Messier Marathon

We're going to "run" a mini-Messier Marathon this month! A Messier Marathon is an event where astronomers seek out and find as many of the 110 objects in the Messier Catalog as they possibly can. Some astronomers take an entire year to complete their treasure hunt, and others do it all in one night. The most favorable times of year to complete a marathon are March and October nearest the new moon, because all the objects will be visible at some point from dusk to dawn.

We're going to do a mini-Marathon, where students will search for 12 easy-to-find objects. These are listed on the following page. You will be able to see a couple with your naked eye on a dark night (Andromeda Galaxy, M42, M44 and M45) and use binoculars for the rest of the objects. There's even a bonus one for students with telescopes (M43).

Here's how to get started: each night, try to find just *one* new object along with any from previous nights. This will help train you to recognize star patterns so you can find them again and again. You'll probably notice that some nights will be more visibly clear than others, so your ability to find them will also depend on your "seeing" conditions. Try to get away from lights and let your eyes adjust to the dark for several minutes. If you're using a stargazing app, use the "red screen" feature to help you find your way.

There will be some nights that are cloudy (or worse!), so get outside when you can. You will increase your chances at being able to see the stars this month if you consistently make time to stargaze, even if it's only for 10 minutes each night.

You can use planetarium software for your stargazing sessions (it's free). Find Stellarium here.

Central Coast Astronomical Society
Twelve Winter Messier Objects

Number	Object Type	Object Name (if any)[1]	Constellation	Apparent Magnitude[2]	Distance from Earth[2]	Discovered by[2]
M31	Galaxy	Andromeda Galaxy	Andromeda	3.44	2.4 million light years	German astronomer Simon Marius on December 15, 1612
M33	Galaxy	Triangulum Galaxy	Triangulum	5.7	2.81 million light years	Italian astronomer Giovanni Battista Hodierna before 1654
M34	Open Cluster	Spiral Cluster	Perseus	5.5	1,500 light years	Italian astronomer Giovanni Battista Hodierna before 1654
M37	Open Cluster	January Salt-and-Pepper Cluster	Auriga	6.2	4,511 light years	Italian astronomer Giovanni Battista Hodierna before 1654
M42	Nebula	Great Orion Nebula	Orion	4.0	1,344 light years	French astronomer Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc on November 26, 1610[3]
M43	Nebula	De Mairan's Nebula	Orion	9.0	1,600 light years	French astronomer Jean-Jacques d'Ortous de Mairan before 1731
M35	Open Cluster	Shoe-Buckle Cluster	Gemini	5.3	2,800 light years	Swiss astronomer Jean-Philippe Loys de Chéseaux around 1745
M44	Open Cluster	Beehive Cluster	Cancer	3.7	577 light years	Known since ancient times
M46	Open Cluster	None	Puppis	6.1	5,400 light years	French astronomer Charles Messier in 1769
M93	Open Cluster	Butterfly Cluster	Puppis	6.0	3,600 light years	French astronomer Charles Messier March 20, 1781
M45	Open Cluster	Pleiades	Taurus	1.6	444 light years	Known since ancient times
M48	Open Cluster	None	Hydra	5.5	1,500 light years	German astronomer Johann Elert Bode around 1782

Books

Year-Round Messier Marathon Field Guide, Harvard Pennington

NightWatch, Terence Dickinson

Turn Left at Orion, Guy Consolmagno and Dan M. Davis

[1] Obtained from Stellarium, stellarium.org
[2] Obtained from messier-objects.com
[3] Obtained from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orion_Nebula#History