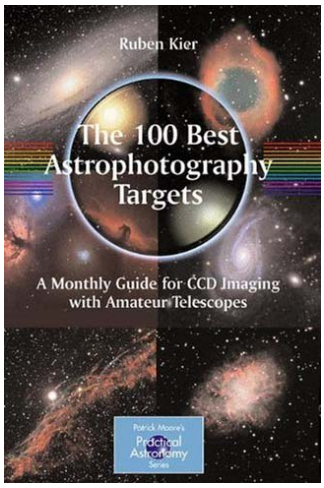
# The 100 best astrophotography targets

**by Ruben Kier**

**Springer–Verlag, 2009. ISBN 978-1-4419-0602-1. pp xxi + 360, £22.99 (pbk)**




This book is one of the *Patrick Moore's Practical Astronomy* series from Springer, aimed at the practising (and sometimes budding) amateur astronomer. With the widespread availability of CCD cameras and digital SLRs for practically any budget and the consequent diffusion of digital astrophotography it was just a matter of time before someone would attempt to create a 'CCD oriented' guide to the night sky in lieu of the time-honoured observing lists or books of the past. The book's intent is to provide a visually compelling list of the 100 most interesting deep sky objects from the perspective of a digital imager, more precisely of the CCD user. The book presents the list in monthly sections so as to give a hint on when it is best to attempt to image them.

The book is divided into three main sections: a short introduction, the main core of the book about the targets themselves and finally a concise guide on practical aspects of astrophotography with a digital (mainly CCD) camera. Each object is presented with the relevant data (names, location, size, integrated magnitude and constellation), a brief astrophysical description, a short note on how to capture the object (exposure length and compositing) and a few suggestions on how best to process the captured data and create the final colour image. Finally the target image is shown with the equally important description of the set-up used, darkness of the sky and the exposure details.

Even a cursory look of some of the over 100 pictures reveals the author's mastery of the subject and as far as presenting the most interesting CCD targets, there is no shortage of 'eye candies' here. With 100 different objects I could only count four I haven't seen before. While most of the pictures shown are of outstanding quality, a few are quite dim or presented in questionable colours. Overall, the author seems more at ease in imaging reflection and emission nebulae than star clusters, with galaxies occupying a sort of middle ground. Disappointingly, star colours tend to be mostly washed out and the sky background is so dark that I suspect clipping of the fainter stuff, especially with galaxies.

The final section is a bit of a let-down, as most of the tips, advice and guidelines seem either very generic or particular to specific software/hardware, and never go into the nitty-gritty details of digital imaging. This is not a book you would want for A–Z imaging guidelines and probably never intended to be, yet the space would have been better used in giving more insight on the nuances of imaging each specific target, as well as a description of the effects of different telescope apertures, cameras and exposure lengths on the end results.

Very dark skies and very large and/or fast telescopes seem a pre-requisite to achieve most of the results presented in this book, especially within the 2–3 hours the author is assuming it would take. In addition to that the average UK imager would find some of the targets far too southerly to invite imaging, and some of the monthly suggestions dubious in the bright summer nights of May, June and July.

This book is a good starter for going beyond the early shots and provides a reasonable reference on what to expect from each target, yet the Night Sky Observer's Guide for the CCD user is still wanting.

**Andrea Tasselli**

*Andrea Tasselli images the (not so dark) night sky from his home in Lincoln. He also helps with raising a family.*