

One Good Target

With Some Other Sights Worth Seeing
While You're in the Neighborhood

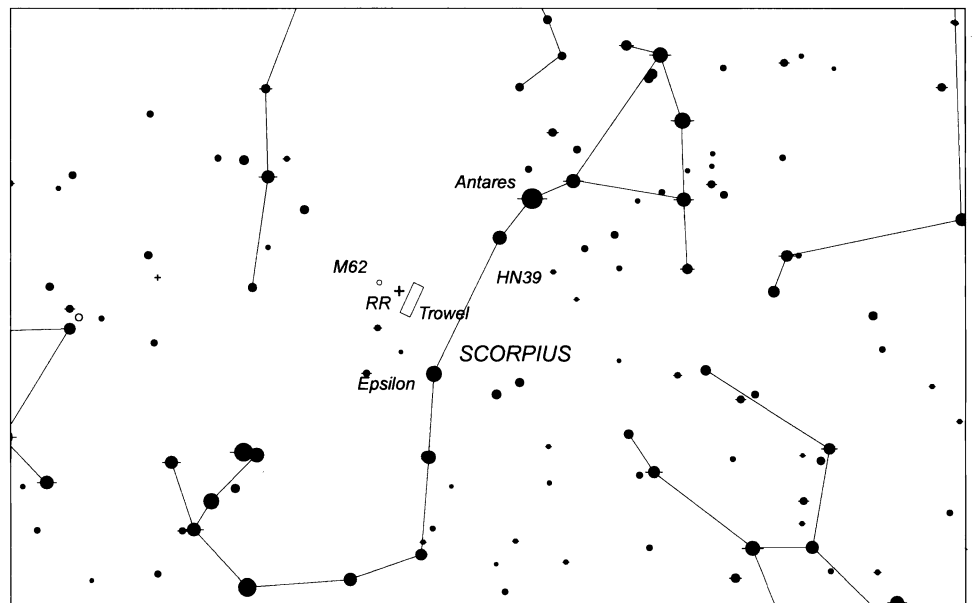
July

A Lopsided Globular Cluster in Ophiuchus (M62)

with side trips to a light red Mira star,
a classic asterism, and a pretty yellow pair

This month's explorations bring us to the border of Ophiuchus and Scorpius, about 8° SE of the crimson beacon of Antares (Alpha [α] Scorpii), where we'll find our primary target: an unusual globular cluster called **M62**. Set against a magnificent star field, the cluster covers 6 arcminutes in diameter and glows at mag 6.6 – bright enough to be seen in finder scopes and binoculars as a dense fuzzy patch, a tiny cottonball lying just south of two mag 7-8 stars.

