Canterbury Astronomical Society

CASMag

Upcoming Notable events for your calendar:

Mar 3rd - Full Lunar Eclipse, Public Night @ West Melton
Doors open @930 pm for gold coin donation – weather permitting

Mar 17th – CAS AGM 2026, in Rehua 427, University of Canterbury

Mar 18th – RASNZ Beatrice Tinsley Public lecture "Astronomy vs. the Billionaire Space Race", The Undercroft at the University of Canterbury (Gr Floor, Puaka James Hight Building) from 7pm – 9pm

Mar 19th – 22nd – Stardate South Island, Staveley

Inside this March 2026 Issue

Editor's Thoughts

A special edition of CASMag for March as we have a few events to bring to your attention which just would not fit into an email.

Weather gods permitting, CAS will be opening its doors to the public for the **Full Lunar Eclipse** on Tuesday March 3rd. More on this full lunar eclipse later on. The action really starts a bit past everyone's bedtime but there won't be another FULL lunar eclipse like this for another 2 year! If the clouds play ball and stay away, we will get a nice show, not to mention there's the parade of planets to see. TELL YOUR FRIENDS. If West Melton is too far, then get outside, look up and enjoy.

****Most important for March** is the **CAS Annual General Meeting on March 17th –** catch up on all that CAS got up to in 2025, vote in a new committee and get up to speed on what your society will be doing in 2026. Anyone who is interested in being a committee member, please let Simon know you'd like to join the posse. There's also the **RASNZ Beatrice Tinsley public lecture** on March 18th on the problem of satellite proliferation – aka "space litter". Lastly, we have **Stardate South Island (SI)** from March 19th – 22nd in Staveley. It's an amazing dark sky site and my source has indicated there are some great talks in the works :D

Anyway, clear skies everyone and keep looking up – *Preetha*

March 3rd starring "The Moon" – *by Preetha Sreedharan (Thanks for NASA for supplying the extra details)*

Total lunar eclipses are not uncommon, but each is still quite amazing. The coming Full Lunar Eclipse on Tuesday night will be visible from anywhere in New Zealand, anywhere not under clouds that is. Currently, the forecast appears hopeful although things can change. CAS will announce via Facebook and the forum as to whether the public night at the observatory is a go closer to the time. A lunar eclipse occurs when the Earth passes directly between the Sun and Moon, casting an earth-sized shadow across the lunar surface turning the Moon, always in Full moon phase, a deep reddish-orange. At total eclipse the moon will appear red hence the name 'blood moon'. Phones and camera are better at capturing the red and to our naked eyes the red may not be as intense. No special equipment needed except a spot of clear sky in the vicinity of the moon. Binoculars are great to have a closer look. Having viewed a few eclipses, I do advice a nice comfortable viewing position – lying on your back looking up at the moon or even better a recliner chair would be ideal. I have a moon chair which is just the best for a lunar eclipse. Here are some timings to help you optimize your time:

- 9.44pm the partial eclipse begins: The moon begins to darken as Earth's main shadow moves across it. To the naked eye, it looks like a bite is being taken out of the lunar disk. The part of the Moon inside the umbra appears very dark.

- 12.04am Wednesday 4 March - Total eclipse begins: The moon is fully in Earth's shadow and appears red. As Earth's shadow dampens the moon's light, other DSOs and constellations may be easier to spot than they usually would be during a full Moon.

At the time of the eclipse, the Moon will be in the constellation Leo, more specifically positioned so that Leo will look like he's sporting a giant red ornament above his hind paw. If you can make Leo out in the sky, it'll be no problem seeing this :D Wherever you are on Tuesday March 3rd, I hope you enjoy this lovely and amazing ballet starring our lovely moon. Just for fun, here is a visualization of what we would see if we were on the surface of the moon during a Lunar eclipse on earth.

