



Rare & Extra-Special Clouds

Lesson 1.6 Photo Guide



The undulatus cloud pattern. Of the three clouds we are going to look at in this lesson, this is the one you're most likely to spot. We describe one of the ten main clouds as undulatus when it is arranged into rows of clumps or rolls. Undulatus clouds sometimes have spaces between the rows and sometimes they are joined-up as on the next photo.



Undulatus spotted by Beatrice Frei



What does the pattern of undulatus remind you of?
One thing undulatus clouds can look like is the pattern of ridges that you sometimes see on the sand at the beach.



Virga spotted by Richard Bacon



You can see this pattern in several of the ten main cloud types. When the low clumpy layer of cloud known as Stratocumulus forms in an undulatus pattern the rows look big because the cloud rows are nearer to you. When the high clumpy layer known as Cirrocumulus forms in an undulatus pattern they look much smaller because the cloud is much further away from you: Undulatus looks big in low clouds (Stratocumulus).



Stratocumulus Undulatus spotted by Jenny Slade



The same undulatus pattern looks small in high clouds like this Cirrocumulus. This is just because they are much further away than the low ones like the Stratocumulus undulatus.



Cirrocumulus Undulatus spotted by Kristina Goslin



Surf's up! The fluctus cloud looks like ocean breakers in the sky.



A fluctus cloud like these are rare.

The fluctus cloud looks like breaking waves. It sometimes looks like a whole bunch of breakers, one behind the other. The fluctus cloud is a bit like the undulatus because it is a pattern of regular bumps, but the important difference is that only with a fluctus do the tops of the bumps curl over. You have to be pretty lucky to spot this cloud because it doesn't happen often that the sky has a whole line of breaking waves in it!



Fluctus spotted by Amy Hunter (top) | Fluctus spotted by Hallie Rugheimer (bottom)



Your best chance of spotting a flactus feature is on the top of a Cumulus on a windy day



Even though dramatic examples of flactus are rare you'll have a good chance of spotting the curls of flactus if you pay careful attention to the top of Cumulus clouds. When it is windy up at the level of the clouds, a flactus curl will sometimes appear on top of a Cumulus. They only last for a couple of minutes, so you have to be paying attention. Next time there are Cumulus clouds on a windy day, see if you can spot a flactus feature forming on top of one.



Flactus spotted by Soren Hauge (top) | Flactus spotted by Tania Ritchie (bottom)



The horseshoe vortex cloud



You have to be an expert cloudspotter to spot a horseshoe vortex cloud!

The horseshoe vortex cloud starts out as a flat roll of cloud. This twists gently like a tiny little tornado on its side. It then starts to curve upwards in the middle to take the shape of a horseshoe. This is because it forms on top of an invisible column of air rising from the ground. When that rising air hits wind blowing up above, it starts to twist at the top. The cloud forms in the middle of this little twist of air, and it bends into a horseshoe as the air below keeps rising.



Horseshoe vortex spotted by Matthias Heigl (top)
Horseshoe vortex spotted by H  l  ne Condie (bottom)