Lunar insects
and other stories

The Wandering Astronomer,
Patrick Moore, The Institute of
Physics, 1999, ISBN 0 750
30693 9, hbk 192pp.

If you think that astronomy is a
dry, serious, stern discipline, you
should read this compilation of 41
effects by Patrick Moore, very much
on the lighter side of astronomy.
You all know of course that
William Herschel considered the
Sun to be cool and habitable, but
did you know that Picketing –
father of stellar classification –
believed that certain dark patches
within the crater Erastosnhes,
which appear to move during the
lunar day, could be explained as
swarms of insects? Did you know
that in King Solomon’s Mines,
Rider Haggard had an eclipse of
the Sun at full Moon? Do you want
to know about Harvest Moons,
Wolf Moons and Blue Moons? Or
Patrick’s sighting of UFOs in the
1970s? But why give it all away?
These are a set of interesting essays –
some serious, some very amusing.
If you sometimes feel that you are
beginning to take your astronomy
too seriously, restore your sanity
with a dip into the Wandering
Astronomer.

One final thought: what will
some latter-day Patrick Moore writ-
ing in the 22nd century pick as
the fanciful among our cherished 20th
century notions and soundly
ridicule us over for weak minded-
ness? For the sake of our egos,
hindsight should be kept to a mini-
um – but one does wonder
nevertheless.

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Star-gazing made simple

See the Stars – your first guide to
the night sky, Boyds Mills Press,
2000, ISBN 1 563 97757 5, hbk
32pp, $16.95.

This is a practical introduction to
observing the stars by an experi-
cenced science writer. Crowell focus-
es on one constellation at a time,
using colour photographs as simple
practical sky maps for each month.
The observations he describes are
possible with binoculars and he
moves on from description to
discuss what is happening out there:
different types of stars, how the Sun
will evolve, dust and gas clouds,
and so on. It is aimed at children
from 9–12 years and seems to me a
worthwhile introduction to the sub-
ject. I sought the opinion of some-
one rather closer to the target audi-
ence. Elizabeth McCaig (16) writes:
The author does a very good job
of explaining the different constella-
tions included in the guide at an
appropriate level for a child. On the
whole the language is not too diffi-
cult bearing in mind that the book
has been written for American chil-
dren who tend to have a larger
vocabulary and seem to have a bet-
ter grasp of more complex sentences
than English children of the same
age. This means that in areas, the
language used is quite complicated.
Fortunately, the diagrams that
support the text are clear, concise
and easy to understand. Unlike
most books, the constellations in
this book are shown separately
from each other which makes it
easier to see the pattern the stars in
a constellation make. You are also
told why the constellations have the