



P E R T H O B S E R V A T O R Y

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Watch the Moon Move

Sky watchers will be treated to a special sight on the evening of Sunday 14th May when the Moon occults (obscures) the red giant star Antares. Such an event has not been visible from Perth for over 20 years.

Normally the motion of the Moon in its orbit around the Earth isn't very noticeable except for the observation that the Moon rises about one hour later each day.

In the early evening of Sunday 14th May the near Full Moon will be easy to locate in the night sky and will be positioned near the bright orange-red coloured star, Antares, in the constellation of Scorpius the scorpion.

This star will provide a point of reference on the sky and enable the motion of the Moon to be easily observed against the background stars.

"Sky watchers in Perth will observe the Moon's orbital motion take it in front of Antares, causing what astronomers call an occultation, around 09:38 pm", explains Dr James Biggs, Director of Perth Observatory.

"Antares will then reappear on the other side of the Moon at around 10:16 pm.", he added.

This event will be visible (weather permitting) from all of WA and just about all over Australia around the times given above.

Lunar occultations of Antares occur for some region of the Earth every month over an interval lasting five years, and this cycle repeats every 18.5 years.

Precise timing of the occultation can provide astronomers with details of the height of surface features on the edge of the Moon.

"There is no interaction between the Moon and Antares; the Moon orbits the Earth at a distance of about 380,000km while Antares is a red giant star, 600 times wider (it would extend to the orbit of Mars if it replaced our Sun) and about 15 times more massive than the Sun, located at a far greater distance of 600 light years." said Dr Biggs.

Diagrams next page.

SKY MAP LOOKING EAST EVENING 14 MAY

