

Celebrate our planet's uniqueness this Earth Day

Earth Day was introduced on April 22, 1970, by then Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, who became concerned about our planet's stewardship after a 1969 oil spill by Santa Barbara. Coincidentally, this was a few months before astronaut Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon, now considered the pinnacle of the space race.

While protection of the Earth has become an issue in the last few decades, the curiosity of life outside our planet has been a quest for much longer. Specifically, is there a planet even similar to ours? In their 2004 book *The Privileged Planet* (www.privileged-planet.org), scientists Jay W. Richards and Guillermo Gonzalez do a detailed study on what makes the Earth unique. Attributes like location, temperature, resources, habitability and much more were some of the many factors outlaid in their study.

After several years, they concluded our planet could not have possibly been an accident but was rather a result of intelligent design created for a purpose.

"The probability by conservative estimation to



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The Sky's the Limit

match all the factors needed simultaneously to support life is one tenth of one trillionth," the book documents. As *Rare Earth* author Don Brownlee puts it, "The entire Universe is hostile to life." While you can see the movie *The Privileged Planet* on-line for free, it is well worth buying it for your collection as it will be one of the classics you'll revisit and share many times!

Sky watch for the next month

The Waxing Moon will be crowned by Jupiter on Saturday, April 13. Look to the west from dusk to midnight as the crescent Moon sets with the orange giant atop.

Saturn will rise with a full moon on Thursday, April 25. Look in the southeast around sunset at 8 p.m. and the ringed planet pulls up the moon for an all-night show.

Mars nears the sun on Thursday, April 18, so grab

a good solar lens for your binoculars or telescope as you can see Mars close to the Sun for an all-day sky viewing show.

The Lyrids Meteor Shower, also known as April shooting stars, will occur late on the night of Monday, April 22, and will peak around 10 p.m. going well into the dawn of Sunday. Look northeast into the constellation of Lyra and you should be able to catch 10-20 meteors per hour on average with rare surges of up to 100, but maybe dulled by the waxing, gibbous moon in the early morning. **Public events for the next month**

Check out our stargazing event courtesy of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Calgary, starting at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, April 12. A brief indoor presentation on "Solar System Stuff; planets, comets and asteroids" will be followed by observing outside (weather permitting) through our resident 11-inch telescope and the latest viewing aids courtesy of All Star Telescopes from Didsbury. Everyone is welcome to attend free of charge and refreshments are provided. Come early as space fills up

by show time. Experts are on hand every second Friday of the month to explain the heavens, teach scoping skills and help you develop your knowledge of our sky. For more information, visit www.vulcantourism.com or contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994.

A Lapse Techniques seminar with Alan Dyer takes place Saturday, April 27, from 1-5:30 p.m. at the Telescope Farm in Didsbury. Consider attending if you want to learn more about astrophotography from one of Canada's leading experts. The cost is \$63, and it's hosted by All Star Telescope (www.all-startelescope.com) just outside Didsbury. This full facility telescope dealer has a heated showroom, with refreshments, washrooms and more. For more information, contact Ken From at 866-310-8844 or check out Dyer's website at www.canadiannature-photographer.com/AlanDyer.html.

Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at 403-485-2683, and Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com.