

Galaxy lends name to triangle of stars

High overhead in the early evening are three bright stars – Vega, Deneb and Altair – forming the Milky Way Triangle.

Viewed from dark skies away from urban light pollution, the bright plane of our Milky Way galaxy is seen running through the triangle, hence its name, although it is also called the Summer Triangle. The Milky Way Triangle is not an official constellation but rather an asterism, an informal but easily-recognizable pattern of stars.

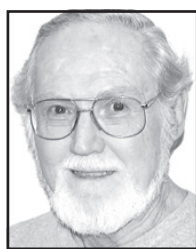
In early September, an hour and a half after sunset, Vega, the brightest of the three triangle stars, is near the sky's straight-up point, called the zenith. Altair, second brightest of the trio, is three fist-widths (held at arm's length) to the south-southeast of Vega with Deneb two fist-widths to the northeast of Vega (and four fist-widths from Altair). Deneb is situated within the Milky Way with Vega is to the west and Altair to the east of the galactic plane.

Vega, the fifth brightest star in the entire night sky, is relatively nearby at a distance of 25 light years. It gained fictional fame when, in Carl Sagan's 1985 novel (and movie) "Contact," it was the star system from which radio messages were received from other intelligent beings. It is the alpha star of the small constellation Lyra the Musical Lyre which features a small parallelogram of four stars that appears to be changing from Vega. Your fist, held at arm's length, can completely cover Lyra's major stars.

Altair, the night sky's 13th brightest star, is the alpha star of the constellation Aquila the Eagle and is 17 light years distant. With Altair as its head, the eagle is flying in a north-northeasterly direction along the eastern edge of the Milky Way.

Deneb, the 20th brightest star, is the alpha star of the constellation Cygnus the Swan. Deneb represents the swan's tail as the big bird flies south southwest along the Milky Way; the fainter star Albireo represents the swan's head two fist-widths from Deneb.

As with many things, appearances can be deceiving. While our sun is blindingly bright to us, it is fainter than any of the triangle stars, and only appears brighter because it is so much closer. And while Deneb appears to be the faintest of the triangle stars, in reality it is brighter than Vega, Altair and our sun combined. A white supergiant star, Deneb is a whop-



Paul Derrick
● Stargazer

ping 3,262 light years distant, making it one of the most distant stars we can see with our naked eyes.

The Milky Way Triangle, which became visible low in the east in the early summer, will be in our evening sky until early winter when it sets in the west soon after dark.

Astro Milestones

German astronomer Johann Galle and his student assistant Heinrich d'Arrest discovered the planet Neptune on Sept. 23, 1846, from Germany's Berlin Observatory. Their discovery was made based on the predictions and position-calculations data sent them by Urbain Jean Joseph Leverrier of France.

September 2012

Sun: Sept. 1: sunrise 7:13 a.m., sunset 8:14 p.m.; Sept. 15: sunrise 7:26 a.m., sunset 7:52 p.m.; Sept. 30: sunrise 7:40 a.m., sunset 7:27 p.m.

Moon: Sept. 8, third quarter; Sept. 15, new; Sept. 22, first quarter; Sept. 29, full.

Night Sky Events

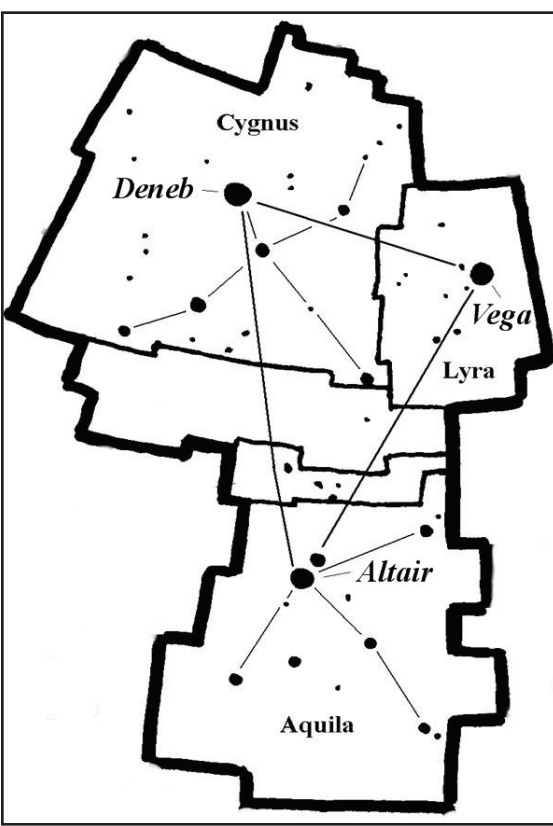
Held at arm's length, the width of your fist is 10° and the width of your index finger is 1°. The width of a full Moon is 1/2°.

8 Saturday morning: The third quarter Moon passes within two moonwidths to the right of Jupiter high in the east.

10 Monday: Mercury is at superior conjunction with (behind) the Sun and passing into the evening sky.

12 Wednesday morning: "Morning star" Venus is flanked by a crescent Moon 4° to the right and the subtle Beehive star cluster 3° to the left, all low in the east two hours before sunrise; all three will barely fit within the same field of view of most binoculars.

13 Thursday morning: Venus passes 2 1/2° (five



Milky Way Triangle

moonwidths) to the right of the Beehive.

14 Friday morning: A thin crescent Moon is 6° to the right of Leo's alpha star Regulus just above the eastern horizon as dawn is breaking.

15 Saturday: The Moon is new as it passes between the Earth and Sun.

15 Saturday early evening: Mars passes 1° to the lower left of Libra's alpha star Zubenelgenubi (an easy binocular double) low in west at dusk.