Great Talks in February – *by Preetha Sreedharan*

In February we had the chance to listen to some interesting "behind the scenes" talks about the design, construction and commissioning of telescopes, namely the James Webb telescope, the Vera Rubin observatory and the South African Large telescope. While we usually hear about the amazing discoveries from the James Webb telescope, Dr Armin Rest from the Space Telescope Science Institute gave a wonderful talk about how the James Web started as a drawing on a napkin and transformed into the beautiful telescope with its array of mirrors currently sitting out in space looking back in time. At the same public talk, Prof Gautham Narayan gave an account of the Vera Rubin Observatory's 10-year Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST) and shared a very, very cool video of how the mirror was silvered. These two telescopes, one in space and one on earth, each expanding our view and understanding of the universe. These two talks were organized by University of Canterbury's Prof Ryan Ridden.

Thanks to Orlon, we had Prof David Buckley at our CAS February meeting. David gave a great presentation on his journey from how he went from being a young CAS member to become a prolific professional astronomer who continues to work in cutting edge astronomy research across the world. David's talk also included his experience on how the South African Large Telescope (SALT) came into being and the visits he made to the many many famous telescopes around the world to inform the design of the SALT.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Orlon, who works tirelessly each month to find a speaker for our CAS meetings. He has always found someone to give an awesome astronomy talk.

Rob's Skies for March – *by Rob Glassey*

Preetha and I got our Seestar S30pro recently. It has a huge 2.25 x 4 degree wide field view which has inspired me to hunt down fields with multiple interesting objects in one view. This is part of the fun of any wide field telescope. Rather than looking at detail of a single object we see a wider perspective showing relationships and contrasts between different objects, and how they sit against the wider background. This month I'll focus on a few of these.

NGC2451 and NGC2477 are a wonderful pair of open clusters. NGC2451 is big bold and bright, with an intense orange star at its centre, while NGC2477 is quite the contrast. It is more subtle (and harder to see with light pollution) but its and intensely rich open cluster with over 300 stars, right beside the bright blue star b Puppis. They stand out against the beautifully rich part of the milky way near the star Naos, especially under dark skies.

NGC2451 & NGC2477

A similar pairing is Messier 47 and Messier 46, also in Puppis. As a bonus, high power and dark skies can reveal the tiny planetary nebula NGC2438 that is in front of M46 (but much closer). It's a challenge to spot visually, but a nebula filter can help. As a further bonus there's another loose open cluster right beside M47, NGC2423. That's a bit of a challenge too.

Another interesting pairing is in Musca, where globular cluster NGC4372 meets the Dark Doodad! NGC4372 does not have a bright core. It is a diffuse haze of light that is almost ghost like beside a bight magnitude 6 star. At higher power a modest size telescope can resolve it into a delicate sprinkling of fine stars. Under dark skies, binoculars will reveal a dark dust lane that runs beside NGC4372, descriptively known as the Dark Doodad!

The familiar Jewel Box, NGC4755, hides a secret sibling, NGC 4852, much fainter, about 1 degree north east of the Jewel Box. It forms a flat isosceles triangle with the nearby southern cross star, Mimosa. Also look for the magnitude 8 vivid red/orange carbon star Ruby Crusis (DY Crusis), right next to Mimosa.

Finally, the big, bold and bright open cluster IC2601, the Southern Pleiades or Theta Carinae Cluster, also hides the much fainter (magnitude 8) open cluster Melotte 101 (Collinder 227) on it's southern side. This is pretty challenging!

STARDATE SOUTH ISLAND 2026

Registrations for Stardate S.I. 2026 is OPEN - Check out the Facebook page: "Stardate SI 2026", or email “campmother.stardatesi@gmail.com” for details.

Stardate SI organisers are also calling for presenters for 2026, so if you are interested in doing a talk, or just a short soapbox talk, please email Rob: rob@cas.org.nz

CAS Monthly Meeting venues for 2026 at the University of Canterbury

– It’s a bit of a mix so do make sure you make a note of it and head to the right room!

