

Binocular Observing July 2021 by Andrew Lohfink



The Night Sky

July 2021.

BST (universal time plus 1 hour) is used this month.

Sagittarius

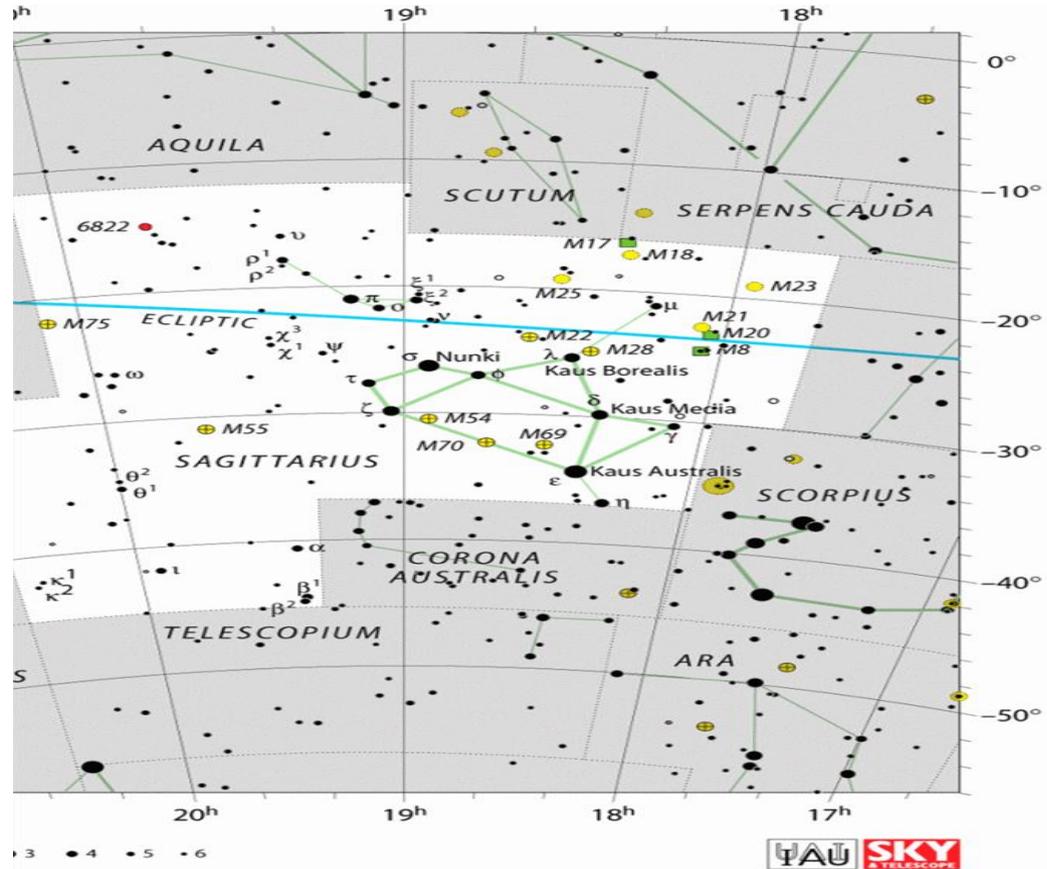
Sagittarius is a constellation which hugs the horizon from the latitude of South Wales making it difficult to observe.

However, there is a treasure trove of binocular targets so it is worth the effort to get to a site which has a clear horizon to the south and of course dark skies are always worth while seeking out.

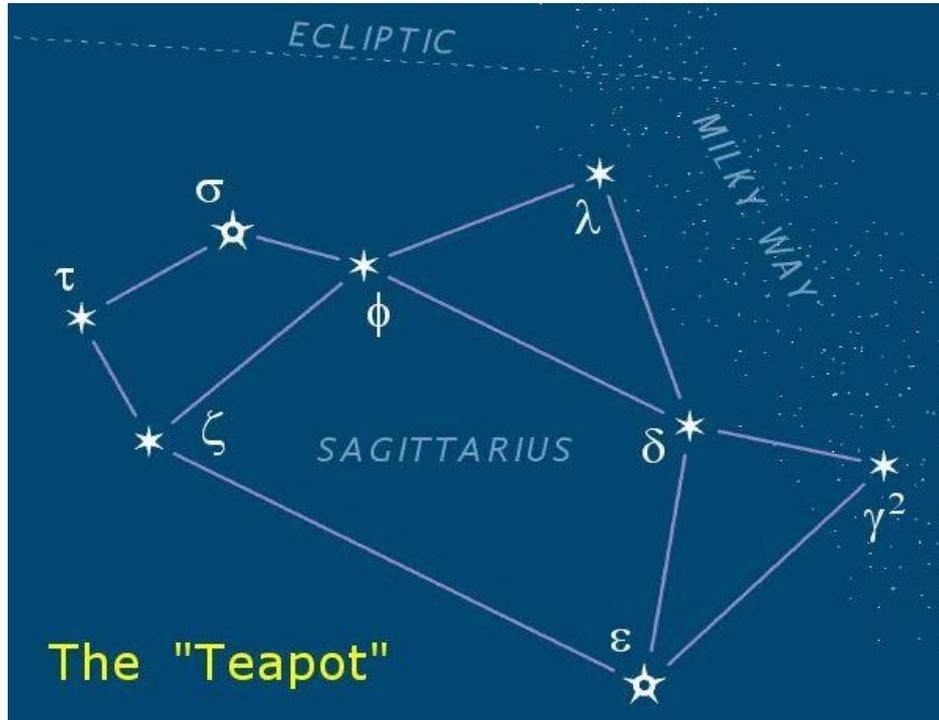
The constellation is easy to spot – just look south along the horizon for the famous teapot asterism.

