Deepsky Delights
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One brave amateur astronomer

Sharing the area around your telescope with a herd of buffalo requires extreme courage and of course an all-encompassing love of the starry sky. It is dry in the bush this time of year and natural for wild animals to roam on the luscious cool green grass close to the camp, and to devour the lucerne provided for them.

The soft hazy Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC) breathtakingly stakes its claim against the Southern Sky and calls for investigation, buffalo herd notwithstanding. Towards the west of the SMC, Tucana’s brightest stars form a distinct kite shape. The most southwestern corner features the double star \textit{delta Tucanae}, which appears to be pale blue-white. Its fainter companion, reflecting a yellow colour, is situated on the primary’s western side. A lovely field of view, splashed with stars in various magnitude and colour.

While I am listening to the buffalos eating and breaking away some of the

The Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC) on the Tucana-Hydrus border, accompanied by the naked-eye globular cluster NGC 104 (47 Tucanae). From dark skies, NGC 362 (another globular cluster) is also a naked-eye target, located on the edge of the SMC. The star chart is adapted from Chart 1 of the newly-released free \textit{Discover!} atlas.
plants next to the driveway, I would like to share with you one of the asterisms that I’ve search out over time. Take the road 2.5° west from delta Tuc to arrive at RA 22h11m16s, Dec –63°06′18″. The asterism consists of three prominent stars pointing south and a fainter triangle to its east.

Who said I was scared of wild animals, as I jump into the deep end more or less 3° north-west of delta Tuc to explore the barred spiral galaxy NGC 7408. With a surprisingly high surface brightness, it was originally thought to be a planetary nebula. Using higher power (218x) it slowly brightens to a broad nucleus.

The most easterly corner star of the kite, beta Tucanae 1 & 2, displays a lovely combination of dirty white opposed to a dull tinged yellow. This double system contains four stars in total.

Another double star kappa Tucanae is situated just north of the SMC. To my eye this is the most beautiful double star in Tucana with a pretty yellow jacket in contrast to its fainter, clear white companion.

From below the staircase leading up to my observatory, noises can be heard. I turn a deaf ear to them, also to the far-away cry of a jackal, because I am about to explore the beautiful SMC.

Nestled near the northern edge is the bright, large and easy globular cluster NGC 362 which can be seen with the naked eye. Through the telescope the centre displays a compressed star-like core (52x). With higher power it turns into a smooth cotton ball, sprayed with well-resolved faint stars embedded in a hazy outer envelope. At even higher power (180x) the core becomes granular, on the verge of resolved starlight. Brighter stars man the edge of the field of view, rounding off this unique globular cluster.

One would expect the bush in the wee hours to be wrapped in silence. How-
ever the night is filled with calls and sounds of feeding. The sudden hooting of a night owl sounds surprisingly close.

**NGC 330**, sharing a home with other objects in the Cloud, appears exceptionally compact and bright, considering the fact that this cluster is extremely small. This one-of-a-sort cluster is peppered with faint tight lonely minute stars. At 218x it looks somehow more busy on its south-eastern edge. Situated about 20' north-east of NGC 330, **NGC 346** in contrast is covered in nebulosity and appears as a large, elongated (NW-SE) very granular cluster embedded in stardust and nebulosity. A band of faint stars, sprinkled in haze, cuddles the area between the two clusters (52x). Take your time to discover a harvest of delightful objects in the SMC; there are just too many to deal with right now.

Saving the best for last, I concluded my brave session with one, if not the best, globular cluster: **NGC 104**. As I plunge in to the heart of this magnificent cluster, I hardly feel the cold creeping through my bones. A casual glance through binoculars will bring a brilliant haze of starlight to your eye. However, the three-dimensional globular cluster becomes a shimmering ball of a thousand and one stars through the telescope. The inner, large, core displays a grainy texture (218x), round in shape with crowded faint stars fighting for a place – the brilliant focus that makes NGC 104 so special. The softer second envelope bursts around the core and runs out to a soft shade of sandpaper. Sprinkling star splinters enveloped in haze fills the field of view with delight. With even higher power you become one of the cluster members floating in space.

Looking out for asterisms I spy six very faint stars in a little coat hanger shape situated on the outer north-west edge. The north-east outer edge, however is slightly cut down in starlight with a dark lane. The pioneering French astronomer Lacaille first recognized this to be a cluster and not a single star round about the year 1755.

Purposely I frighten away all the animals that might be lurking in the dark as I wind my way down to the kitchen for a hot cup of tea and a quick nap before dawn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>RA (J2000.0) Dec</th>
<th>Mag.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beta Tuc</td>
<td>00h31.5m –62°58'</td>
<td>4.4/4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGC 104</td>
<td>00 24.1 –72 05</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGC 330</td>
<td>00 56.2 –72 29</td>
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<td>NGC 362</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kappa Tuc</td>
<td>01 15.8 –68 53</td>
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<td>Asterism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delta Tuc</td>
<td>22 27.3 –64 58</td>
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