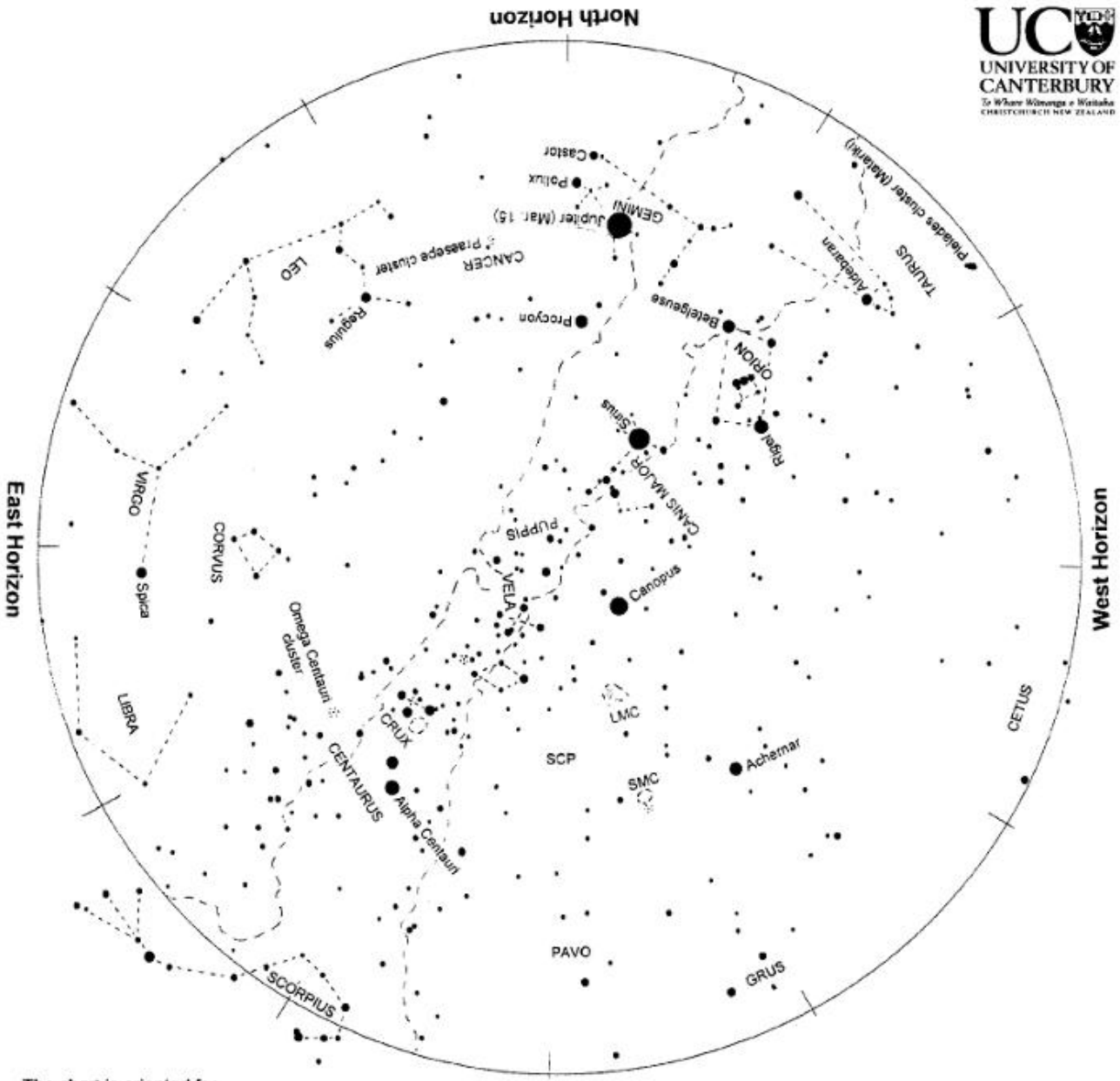
Date	Location	Speaker
17/2/2026	Ernest Rutherford 225	Prof David Buckley, South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) and ex-CAS member
17/3/2026	Rehua 427 Technology Workshop	CAS AGM 2026
21/4/2026	Jack Erskine 111	To be advised
19/5/2026	Jack Erskine 111	To be advised
16/6/2026	Jack Erskine 111	To be advised
21/7/2026	Ernest Rutherford 225	To be advised
18/8/2026	Jack Erskine 111	To be advised
15/9/2026	Jack Erskine 111	To be advised
20/10/2026	Ernest Rutherford 225	To be advised
17/11/2026	Ernest Rutherford 225	To be advised