The best time to view Sagittarius from South Wales is throughout July until the end of August especially when the moon is out of the way. Unfortunately astronomical twilight is still a problem – the later you leave observing the better the skies. It also gets darker earlier as August progresses but Sagittarius gets lower in the sky – as with everything astronomical compromise is inevitable.

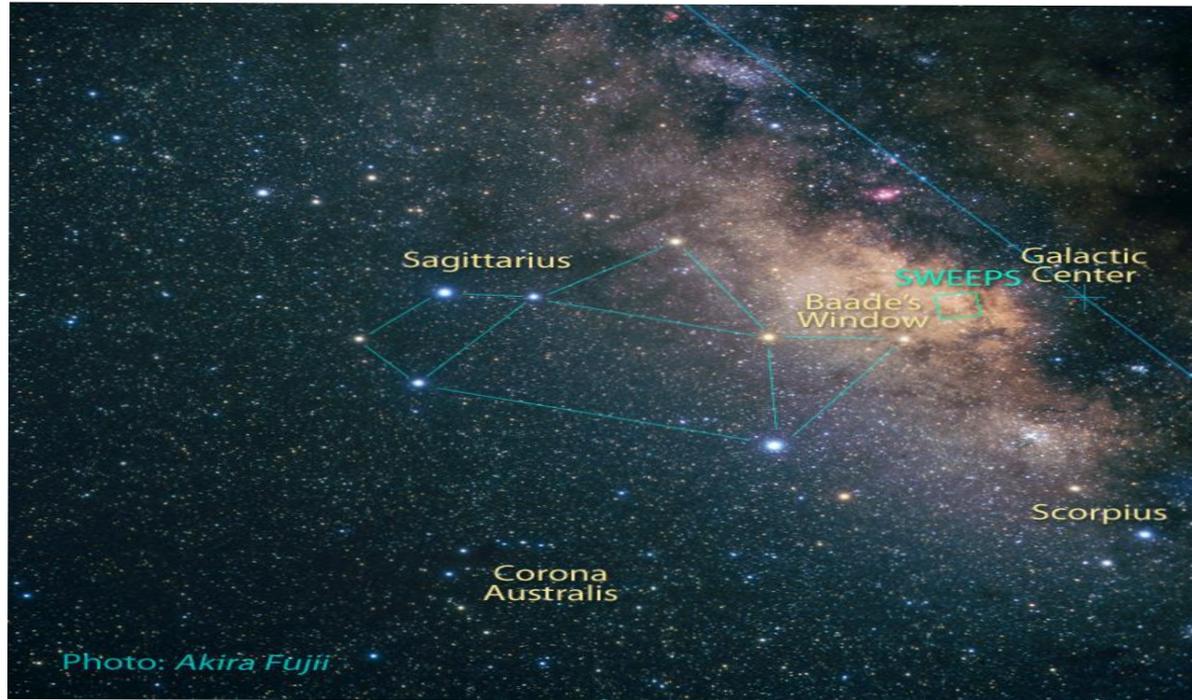
Sagittarius



The Teapot Asterism



Sagittarius points to The Galactic Centre – just follow the spout of the teapot.



The Lagoon Nebula M8

There are a number of objects in the steam area from the teapot north of Delta and Gamma stars of the spout. Extend a line from Theta Sagittarii through Lambda Sagittarii (the top of the lid) the same distance west and M8 appears. The Lagoon Nebula is an emission nebula and looks like a bluey haze around the star cluster NGC 6530. This can be seen in all sizes of binoculars and is the summer rival of the Orion Nebula.



The Triffid Nebula - M20

Just above the Lagoon Nebula lies The Triffid Nebula and can be seen in the same field of view as M8 – a beautiful sight. This is a combination of an emission and reflection nebula and lies 5,200 light years away. The name has nothing to do with the famous book “Day of the Triffids” but relates to the dark lanes of dust which can be teased out with averted vision



Messier 24 – The Sagittarius Star Cloud

M24 is the densest concentration of stars that can be seen using binoculars and is a glorious sight. It lies a few degrees north of Mu Sagittarii. About a thousand stars are visible in a single field of view. The star cloud is 600 light years wide and 10,000 light years distant and is part of a spiral arm of The Milky Way.



M23 – An Open Cluster

A few degrees west of the M24 Star Cloud lies the open cluster M23. It contains approximately 150 stars and is 2,150 light years away and is 15-20 light years in radius. Larger binoculars will tease more stars out but smaller ones give a greater field of view.



M25 – An Open Cluster

A few degrees to the east of the M24 Star Cloud lies M25 - another beautiful open cluster. This cluster is about 2000 light years distant, 19 light years across and is around 90 million years old. As with all open clusters try to look at the different colours of the stars when seen through binoculars.



M22 – A Globular Cluster

M22 is one of the brightest globular clusters in the sky and can be found a few degrees north east of Lambda Sagittarii (the top of the lid). It is one of the nearest globular clusters to Earth, approximately 10,600 light years distant. In binoculars you will see a milky smudge with larger optics giving a definite brighter core image.

