



**SUN** Moving through *Aquarius* into *Pisces*. Vernal Equinox at 11:43 on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

**MOON** New Moon on the 11<sup>th</sup>, Full Moon on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**PLANETS** **Mercury** is too close to the Sun to observe this month.  
**Venus** is chasing the Sun down in the West and after the 20<sup>th</sup> is in conjunction and out of sight.  
**Mars** is a reddish morning object visible in the East an hour before sunrise. It is shining at 1.1<sup>M</sup> and passing through *Aquarius*.  
**Jupiter** is in *Capricornus* with a magnitude of -2.0 for an hour before sunrise.  
**Saturn** is a bright yellowish object on the edge of *Leo* with a magnitude of 0.5<sup>M</sup> and a diameter of 19". It is visible all night long but is best observed when it is high in the South around 10pm.

**COMETS** No bright periodic comets predicted for this month.

**METEORS** There are no meteor showers this month.

**STARS** Castor ( $\alpha$  *geminorum*) is a system of six stars in reality. Through a telescope the star resolves into two bright points, each of which is a binary pair (not observable). A faint pair of red dwarfs orbits these four stars.  
Mebstata ( $\epsilon$  *geminorum*) is a wide double visible in binoculars.  
Wasat ( $\delta$  *geminorum*) is a close 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> magnitude pair, the primary being a red giant variable.  
Sirius ( $\alpha$  *canis majorum*) is a binary system, but the companion star was only discovered in 1862 by Bessel from the wobble in Sirius' motion. In order to see this 8<sup>th</sup> magnitude white dwarf so close to the brightest star in the sky requires exceptional seeing conditions and clean optics.

**NEBULAE** *Orion* plays host to the most spectacular emission nebula - M42 or the Great Nebula. It is visible to the naked eye as the middle "star" of his sword. Binoculars will reveal it to be a fan shaped cloud. Larger telescopes reveal an intricate structure and a quadruple star system called the Trapezium ( $\theta$  *orionis*) at its heart.  
M78 is an 8<sup>th</sup> magnitude reflection nebula to the north of the belt.  
M1 or the Crab Nebula in *Taurus* is quite a challenge for binocular users, but larger instruments should reveal this fascinating supernova remnant.  
The Rosette Nebula in *Monoceros* (NGC 2237) is a challenge with large binoculars, requiring clear skies to distinguish the faint smoke ring surrounding the core cluster.  
The Eskimo Nebula in *Gemini* (NGC 2392) is a fascinating telescopic object but is too faint to see in binoculars. A telescope of 6" and greater will show a fur "hood" round a round face.

**CLUSTERS** M35 is a superb open cluster in *Gemini*, easily visible in binoculars as a triangular blob. A small telescope resolves this into hundreds of stars. Very nearby is the fainter NGC 2129.  
*Monoceros* has three good binocular clusters: M50, NGC 2264 (also called the Christmas Tree) and the cluster at the centre of the Rosette Nebula (NGC 2244) is visible in binoculars and appears to have a distinct parallelogram shape.  
M41 in *Canis Major* (located where the dog's heart should be) is a naked eye open cluster and contains about 100 stars.

**GALAXIES** No prominent galaxies this season apart from our own Milky Way running down past *Orion*.