From CAS Membership - CAS Membership subscriptions are due 1st April 2026

Payment by either, bank deposit or eftpos at a meeting. If by bank deposit, please use your name and membership as a reference so it can be matched to your membership. (if you know your member number please use this). Also advise any of your contact detail changes for your membership (e.g.: address, phone number) to membership@cas.org.nz

Online Banking Details (Please identify your payment): 03 0802 0098273 00

		Full
☐	Adult (any person 18years of age or over who is not eligile for any other category)	$70
☐	Family (two or more persons living at the same address)	$105
☐	Junior (under 18 years of age on 1st April in the current year)	$35
☐	Senior (over 65 Years)	$35
☐	Community Services Card Holder	$35
☐	Student (any person studying full-time at a tertiary institution, must reapply annually)	$35
☐	Corporate (members have voting rights of one member, but cannot take office)	$210



The chart is oriented for
Feb. 15 at midnight NZDT
Mar. 1 at 11 p.m. "
Mar. 15 at 10 p.m. "
April 1 at 9 p.m. "

Evening sky in March 2026

To use the chart, hold it up to the sky. Turn the chart so the direction you are looking is at the bottom of the chart. If you are looking to the south, then have 'South horizon' at the lower edge. As the earth turns the sky appears to rotate clockwise around the south celestial pole (SCP on the chart). Stars rise in the east and set in the west, just like the sun. The sky makes a small extra westward shift each night as we orbit the sun.

Jupiter is the 'evening star', appearing in low in the north soon after sunset. Sirius, the brightest true star, appears northwest of the zenith in early twilight. Orion, containing 'The Pot', is below and left of Sirius in the northwest sky. Canopus, the second brightest star, is southwest of overhead. The Southern Cross, Crux, and the Pointers are midway up the southeast sky. Nearby galaxies the Clouds of Magellan, LMC and SMC, are high in the south looking like misty patches in a dark sky. There is a total eclipse of the Moon on the 3rd.

Chart produced by Guide 8 software; www.projectpluto.com. Labels and text added by Alan Gilmore, Mt John Observatory of the University of Canterbury, P.O. Box 56, Lake Tekapo 7945, New Zealand. www.canterbury.ac.nz

The Evening Sky in March 2026

Total eclipse of the Moon on March 3-4. The full Moon starts to enter the fuzzy edge of the Earth's shadow, the penumbra, at 9:43 pm NZDT, but won't show obvious fading at first. At 10:50 it starts to move into the dark part of the shadow, the umbra. It is fully in the shadow just after midnight. At 12:34 the Moon is in the deepest part of the shadow. It begins to emerge from the umbra at 1:03 a.m. and is fully out by 2:18. It leaves the penumbra at 3:25. Just how dark the Moon gets depends on how much light is being bent around the Earth by the atmosphere. As no recent volcanoes have put dust into the air, the totally eclipsed Moon is likely to stay fairly bright and be a 'blood moon'.

Jupiter is the 'evening star', appearing low in the north at early twilight. It sets in the northwest after 2 a.m. at the beginning of the month, and before 12:30 a.m. at the end. The Moon will be near Jupiter on the 26th. From places with a sea horizon to the west brilliant **Venus** might be seen setting half an hour after the Sun.

