

# Alberta starwatchers solve aurora enigma

A recent article by *Russia Today* called “Magnetic field of dreams: Amateur stargazers help solve mystery of unknown aurora” speaks volumes about the conscientiousness of local astronomers.

The European Space Agency’s SWARM launched on Nov. 22, 2013, with three satellites going on a mission to study the Earth’s mysterious magnetic field.

The magnetic field and electric currents in and around Earth produce complex forces that have vast effects on everyday life.

Alberta stargazers from the Facebook group Alberta Aurora Chaser have teamed up with professor Eric Donovan of the University of Calgary to solve the mystery of



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The Sky’s the Limit

a previously unknown aurora in the night sky above Alberta, known as “Steve”.

Donovan matched a sighting of Steve to readings collected from one of the satellites’ routine passovers and concluded “it turns out that Steve is remarkably common, but we hadn’t noticed it before. It’s thanks to ground-based observations, satellites, access to data, and an army of citizen scientists joining forces to document it”.

## Sky watch

Look below the full moon on Sunday, July 9 with a telescope and you’ll see Pluto all night.

On Monday, July 10 after sunset, look southeast-east for a couple of hours. Mercury will be next to the Beehive Cluster.

On Thursday, July 20, look northeast-east at 3:30 a.m. as a pre-dawn Venus and a crescent moon rise in the sky.

The Delta Aquariids meteor shower peaks on Thursday, July 27. Look in the southern sky a few hours before dawn as it is expected debris from comet 96P Machholz will fall at a rate of 15-20 per hour. The moonless nights make it easy to enjoy.

## Public events

The Milky Way Night at the Rothney Observatory near Priddis takes place from Thursday, July 20 to

Saturday, July 22.

10 p.m. to 2 a.m. are special evenings at the observatory dedicated to solely observing the night sky. There will be an array of telescopes operated by University of Calgary astronomers and members of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.

You will have the opportunity to look through the telescopes, and astronomers will be on hand to answer questions. Go to [www.ucalgary.ca/rao/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/rao/) for more information.

*Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at (403) 485-2683 and [Neel\\_Roberts@ptccanada.com](mailto:Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com).*