some of the high earth orbit (HEO) satellites that are only visible from there but most of the LEO (low earth orbit) targets now are part of the mega constellations.

I make so many beginnings there never will be an end.

"Little Women" Louisa May Alcott.

I have a lot of unfinished projects like finishing off the asteroid occultation program and spectroscopy. One new program to look forward to is the Exoplanet Observing Program from the Astronomical League which was announced but has not been released yet. This should be both extremely difficult and very rewarding. Otherwise, I'll just keep looking at the skies and fondly remember all the very dim, small smudgy NGC items that I looked at over the past 45 years and hope that I'm looking at something brighter tonight.

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