Northwest of overhead is **Sirius**. It is the brightest true star in the sky, but fainter than Jupiter. Southwest of the zenith is **Canopus**, the second brightest star. Below and left of Sirius are bluish **Rigel** and orange **Betelgeuse**, the brightest stars in **Orion**. Between them is a line of three stars: Orion's belt. To southern hemisphere star watchers, the line of stars makes the bottom of 'The Pot'. Orion's belt points down and left to orange **Aldebaran**. It is at one tip of an upside-down V. The V is the face of Taurus the bull with Aldebaran being one of his eyes. Further down and left is the **Pleiades** or **Matariki** star cluster.

Sirius is the brightest star both because it is relatively close, nine light-years away, and 23 times brighter than the sun. **Rigel** is a bluish supergiant star, 40 000 times brighter than the sun and much hotter. It is 800 light-years away. Orange **Betelgeuse** is a red-giant star, cooler than the sun but much bigger and 9000 times brighter. Betelgeuse is 400 light-years from us.

The handle of "The Pot", or Orion's sword, has the Orion Nebula at its centre; a glowing gas cloud many light-years across and 1300 light years away. It is a place where dust and gas in space are gathering together to make new stars.

Below and right of Jupiter are **Pollux** and **Castor** marking the heads of **Gemini** the twins. Though paired in mythology, the two stars are not related at all. Castor is a hot white star like Sirius but 52 light years away. Golden Pollux is bigger and brighter but cooler than Sirius and 34 light-years away. Above and right of them is the **Praesepe** star cluster, marking the shell of **Cancer** the crab. Praesepe is also called the Beehive cluster, the reason obvious when it is viewed in binoculars. It is 500 light-years from us.

Crux, the Southern Cross, is in the southeast. Below it are Beta and **Alpha Centauri,** often called 'The Pointers'. Alpha Centauri is the closest naked-eye star, 4.3 light years away. Beta Centauri, like most of the stars in Crux, is a blue-giant star hundreds of light-years away. **Canopus** is also a very luminous distant star; 13 000 times brighter than the sun and 300 light-years away.

