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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Satellite Question

From: Bob Young <YoungBob2@aol.com>
Date: Wed, 14 Jul 1999 19:18:38 EDT
Fwd Date: Thu, 15 Jul 1999 09:26:46 -0400
Subject: Re: Satellite Question

>From: John Velez <jvif@spacelab.net>
>Date: Wed, 14 Jul 1999 04:25:28 -0400
>Fwd Date: Wed, 14 Jul 1999 15:36:12 -0400
>Subject: Re: Satellite Question

>>Date: Tue, 13 Jul 1999 12:37:39 -0400
>>From: Scott C. Carr <sardonica@erols.com>
>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>Subject: Satellite Question

<snip>

>A satellite will not;

>1. Hover in one spot. (it will be in motion either on its own,
>or if a 'stationary satellite' due to the turning motion of the
>earth.)

I assume the question is how does the satellite look as seen by the observer on Earth? A geosynchronous satellite seen in a telescope (as most are since they are quite high and therefore dim) will appear to be stationary in the field of view with the background stars moving past if the telescope does not have a clock drive or the drive is turned off. In fact, turning off the drive and watching the satellite just sit there is a cool way to tell if the satellite is in geosync orbit. Also, if a dim telescopic moving light is near the celestial equator (hence above the Earth's equator, too) this is also a good sign that it might be a geosync satellite.

>2. will not 'stop' and then 'start' moving again.

Ah, contraire. Perhaps the most commonly reported movement of fixed astronomical object IFOs, aircraft IFOs, satellite IFOs (and probably nocturnal light UFOs which have not (yet?) been judged an IFO) is a stopping and starting, zig-zagging and jerking caused by autokinetic motion of the eye muscles. This is the cause of the famous Falling Leaf Effect. Satellites are classics, particularly when they are close to the horizon and moving slowly without many nearby dimmer stars because of atmospheric dimming near the horizon.

>3. will not appear 'under' clouds

but might appear below clouds at a distance, with the witness assuming the object is under the clouds.

>or execute random turns.

But, see autokinetic motion, above.

<snip>

Most satellites will appear fairly low in Southern skys (towards equator) for Northern observers as satellites in a 'polar orbit' are -extremely rare.-

This is absolutely wrong, John. Most satellites and their launchers which are easily visible to the unaided eye (because they are in lower orbits) are, indeed, polar orbiters. Just go out tonight and watch for them. They can thus cover the entire Earth. Manned missions, by contrast, are usually further south toward the equatorial regions, mainly because of the latitude of the launch facilities.

Clear skies,

Bob Young

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