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Music.

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Jane Houston Jones: What's Up for July? Take a grand tour of the Milky Way--with binoculars!

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Hello and welcome. I'm Jane Houston Jones from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

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If you haven't been under a dark sky for a while,

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July's a great month to make a dark sky getaway.

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Many parks have astronomy programs at night

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and dark conditions necessary to show off the summer skies.

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Sound: Whoosh.

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Jones: This month we're looking south at Sagittarius and Scorpius,

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which are separated by the core of our Milky Way galaxy.

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The brightest stars in Sagittarius look just like a teapot,

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complete with a nearby group of stars resembling a teaspoon.

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The center of our galaxy looks like hot steam spewing from the teapot's spout.

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Even with a pair of binoculars, you'll find Milky Way star clusters and knots of nebulae.

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Just aim at the brighter, clumpy areas.

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Use binoculars to look for the globular cluster M22 just above and to the left of the teapot's lid.

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00:01:07,000 --> 00:01:14,000

It's composed of about 83,000 stars and fills as much sky as the moon!

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M8, the Lagoon Nebula, is a giant star-forming interstellar cloud

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faintly visible to the naked eye from mid-northern latitudes.

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Seen with binoculars, it appears as an oval cloud-like patch with a core.

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With a telescope, a star cluster formed from the material of the Lagoon Nebula itself is easy to see,

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appearing superimposed on it.

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You'll see a dark patch bisecting the two lobes.

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Like many nebulae, it appears pink in time-exposure color photos

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but is gray to the eye peering through binoculars or a telescope.

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You will need a telescope to see B86, a pretty, dark nebula just above the teapot's spout.

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It's a shock to see a tiny patch so dark that the Milky Way is obscured.

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Sound: Whoosh.

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Jones: Looking in the same direction, we can see two dwarf planets.

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Near Sagittarius this month is Pluto.

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00:02:09,000 --> 00:02:12,000

That little teaspoon star shape near the teapot

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00:02:12,000 --> 00:02:16,000

is where amateur astronomers can look for Pluto all month long.

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You'll need a medium-sized telescope and some experience, patience and a little weather luck

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to see Pluto, but do look in the direction of the dwarf planet and think of

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NASA's New Horizons spacecraft approaching and flying by it on July 14.

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Another dwarf planet, Ceres, is at opposition

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not too far away from Pluto in the southern sky between Sagittarius and Capricornus.

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That's where NASA's Dawn spacecraft is orbiting right now!

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You can learn more about New Horizons and Dawn and all of NASA's missions at

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