

NGC 6633: Open cluster in Ophiuchus

Distance from Earth: 1,000 light years

Finding Factor: **

"WOW!" Factor: Binoculars: *** Small telescopes (3" to 5"): ***

Medium telescopes (6" to 8"): **

Where To Look:

From the star Cebalrai in Ophiuchus , which was used before to find M14 in Summer Sky Window 3, scan through your finderscope or binoculars about one field to the east, to the V-shaped star group known as Poniatowski's Bull. Continue another finder field to the east-northeast, keeping an eye out for a kite-shaped pattern. NGC 6633 is set directly adjacent to the kite's eastern corner and should be visible through your finder.

What You'll See

Through Binoculars. Binoculars beautifully display most of the thirty 8th-magnitude stars that belong to this rich swarm. The stars shine with a blue-white glow against a hazy backdrop created by the few cluster members left unresolved.

Through a Telescope. Although it never made the Messier catalog, NGC 6633 is one of the summer's prettiest open star clusters for backyard telescopes. The cluster stars really glisten here, looking like celestial sapphires against a velvety black background. Since NGC 6633 covers an area about the same size as the Full Moon, low power gives the best view. Don't go over 50x, as higher powers make it nearly impossible to tell where the cluster starts and ends.

Box

NGC 6633 was discovered in 1745-46 by Philippe Loys de Cheseaux. Studies of its starlight show that NGC 6633 is relatively close at only 1,000 light years away. Astronomers also see several orange and red stars among the many blue-white orbs, leading them to conclude that NGC 6633 is about 660 million years old, which is relatively old for an open cluster.

Incidentally, that pattern of stars identified earlier as Poniatowski's Bull is a defunct constellation created in 1777 by Abbé Poczobut, of Vilna, Poland, to honor that country's King Stanislas Poniatowski II. Although the constellation is no longer officially listed, it is still an interesting sight through binoculars.

