

PHOTOGENIC COMET APPROACHES EARTH: Comet ATLAS (C/2020 M3) is approaching Earth. At closest approach on **Nov. 14th** it will be 0.358 AU (54 million km) away--not *quite* close enough to make it a naked-eye object. But can you say "photo-op"? Glowing like an 8th magnitude star, this remarkably beautiful comet is an easy target for backyard telescopes. Austrian amateur astronomer took this picture of Comet ATLAS passing the Orion Nebula on Nov. 8th:



The comet's green atmosphere is huge. [This composite photo](#) from Dan Bartlett of June Lake, California, shows that it is nearly as wide as a full Moon. Hence the following tip for astrophotographers: You'll need a wide field to capture the entire comet. It gets its verdant hue from diatomic carbon (C₂), a compound which glows green in the near vacuum of space.

The fact that the comet is passing through Orion makes it easy to find. On Nov. 11th, draw a line through the stars of Orion's Belt: It leads directly to the comet. And on Nov. 15th (within hours of closest approach to Earth), the comet will pass a fraction of a degree from the bright star Bellatrix, the hunter's left shoulder. Deep exposures may show Bellatrix shining through the outskirts of ATLAS's atmosphere.