

# Observing Report for September 21, 2019

by Joe Stieber

---

## September 21, 2019 — WAS Member Star Watch at Atsion

Despite some high thin clouds later in the afternoon on Saturday, September 21, the sky at Atsion for our Member Star Watch was pretty good. After they gained some altitude, the Andromeda Galaxy (M31) and the Double Cluster in Perseus were relatively easy to see with unaided eyes. However, dew condensation was a problem. I set up my 88 mm apo spotting scope, and ultimately, I had to use my 12V “hair dryer” to clear the objective and eyepiece. But most of the time, I was wandering the field with my medium-power green laser doing visual astronomy with fellow members.

One of my objectives was to see comet C/2018 W2 (Africano) in the 88 mm scope. I had first seen it at Barnegat on the night of August 29-30 with my 16-inch dob. It was an indistinct patch of glow to the east of Perseus’ cap (a compact triangle formed by the stars Eta, Gamma and Tau Per). I saw it again on the morning of September 4 at Carranza with the 88 mm scope. It was one of the faintest things I have ever identified. I had determined its location with averted vision before referring to my charts to confirm the position inside the triangle of Perseus’ cap, so I’m confident I actually did see Africano.

This past Saturday night, it was faint in the 88 mm, but decidedly more “conspicuous” than it was on either of the two previous sightings. Looking at reports in the COBS (Comet Observation) database, Africano was about 1 to 1.5 magnitudes brighter than it was for the previous sightings (appx magnitude 8.5 to 9 vs. 10.x before).

The other object that is something I look at with some frequency was also one of Suzanne’s objectives, Barnard’s Star. There was a recent article at Sky & Telescope online about it and why it’s an interesting target. At 6 light years, it’s the closest star visible at mid-northern latitudes (besides the Sun of course) and it has the highest known proper motion (10.3 arc seconds per year, that’s roughly a Jupiter diameter every four years). Here’s the S&T article...

<https://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-resources/meet-barnards-star-our-red-dwarf-neighbor/>

I found the article to be a little short on the details for actually pinpointing Barnard’s Star, and offered some comments about spotting it at the end of the article. It includes a link to my Barnard’s Star page, but here’s a direct link...

<http://sjastro.org/barnard-star.htm>

Suzanne and Harry used the snapshots at my page (labeled on mouseover) viewed on my iPad as a guide to seeing it in my spotting scope, and I believe Susanne then found it herself in her scope.

Bob King has an earlier S&T article about observing Barnard’s Star, as well as 61 Cygni, at...

<https://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-blogs/on-the-move-with-barnards-star-and-61-cygni06032105/>

I often look at 61 Cyg because of its historical significance. It was the first to have its distance measured with some accuracy via parallax. It’s fairly close at about 11 light years and therefore has high proper motion too, such that it’s also known as “Piazzi’s Flying Star.” The pair of magnitude 5.2 + 6.0 stars is

## Observing Report for September 21, 2019, continued...

---

visible to unaided eyes as a single magnitude 4.8 star in a dark sky, but is easily resolved in binoculars and is attractive in a scope. Here's a link to Jim Kaler's "Stars" page about it...

<http://stars.astro.illinois.edu/Sow/61cyg.html>

And Phil Harrington...

<https://www.cloudynights.com/articles/cat/column/phil-harrington-s/cosmic-challenge-61-cygni-piazzis-flying-star-r3111>

I regret that I didn't think to look at 61 Cyg at Atsion Saturday, but there were so many other things keeping us busy. We did see Jupiter's Great Red Spot early in the evening, but seeing was poor at its low altitude and the GRS was well past the central meridian, so it wasn't prominent. Later, Saturn and its rings provided a fine view and I also spotted Neptune and Uranus.