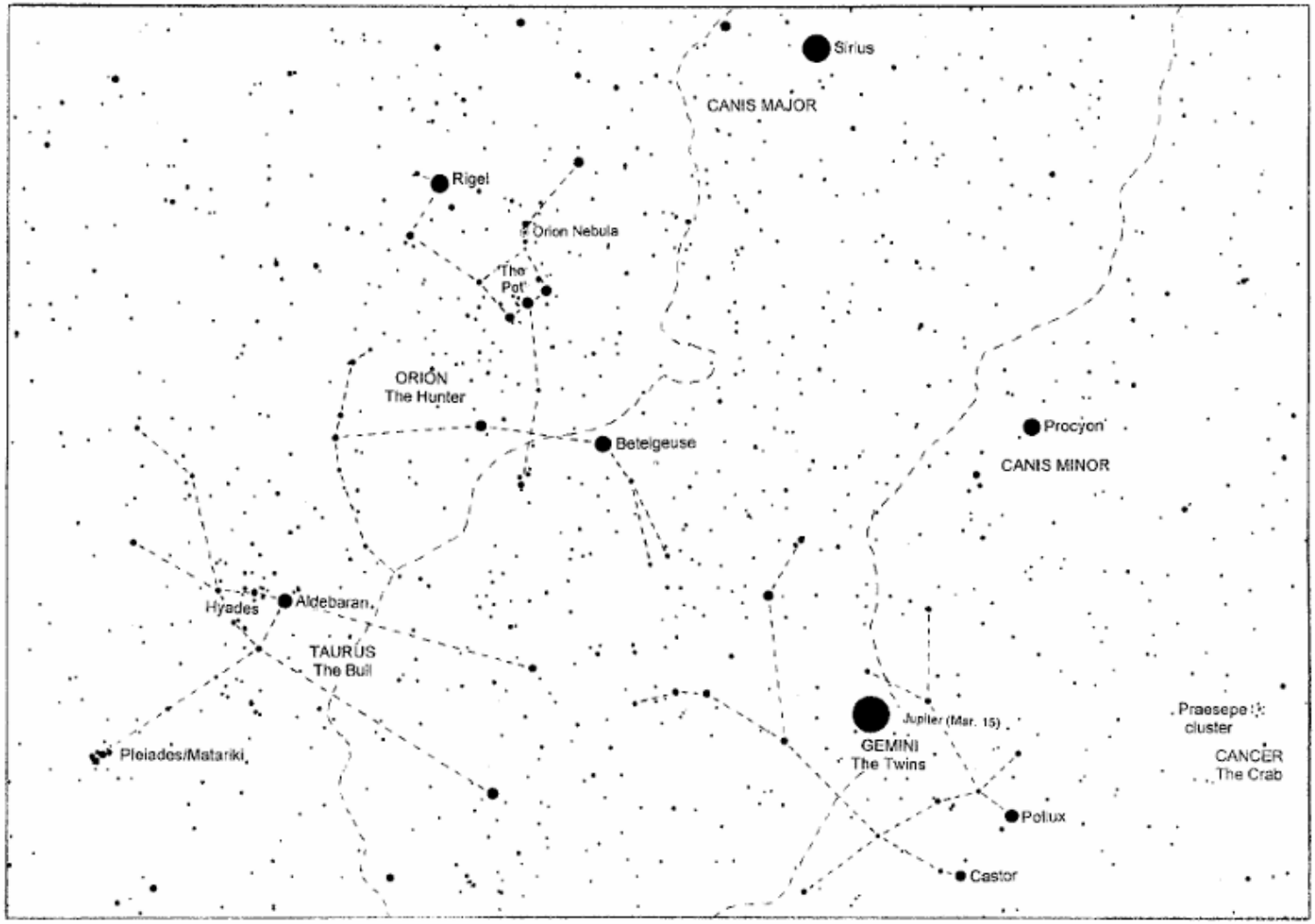
The **Milky Way** is brightest in the southeast toward Crux. It becomes broader lower in the southeast toward **Scorpius**. Above Crux the Milky Way can be traced to nearly overhead where it fades. It becomes very faint in the north, right of Orion where we are looking toward the Galaxy's nearby edge. The centre of the Galaxy is in the broad part of the Milky Way below Scorpius in the southeast.

On the 10th the Moon crosses in front of Antares, the bright orange star in Scorpius. Antares will disappear around 11:30 pm NZDT and reappear an hour later. The exact times depend on your location.

The Clouds of Magellan, **LMC** and **SMC** are high in the south sky. They are easily seen by eye on a dark moonless night, looking like misty patches. They are two small galaxies about 160 000 and 200 000 light years away. The Large Cloud is around a quarter the mass of the Milky Way.

A **light-year** (**l.y**.) is the distance that light travels in one year: nearly 10 million million km or 10^13 km. Sunlight takes eight minutes to get here; moonlight about one second. Sunlight reaches Neptune, the outermost major planet, in four hours. It takes sunlight four years to reach the nearest star, Alpha Centauri.

Notes by Alan Gilmore, University of Canterbury's Mt John Observatory, P.O. Box 56, Lake Tekapo 7945, New Zealand.
www.canterbury.ac.nz 260123



Northern Evening Sky in March 2026

The chart shows the northwest to north sky in the evening. Jupiter, the brightest 'star' in the evening sky, is a beacon for the region. The chart may need to be tilted to the left to match the sky, depending on the time of night.

Chart produced by Guide 8 software; www.projectpluto.com. Labels and text added by Alan Gilmore,
University of Canterbury's Mt John Observatory, P.O. Box 56, Lake Tekapo 7945, New Zealand. www.canterbury.ac.nz

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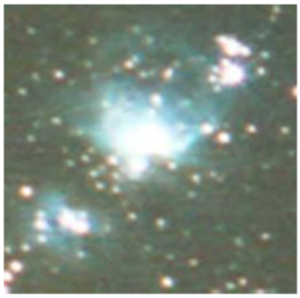
Interesting Objects in the North and Northwest sky in March 2026

Jupiter, the brightest 'star', low in the north at dusk, highlights this region. Jupiter is worth a look in any telescope with its four 'Galilean' moons lined up on each side. Not all four are seen every night as they pass in front of Jupiter and behind it and are eclipsed in the planet's shadow. At least two can be seen in binoculars, if you can hold the binoculars steady enough. Larger telescopes show parallel stripes in Jupiter's clouds. It is 720 million km away mid-month.

