

Radiant Venus can beguile UFO hunters

BEAUMONT, TEX. ENTERPRISE

*"Oh Venus make her fair
a lovely girl with sunlight in her hair
and take the brightest stars up in the skies
and place them in her eyes for me."
"Venus," sung by Frankie Avalon, 1959; words
by Ed Marshall.*

By MERRILEE MORROW
Staff writer

The vision came from the western skies shining an eerie ream of silver light over an unassuming Taco Bell stand. It came bearing gifts: a pair of peacocks mysteriously deposited on a woman's front lawn.

They dubbed the invasion "Peacocks from Space," "The Peacocks that Ate Vidor" or "Unidentified Flying Peacocks."

But Frankie Avalon knew better.

Frankie may put stars in your eyes with the song "Venus," but Mother Nature put the stars up in the skies over Orange County this week. Reports of UFOs cruising the atmosphere near Sandra Lane probably have their source in the planet Venus and its celestial tricks, say professional star watchers.

Venus, visible in the western sky, "is real bright right now, almost bright enough to convince some people that they saw a disk, more than just a point of light," says Terry Contant, observatory director at the Burke Baker Planetarium in Houston.

She says the bright light is visible just after dark until about 11 p.m. The sky show should continue over the next two months and will include Jupiter, which also is very bright right now in the eastern skies.

Hundred times brighter

During this period, Venus can be "hundreds of times as bright. It's not surprising people are extremely aware of it," says Mimi Hynek, vice president of the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Ill.

The privately funded center, established in 1973, usually receives reports of three to four UFO sightings a week, but the numbers have increased since Venus became so visible, she says.

"It catches even quite intelligent people" who might think it was a UFO, she says.

A Gallup Poll study of about 10 years ago revealed that 53 percent of the people surveyed believed in UFOs, she says. A later study found 57 percent believed in the unexplained airborne objects.

Most UFO reports can be explained away as weather balloons, flaming meteors or unusual atmospheric conditions surrounding a planet or star.

The colored lights that local residents reported coming from a fat, silver object in the sky could be caused by prolonged staring at lights, especially through binoculars, she says, adding that it's a well-known optical effect.

Hynek says "90 to 95 percent of all sightings have some plausible explanation. The rest we can't collect enough data on."

And what about the peacocks?

It seems that a local radio station received a call from a Vidor woman who said that two peacocks appeared on her lawn uninvited. The UFO sightings were made public at about the same time.

So the airwave pilots put two and two together and got five: ET must be a bird lover.

Meteor lights night sky
BEAUMONT, TEX. ENTERPRISE
By The Associated Press 6/15/83

A meteor flashed through the skies over four Midwestern states early Tuesday, throwing off orange sparks and lighting up the night sky "like dawn," witnesses said.

The meteor was sighted from southern Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Kentucky, authorities said.

"What I thought was, somebody had pushed the button ... I thought World War III had started, it was so brilliant," said Bob Green, a cook at a restaurant in Herrin, Ill., about 60 miles southeast of St. Louis.

Green said he saw the sky light up just as he finished reading from the Bible's Book of Revelations, which deals with prophecy of the end of the world.

Carl Heinrich, a commercial pilot and flight instructor in Centralia, Ill., said he was in his front yard making wooden forms for the pouring of a concrete sidewalk at 1:15 a.m. CDT when he saw the meteor.