

# Comet McNaught (C/2009 R1): A View Of A Lifetime

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There is a comet up there in the sky these days, C/2009 R1



McNaught that is getting to be a naked eye object if you know where to look for it in the mornings, till Jun 26. It will be seen near the horizon in the east, a view limited at times by a not so dark a sky or clouds in the direction. Thereafter, it moves into the evening sky with its view re-

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stricted by the same factors for it would stay close to the horizon only.

The comet was dis-

covered by an Australian astronomer Robert McNaught at the Siding Spring Observatory on Sept 9, 2009. Its orbit is hyperbolic ( $e > 1$ ). That would mean the present apparition is its first visit and that the comet shall never return. So, a view of a lifetime is round the corner, particularly in the middle of June, with a binocular.

The comet is moving eastwards these days and after Jun 15 will be moving away from the Earth but near-

ing the Sun and also brightening up. Till Jun 26, the comet arises in the east before the Sun. After that it would begin trailing the Sun meaning that it would set after the Sun sets in the west. At its brightest, the comet will be a naked-eye object. It would be brighter than a 4.73 mag that was estimated earlier for the

epoch around Jun 30-Jul 2 and brighter than the Milky Way. For a comfortable viewing, the period Jun 13-22 is the best but then a binocular would be a great help. On Jun 13, the comet would be in the constellation of Perseus. It enters constellation of Auriga on Jun 20. By the end of June the comet as is being thought may get quite bright to reach mag +2.

**As a caution, stay clear of the Sun & never point your telescope or binocular in the direction of the Sun.**

**Will it become an eclipse comet too?**

As it is brightening up better than as was expected before, will it shine enough be an eclipse comet too? On the day of the forthcom-

ing total solar eclipse on Jul 11 (not visible from India), the comet will be barely 10.21 deg from the Sun, to its east. Most of eclipse path falls over the Pacific Ocean but a little over mainland, such as Easter Island. During the totality, when there is enough darkness it should be possible to image it with a high resolution camera. It can be seen as an evening delight after the sunset when it would have entered the constellation of Cancer & traceable easily for next couple of days before the Moon rising in the west begins to make the sky brighter. Towards the end of July, the Moon will be no challenge but the comet shall be faint at about 8 mag & get increasingly fainter.

—Hawk Newslines