Sirius, the brightest true star, appear northwest of overhead as the sky darkens. It marks the head of **Canis major**, the big dog. The stars making the dog's hind legs are above Sirius, off the top of the chart. **Procyon**, below and right of Sirius, is the head of **Canis Minor**, the small dog. The two dogs follow Orion the hunter across the sky.

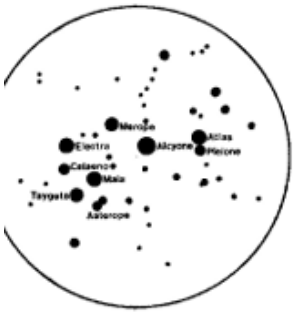
Orion is below and left of Sirius. Bluish **Rigel** and orange **Betelgeuse** are the first of its stars to appear. Between them, as the sky darkens. is a line of three stars, Orion's belt. Above the three, and fainter, is a short line of stars making Orion's sword. To southern hemisphere sky watchers the belt and sword form **The Pot** or The Saucepan. In the northern hemisphere view, upside down to us, Orion has a shield raised toward Taurus the bull and a club ready for action.



The **Orion Nebula** is visible in binoculars as a misty glow around the middle stars of Orion's Sword or the handle of The Pot. It is a vast cloud of dust and gas about 1300 l.y. away and more than 20 l.y. across. Ultra-violet light from a massive, extremely hot star in the cloud causes it to glow. Some stars in this region are only two million years old. The sun, by contrast, is 4.6 billion years old. Stars continue to form in a giant cloud behind the glowing nebula. There are many bright and dark nebulae in this region. The Horsehead nebula, a favourite of astronomy books, is beside the right-hand star of Orion's Belt, but is too faint to be seen in small telescopes.

Below and left of Orion is orange **Aldebaran**. It is at one tip of a V-shaped cluster of stars called the Hyades. The V is the face of Taurus, upside down to us, with Aldebaran making one eye. Aldebaran is not in the cluster, just on the line of sight at half the cluster's distance.

Further down and left, toward the northwest, is the **Pleiades/Matariki** star cluster.



The **Pleiades / Seven Sisters / Matariki / Subaru**, and many other names, is a cluster of stars well known in both hemispheres. Though often called the Seven Sisters, most modern eyes see only six stars. Many more are seen in binoculars. The cluster is about 440 light years away. Its brightest stars are around 200 times brighter than the sun. It is between 75 and 150 million years old.
The cluster is visible from all places except Antarctica. So all cultures have names and stories about it.

Below and right of Jupiter are **Pollux** and **Castor**, marking the heads of Gemini the twins. Though paired in myth, the two stars are unrelated. Pollux is 34 l.y. away and 43 times brighter than the Sun. It is cooler than the Sun (4,600 C), so has an golden tint. Castor is a multiple star: a bright white star with five fainter companions orbiting in a complex dance. It is 50 l.y. away.

Further to the right is the **Praesepe** star cluster. It looks like a faint spot of light to the eye. Binoculars show it as a compact group of stars. It is 577 light-years away. Praesepe is 625 million years old, so its bright stars burnt out long ago. That's why its stars are more similar in brightness than those of the much younger Matariki cluster.

A light-year (l.y.) is the distance that light travels in a year, about 10 million million (10^13) km.

