

NITE SKY

March-April 2012 by Brent Olge

Moon Phases: New 3/22, FQ 3/30, Full 4/6, LQ 4/13, New 4/21, FQ 4/29

Events: 3/20 Vernal Equinox, 4/15 Easter, 4/21-22 Lyrid Meteor Shower

BOOTES (boh-OH-teez) The Herdsman has many similar ancient legends, including that he invented the plow and leads the hunting dogs (Canes Venatici) to drive the bears (Ursa Major and Ursa Minor). Three double stars are Kappa (magnitude 4.6/6.6 separated by 13.4 arc seconds), Iota (magnitude 4.9/7.5, separated by 38.5 arc seconds), and Epsilon (magnitude 4.5/4.9, separated by 2.8 arc seconds, colors yellow/orange and blue/green). Zeta is a triple star (magnitude 4.5, 5.9, and 10.5, separated by 0.9 and 99 arc seconds).

LIBRA (LEE-bra) The Scales or Balance was the claw of the Scorpion, but became Libra in Roman times. Alpha Libra is a white double star of magnitude 2.8/5.2 separated by 23 arc seconds, which is barely detected by the eye. Delta is an eclipsing variable star (like Algol) from 4.9 to 5.9 magnitude every 2.3 days. NGC 5792 is a type Sbc spiral galaxy, 12.9 magnitude and NGC 5897 is a globular cluster at 8.5 magnitude.

LUPUS (LOO-pus) The Wolf is a small constellation with several open and globular clusters. RU Lupi is a 9th magnitude variable nebula of young stars and NGC 5824 is a small bright globular cluster. Planetary nebulas are IC 4406 (20 arc seconds and 11th magnitude) and NGC 5882 is a bright star (7 arc seconds and 10.5 magnitude).

CENTAURUS (sen-TOR-us) The mythical Centaur (horse's body with man's head and upper torso) represents a peaceful teacher of wisdom (Pholus and Cheiron) who taught as recorded in the Labors of Hercules. Although we can only see the top of this large (9th largest constellation, 1060 square degrees), amazing, and many-featured wonder, all of Centaurus is included because we travel and it is the best on in the Southern Hemisphere. Most notable is the triple star system Alpha Centauri, our clearest star system at 4.37 light years, 0.24 magnitude, type G2V/K1v and 4th brightest in the sky. Its 3rd star is Proxima Centauri, our nearest star (4.22 light years, 10.7 magnitude, type M5.5Ve, red dwarf flare type) at 2 degrees from the brighter yellow binary. The 2nd brightest star is Beta or Hadar, a blue-white giant, 12th brightest, binary type B1 II, 9.6 magnitude, at 460 light years away. Omega Centauri (NGC 5139 is NOT a star, but the largest and brightest globular cluster, magnitude 3.7, 0.6 degrees diameter (area of 2/3 the moon), 200,000 light years away. Globular Cluster NGC 5286, magnitude 7.6 is tops. Centauri A (NGC 5128) is a unique, peculiar, elliptical galaxy cut across by dark bands of dust, 16 mega light years distant. It is the nearest active galaxy and a huge source of radio and X-rays, 1,000 times stronger than our galaxy. Two other galaxies are NGC 4945, type SBc and NGC 5253, type **ES**. The Blue Planetary Nebula, NGC 3918 is brightest at 8.5 magnitude, 12 arc second in diameter and 5,000 light years distant. Two good Open Clusters are NGC 3766, 12 arc minutes diameter and 5.3 magnitude, and NGC 5460, 35 arc minutes, 1,600 light years away, and magnitude 5.6. Under Centaurius by the left arm of The Southern Cross in Crux is Open Cluster NGC 4755, The Jewel Box which has many blue and red giant stars, amazing!