18 Tuesday early evening: A thin crescent Moon is 9° to the left of Saturn near the western horizon at dusk.

19 Wednesday evening: The crescent Moon is 2° to the left of Mars low in the southwest soon after dark.

20 Thursday evening: The waxing crescent Moon

is 7° to the right of Scorpius' alpha star Antares in the southwest; Mars, looking like Antares, is 16° to the Moon's lower right.

22 Saturday: Autumn equinox, the beginning of fall in the Northern Hemisphere when night and day are of approximately equal length.

22 Saturday evening: The Moon is at first quarter.

29 Saturday: The full Moon is called the Fruit Moon and Corn Moon, and being the full Moon nearest the fall equinox it is also this year's Harvest Moon.

Note: September is a good month to see the zodiacal light in the morning an hour before dawn begins to break; under very dark skies, look for a triangular-shaped cosmic cloudiness rising 30° or more from the eastern horizon.

Naked-eye Planets

The sun, moon and planets rise in the east and set in the west due to earth's west-to-east rotation on its axis.

Evenings: Mars, Saturn.
Mornings: Venus, Jupiter.

• Mercury spends the month hidden in the sun's glare, passing behind the sun Sept. 10.

• Venus is still the brilliant "morning star" dominating the eastern sky.

• Mars, low in the west southwest at dark, now sets well before midnight.

• Jupiter, rising around midnight, is high in the south by morning.

• Saturn, low in the west southwest at dark, sets by 10 p.m. early in the month; by month's end it sets soon after sunset essentially ending its 2012 evening appearance.

Paul Derrick is an amateur astronomer who lives in Waco, Texas. His website (www.stargazerpaul.com) contains an archive of past Stargazer columns and other basic stargazing information. Contact him at paulderrickwaco@aol.com or (254) 723-6346 or write 918 N. 30th St., Waco, Texas, 76707.

Eagle poacher sentenced

The poacher of a golden eagle in Trego County was sentenced Tuesday after pleading guilty to killing the immature raptor in 2011.

Chad Irvin, of Lacrosse, pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor count of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act; he was ordered to pay a fine of \$5,000 and restitution of \$3,000; placed on supervised probation for a period of three years during which time he may not hunt, fish or trap; required to complete 50 hours of community service; and ordered to forfeit the shotgun used to kill the eagle. In his plea, Irvin admitted he

knowingly killed a golden eagle on Jan. 9 near Cedar Bluff Reservoir in Trego County. Irvin was coyote hunting from his truck when he spotted the eagle and shot it twice. He saw the bird fall.

Two days later, the injured eagle was reported to the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, which recovered the bird in southeast Trego County. The bird was taken to the department's regional office in Hays and then to the zoo in Great Bend for veterinary care. The bird's legs were paralyzed by the shot and the animal had to be euthanized.

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Ser-

vice special agent investigated the crime in conjunction with Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks Natural Resource officers. The poacher killed the eagle with a 12-gauge Remington shotgun, from a vehicle while hunting with family members.

Golden eagles are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The killing of any eagle constitutes a violation of those acts.

For information on golden eagles, go online to www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/baldeagle.htm.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Matt Treaster prosecuted.

Youth can learn animal care

The Beef Cattle Institute at Kansas State University has launched Youth Animal Care Training, an online program at www.animal-caretraining.org/Youth/.

The program targets high school age and younger youth who can complete web-based training modules. The modules focus on animal husbandry and welfare, food safety and environmental stewardship. Thanks to support from institute sponsors, the Youth Animal Care Training modules are free of charge.

The institute previously launched the Animal Care Training website www.animalcaretraining.org, which is designed to be informative and interactive for adults who handle livestock.

Modeled after previously successful programs such as Beef Quality Assurance, Humane Equine Management and Dairy Animal Care and Quality Assurance, for which over 10,000 peo-

ple have registered and 8,200 have earned certification, the Youth Animal Care Training program is designed to educate youth involved in the animal agriculture industry about proper animal welfare protocol. The program can also serve to empower children and teens to be a role model for their peers.

The institute has issued more than 170 youth certifications since the youth program's launch in February 2012. It was designed to demonstrate the importance of exposing children to best management practices.

The Beef Cattle Institute was founded in 2007 to provide beef industry employees and stakeholders with the most current education, research and outreach available in the beef industry. The institute offers certificates and tools to aid producers in managing a successful beef business.

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On the Beat

- COLBY POLICE**
Wednesday
12:52 a.m. – Domestic: caller reported being restrained. Report filed.
2:03 a.m. – Security check at the College.
4:50 a.m. – Security check at the airport.
8 a.m. – Accident at Stephen's Construction.
11:51 a.m. – Caller reported meds being taken. Report filed.
1:18 p.m. – 911 open line from business. Everything OK.
2:25 p.m. – Caller reported suspicious person. Unable to locate.
- THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF**
Wednesday
12:08 a.m. – Booked Joshua J. Carman.
10:20 a.m. – Released Tyson R.

- Owings.
1:44 p.m. – Brandon Boutte arrested on warrant.
2:18 p.m. – Brought prisoner from Lincoln County to Law Enforcement Center.
2:45 p.m. – Caller reported his meds being lost or stolen. Reporting party made contact and advised he had found them. No report.
5:18 p.m. – Helped someone on I-70 at westbound mile 40 with a tire change.
8:36 p.m. – Booked Boutte.
9:12 p.m. – Caller reported accident on K-25 at the Thomas/Logan county line. No accident.

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