

That's How It Works

... Hear the voices in my head

I swear... it sounds like they're snoring

But if you're bored, then you're boring – “Flagpole Sitta” by Harvey Danger

I've been having a bit of a writer's block lately for new material. Part of this is the unrelenting heat and humidity here in Oklahoma which makes everything, even indoors, seem harder. I haven't been able to observe much at all, even just satellites at home, due to the heat. The only time that is bearable is before dawn. The other part is I'm working on finalizing my NGC project (sketching them all) and a book on that. I'm close to finishing so I've been spending most of my time on it. That and bothersome repairs of my car and telescope have diminished my summer observations.

It struck me that I often go through a similar situation with astronomy, a sort of observer's block. Sometimes, especially if it's very hot or cold, it seems there is nothing worth looking at. Or at least there's nothing worth going outside in the unrelenting elements for. And then, just when you least expect it, there are all kinds of events, star parties, new satellites, nova, or just several nice nights in a row. Much like the general cycles of life, often things tend to clump together with amateur astronomy such that there may be some times when things seem boring, and other times when it seems like you can't get to everything there is to look at. I liken it to the old saying, when it rains it pours (although, sort of the opposite...).



But That's Okay

Wind the clock, for tomorrow is another day. E.B. White

Many of the things that we can look at will always be there, even though some of them may be harder to catch because they're best in winter or some other weather-related issue interferes. So, we try to catch the new stuff or things that we are interested in right now. Then, when the new naked eye comet (which we're all breathlessly waiting for incidentally), has dimmed and there's not much going on, we can return to the stars and the deep sky. Whenever there is not much going on or the weather is inclement, there may be other things we can do as I've mentioned before such as solar astronomy, radio astronomy, or using remote telescope systems to observe where it is clear.

It's really up to us; modern amateur astronomy provides many options for fun views, new types of objects, serious deep sky projects, even scientifically important citizen science and discoveries. Part of the issue of breaking through the "sophomore slump" that can occur after the initial thrill of easy, bright objects is to find some part of the hobby that moves you personally. Remembering it is a hobby and supposed to be fun helps – if it becomes a chore, take a break. No need to remind me that this philosophy also applies to writing.

Just When You Think You Have Figured It Out

Shew mercy to those that are shipwrecked, for the sea, like fortune, is a fair but fickle mistress.
The Republican (1825) - (supposedly attributed to Phocylides, appx. 540 BC)

All in all, astronomy is indeed a fickle mistress. I give a perfect example from the other day when Venus and Jupiter were having a conjunction. It was also time for the helical rise of Sirius, indicating the end of the dog days of summer, and the Perseid meteors were just starting to build up to their maximum. So, it was, of course, the first morning we had had clouds and rain in over a month. Two days later it was back to intense heat with clear skies but so muggy the sky looked almost like milk during the daytime. Other parts of the country are layered in forest fire smoke right now, a seemingly endless summer threat to the sky recently.

Well, there will be other days or nights when things are much better, the sky clear and another nice conjunction or event will occur. That's just the way things work with amateur astronomy, and it takes some getting used to. Of course, September ushers in the most comfortable, and often clearest time of year, with blue skies and calm nights. Many public events and star parties are coming or going on now, and the Milky Way is still a glorious sight arching overhead and off to the northeast. Our club in Tulsa has a big event at Hunter Park on Aug 30 and begin our new year of indoor meetings at the Jenks Planetarium after Labor Day.

Remember there's always something to see, you just may have to bundle up or stand around with some water and an ice bucket to see it. Don't forget the bug spray.