

ASTRONOMY

New Comet Discovered

► A NEW COMET, bright enough to be seen with binoculars, is now visible early in the morning at about dawn.

The comet, named Ikeya after its Japanese discoverer, is magnitude eight. Its discovery was confirmed by the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory's station at Woomera, Australia.

However, only early risers or real comet fans are likely to see the new comet, since it rises only a little more than an hour before the sun.

Morning twilight could thus interfere with spotting it.

The comet, fourth to be discovered this year, is very close to the dense star group known as the Hyades, which is in the constellation of Taurus, the bull.

Another comet, known as 1964C, although brighter, is even more difficult to see because it is setting as astronomical twilight ends and fainter stars begin to shine brightly.

It is now magnitude five, which is visible to the unaided eye, but is going away from

the sun and will fade to magnitude eight by the end of July.

Ikeya's position is four hours, 11 minutes in right ascension and 16 degrees, 11 minutes in declination.

The position of 1964C, the receding comet, is nine hours, 25 minutes in right ascension and 26 degrees, five minutes in declination.

News of the discovery of the new comet and of the position of 1964C was telegraphed to astronomical observatories by Harvard College Observatory in Cambridge, Mass., clearing house for such information in the Western Hemisphere.

• Science News Letter, 86:45 July 18, 1964

SPACE

'Space Junk' Damage Poses Legal Problem

► WHO WOULD be held responsible for any damage if one of those speeding man-made satellites above should suddenly make a fiery return to earth?

The U.S. Government is now immune to individual damage suits and does not have to honor claims against it. This essentially holds true for the Soviet Union also.

Except for a recent Cuban claim that a piece of a U.S. missile hit one of their cows, and a few other minor incidents, the question of liability for personal or property damage from "space junk" has not yet reached major proportions. However, since it may be a growing problem in the near future, it was the topic of considerable discussion at the National Colloquium on Space Exploration in Washington, D. C.

Max Paglin, a Washington attorney, pointed out that he could foresee the establishment of a formalized international forum to judge responsibility for damages caused by fragments of a man-made space vehicle that reentered the earth's atmosphere without burning up.

Another suggestion, made by Col. Gerritt W. Wesselink, USAFR (Ret.), General Counsel, Department of the Air Force, indicated the need for agreement on a government-to-government level. Col. Wesselink stated that the U.S. and Russia, essentially the only two countries involved in assuming responsibility, should come to a signed agreement to determine the extent of liability.

Andrew G. Haley, Washington attorney and author of the book "Space Law and Government," previously made another

suggestion regarding the problem of future "space accidents."

Mr. Haley considers the possibility of a kind of "space insurance" in which an administrative board, set up by the United Nations, would process and assess claims. Insurance would be compulsory for operators of space vehicles, whether the operators were a government or private corporation.

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TECHNOLOGY

Shoebox Computer Uses Microelectronics

► A NEW ELECTRONIC computer the size of a shoebox contains as many parts as are found in 400 television sets.

The computer, developed by North American Aviation Company's Autonetics Division, Anaheim, Calif., has a memory of more than 1,000 "words" or sets of instructions and can be expanded to hold more.

Its tiny electronic components are hundreds of times smaller than transistors. Some of the circuits from it are used in the guidance system of the Minuteman II missile. The computer was designed for use in aviation, as well as space and military projects.

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Nature Note

Rattlesnake-Killing Cuckoo

► AN UNUSUAL BIRD, who is reputed to build cactus "corrals" around sleeping snakes before killing them, has been seen with two feet of snake dangling from his mouth while waiting for the first part to be digested.

The bird in question is the roadrunner, *Geococcyx californianus*, noted for his long sturdy legs capable of running as fast as 15 miles per hour along the ground. This member of the cuckoo family is also known as the "chaparral cock," cock-of-the-desert, snake-eater and ground cuckoo.

Travelers in the southwest will recognize this bird by its slender build, long bill, long floppy tail, shaggy crest and streaked pattern. As the bird perches on bush or fence post, he calls "coo coo coo ooh ooh ooh."

While famous for his snake-killing ability, the roadrunner usually dines on lizards, rodents, spiders and insects. He kills his prey by pounding with his bill before swallowing the victim head first.

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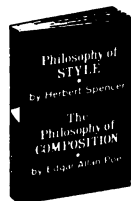


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