

Sky watchers gear up for lunar eclipse

By **JENNA MCMURRAY**, CALGARY SUN

Last Updated: December 19, 2010 5:29pm

It's just like Bonnie Tyler sang, except instead of an overshadowed heart Calgarians are in for a total eclipse of the moon.

Late Monday and early Tuesday, the Earth is set to cast a shadow on the moon, making it appear a deep red colour in a full lunar eclipse.

"The sun, Earth and moon are in a perfect, straight line; the Earth is in the middle," said Alan Dyer, astronomer at the Telus World of Science Calgary.

"We always look forward to lunar eclipses — they're very, very pretty."

Dyer said a lunar eclipse happens once every couple of years on average; the last one visible from Calgary happened in February of 2008.

Monday's show will be most visible to people living in western North America, said Dyer.

It's believed this is the first time a lunar eclipse has happened in tandem with winter solstice in nearly four centuries.

According to the Rothney Astrophysical Observatory (RAO), the eclipse will begin about 11:30 p.m. Monday and will become full at 12:40 a.m. Tuesday and last for 73 minutes.

It is expected to reach its reddest point at about 1:16 a.m.

Though the astronomical phenomenon will be visible to the naked eye, Calgary-area residents will also have the chance to view the moon by telescope from outside the city or through a live webcast.

Neel Roberts, astronomy coordinator at the Tourism and Trek Station in Vulcan, about 100 km southeast of Calgary, said the public is invited to come view the eclipse through telescopes and binoculars alongside members of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.

"When it's filtered in red, it looks like Mars or something," he said, adding the telescopes will give viewers an up-close look at the moon's craters.

Meantime, the RAO will broadcast the eclipse live on its website and will also record the event so those who aren't able to stay up late can watch a time lapse on line later.

The Vulcan event starts at 10 p.m. at 115 Centre St. East.

To view the live RAO's webcast visit ucalgary.ca/rao