***This month's targets:
North at top,
stars to mag 5.5***

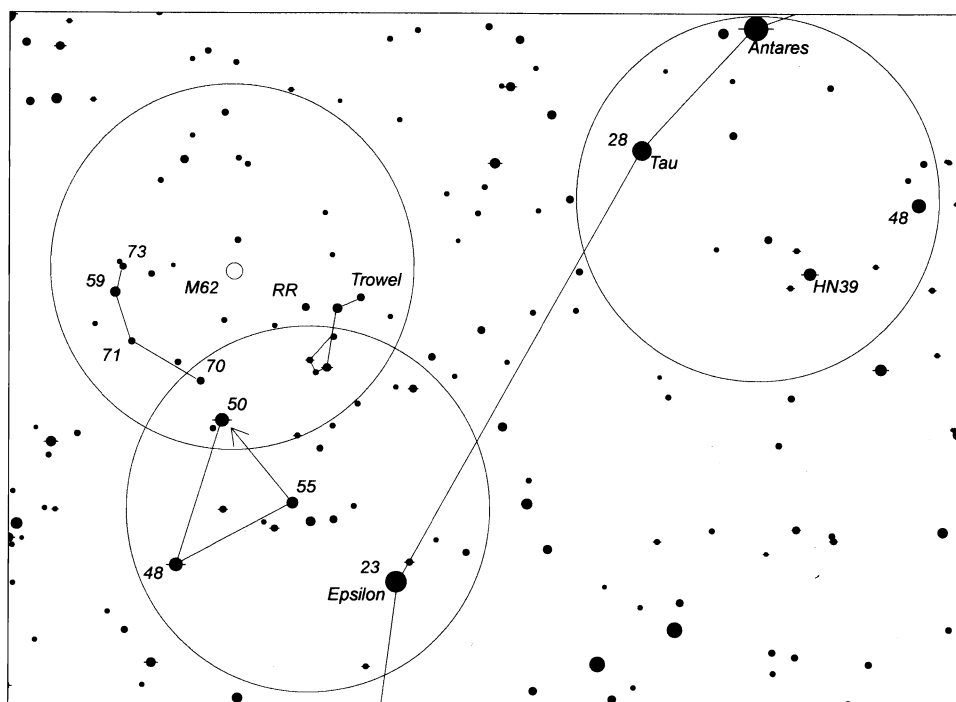


To reach M62, start at mag 2.3 Epsilon (ϵ) Scorpii, the second pattern star below Antares in the curving body of The Scorpion. With Epsilon positioned in the SW quadrant of the field as shown in the finder view below, you'll see a mag 5 triangle on the opposite side of the field. Pan in the direction indicated in the chart until you reach the mag 7 arc shown on the left side of the upper field, and the fuzzy cluster will be roughly centered in the finder field, just below a close pair of stars, mag 7.4 and 8.0. Switch to a low power eyepiece giving about a 1° field, locate the cluster in the same field as the two stars, and increase the magnification to 100x or so.

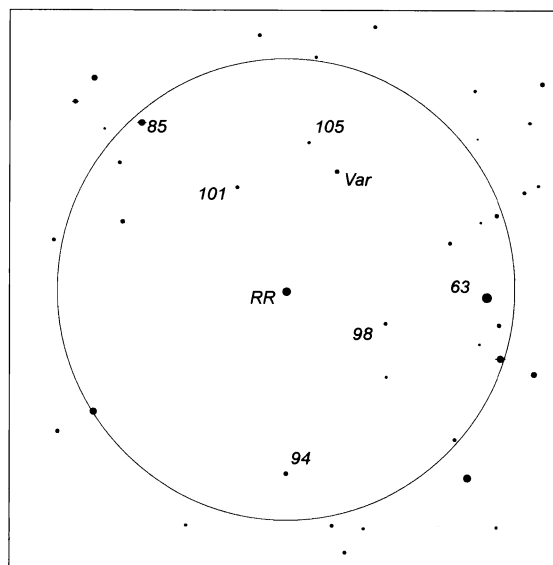
Although the cluster will appear grainy in 6" instruments, you'll need at least a 10" scope to begin to resolve stars at the cluster's edges, and 12" to resolve it to the core. But even small scopes will show M62's signature

feature: it appears slightly lopsided or out-of-round, distinctly brighter on one side than on the other, as if its bright core had been pushed away from center – unlike most globulars, which present as evenly-lit, perfectly symmetrical balls of concentrated starlight. The reason may be that M62 is one of the closest globulars to the center of The Milky Way, and is therefore affected by powerful galactic tidal forces that have pushed its stars over to one side.

Finderscope views (5° fields):
North at top, stars to mag 8,
selected magnitudes shown,
decimals omitted



While you're in the neighborhood, go back to the finderscope view above and have a closer look at the arc of stars shown on the right side of the upper field. That group forms an asterism known as **The Garden Trowel**, coined by Massachusetts amateur John Davis and popularized by binocular aficionado Phil Harrington (although I admit that I've never been able to see a garden trowel in these stars). Just east of the asterism is a Mira star, **RR Scorpii**, a red giant whose brightness varies from a relatively bright mag 5.0 to an extremely dim mag 12.4 over a period of 280 days. The (unreversed) 1° eyepiece view at right shows some comparison stars to help you estimate its brightness when you observe it.



Before packing up for the night, use Antares and mag 2.8 Tau Scorpii to find **HN39**, a lovely pair of yellow-white stars, mag 5.9 + 6.6, separated by just 5½ arcseconds. Double star guru Sissy Haas rightly describes this as a showcase pair, and their soft, almost pastel color seems somehow comforting and therapeutic after a long night at the eyepiece. It's a fitting spot to wrap up tonight's explorations in the Scorpius-Ophiuchus borderlands.

Rick Gering / July 2024