

COMET NOTES

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Periodic Comet Tempel 2 was recovered by G. Van Biesbroeck with the 82-inch reflector of the McDonald Observatory on May 5 and received the designation 1956 *e*. The comet was of magnitude 19 when found and showed a nearly stellar coma. The prediction for the current apparition was prepared by R. Luss of the Computing Section of the British Astronomical Association. This is the twelfth apparition of P/Tempel 2 to be observed; it was discovered in 1873 and was last observed in 1951. The period is 5.2 years. The next perihelion passage will take place early in February 1957, but the comet will not be well placed for observation at that time.

Comet Mrkos, 1956 *b*, continued to fade rapidly during April as its geocentric distance increased. By April 28, when it was last observed at Mount Hamilton, the comet had faded to magnitude 17 and was quite diffuse, without a central condensation.

An improved orbit of Comet Wirtanen, 1956 *c*, was computed by A. G. Mowbray, University of California, Berkeley. The new orbit was based on an observed arc of some 40 days, and the indication now is that perihelion passage does not occur until the summer of 1957. All the available observations were satisfactorily represented by a parabolic orbit.

Comet Wirtanen at the end of May had essentially the same appearance as it had at discovery on March 16. It will be unobservable during the summer and fall as it passes through conjunction with the sun.

Periodic Comet Schwassmann-Wachmann 2 was observed again on May 16 and 29 by the writer with the Crossley reflector at the Lick Observatory. The comet was then near opposition and showed a small coma of magnitude about 18.7. Perihelion passage of this comet occurred February 27, 1955.

New orbits computed recently for Comet Mrkos, 1955 *e*, indicate that this comet has an elliptic orbit of period near 400 years. I. Hasegawa has computed elements based on an observed arc

of 43 days in June and July 1955, and has found a period of 419 years. An attempt was made to observe the comet again this spring at Lick on the basis of ephemerides supplied by G. Merton, but it is not certain that the comet was recorded. Comet Mrkos was visible to the naked eye in the morning sky for a short time during June last year.

Periodic Comet Olbers brightened considerably during the spring as it approached perihelion passage in mid-June. On May 19 it was observed with the Crossley reflector as a conspicuous object even through clouds. The comet will remain in the evening sky some two or three hours of right ascension east of the sun throughout the summer, but will become increasingly difficult to observe as it moves south and begins to fade after early July.

Comet Abell, 1955 *b*, and Comet Haro-Chavira, 1954 *k*, have continued under observation throughout the spring, but the former will move too close to the sun for further observation by the end of June. Comet Haro-Chavira still is observable at high northern declination. By August it will have moved into Ursa Minor and faded to about magnitude 14.

A number of periodic comets are expected at perihelion late in 1956 or early in 1957, and searches are being carried out at several observatories. P/Johnson, 1949 II, and P/Shajn-Shaldach, 1949 VI, are returning to perihelion for the first time since the discovery apparition. P/d'Arrest made its tenth return in 1950, and is expected at perihelion again in February 1957. P/Crommelin, which originally was known as Comet Pons-Coggia-Winnecke-Forbes, will return to perihelion in October 1956. The last perihelion passage of this comet occurred November 5, 1928, the period being nearly 28 years. Near perihelion P/Crommelin should be a moderately bright object. P/Tuttle-Giacobini-Kresak, 1951 IV, is expected at perihelion in August 1956, but the comet remains very close to the sun for several months before and after perihelion passage, and it is very doubtful whether any observations can be made at this apparition.