

## Observe a Comet

A bright comet can be one of the highlights of a visual astronomer's observing experience. This 1996 one came unexpectedly and its tail was up to 80 degrees long. Many periodic comets like Halley's come in regular patterns while others appear suddenly.



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How do you know a bright comet will be coming soon? RASC member Chris Vaughan sends a weekly email with news about new astronomy events including comets. Subscribe to Astronomy Skylights by clicking:

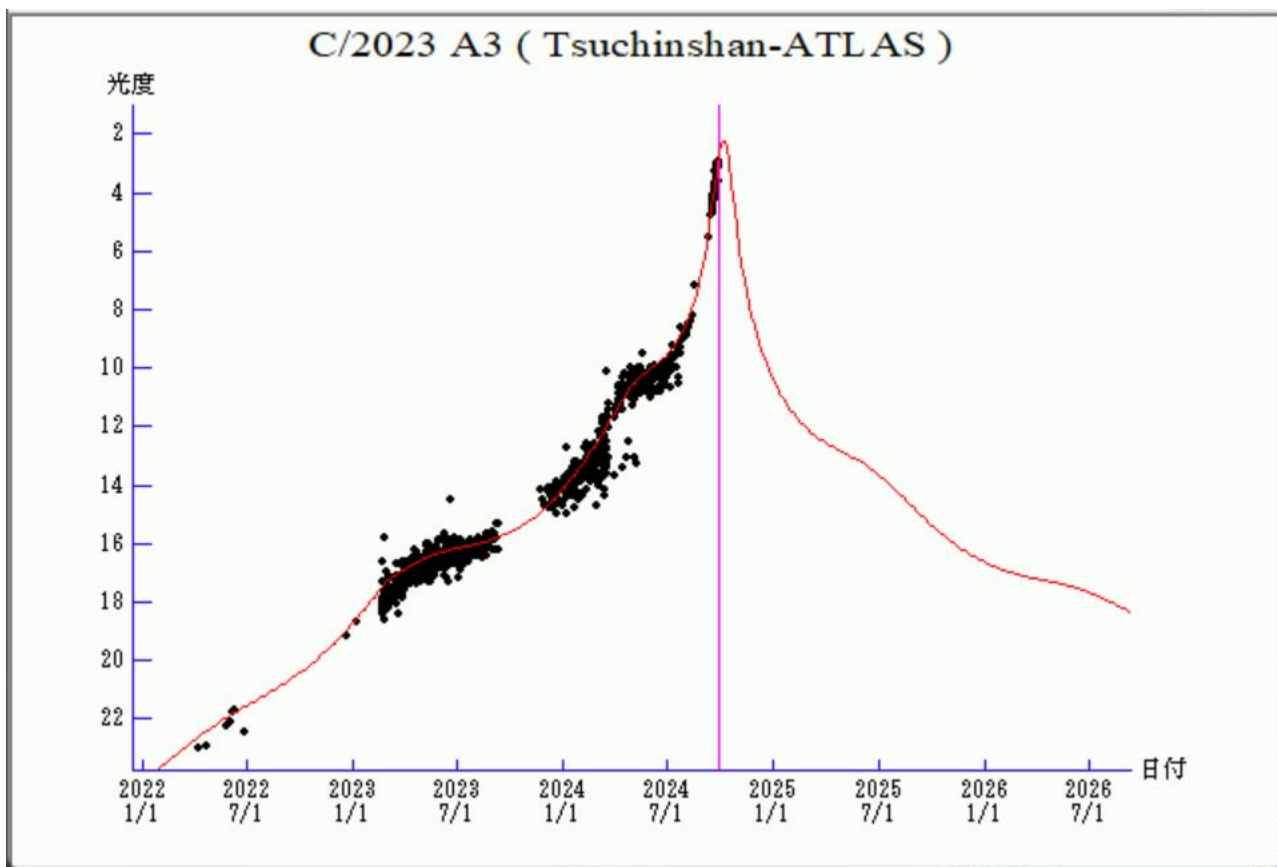
<https://astrogeo.us8.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=938aa73a0c2c6075a70b653ec&id=02e14580b4>

Also a benefit of RASC membership is joining email or Facebook groups where events like a new comet are well discussed.

The website <http://www.aerith.net/comet/future-n.html>

also lists various comets visible from the northern hemisphere in the evening, night and morning. “Mag” is magnitude where the lower the number the brighter. Magnitude 4 is often needed to see visually.

This chart from that website gives the reported magnitude of a comet. After a brief bright period, it will fade quickly. Comets are very unpredictable and sometimes split into pieces as they pass closest to the Sun.



Planetarium programs can calculate positions of astronomical objects at future times. Some automatically upload new comets giving azimuth (compass bearing) and altitude for any time. A compass can help you find it.

Most comets are brightest when near the Sun, so it's hard to find them against the glow of dusk or dawn. Perhaps someone might have a telescope where you are observing. Or some experienced observers might be able to help. Really bright naked eye comets only come every few decades.