Pictures and words by Alan Gilmore, University of Canterbury's Mt John Observatory, Lake Tekapo, New Zealand;
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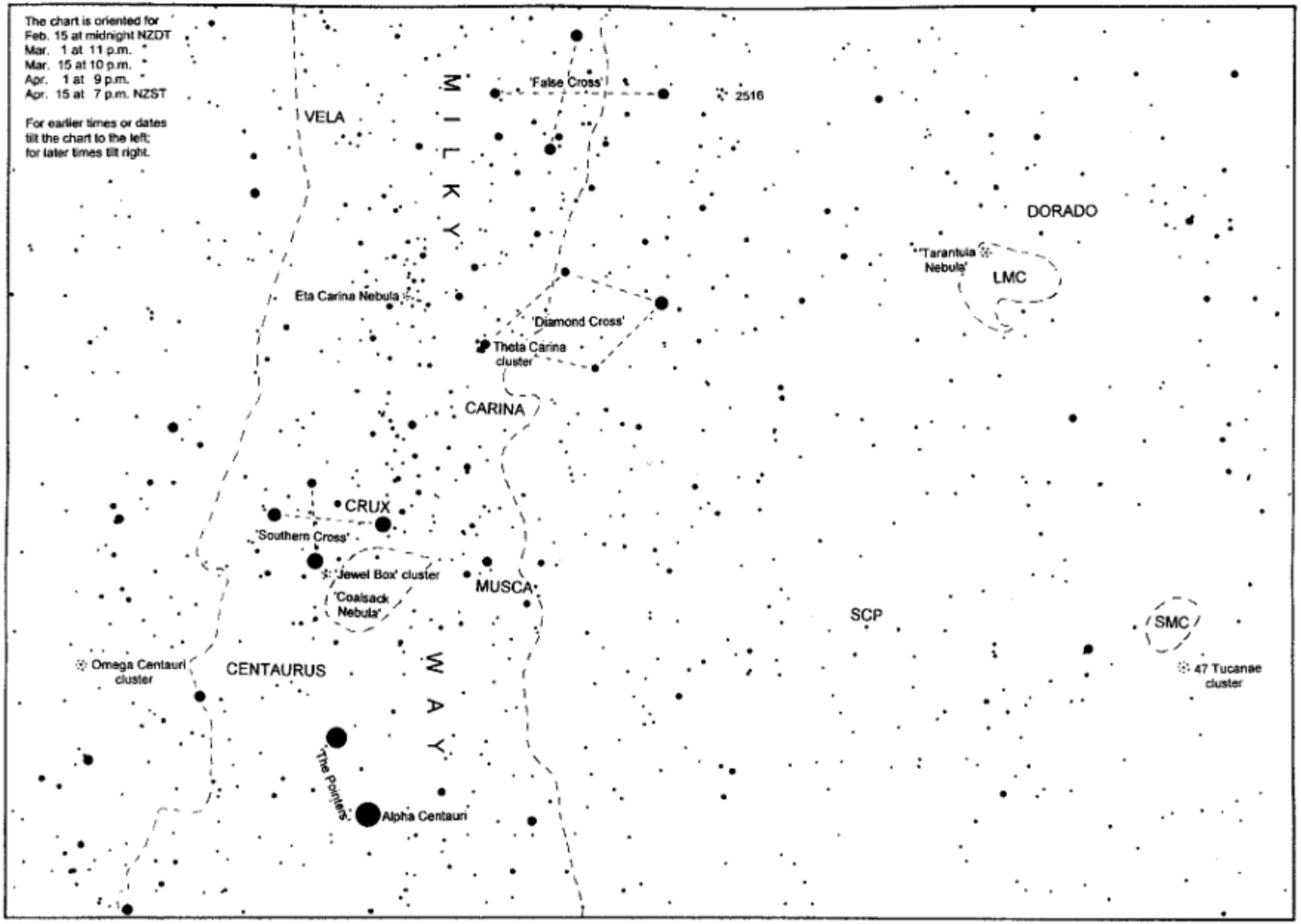

Southern Evening Sky in March-April

The chart shows the southeast sky. Interesting star clusters and nebulae are indicated with asterisks. They are described on the other side of this page.

Chart produced by Guide 8 software; www.projectpluto.com. Labels added by Alan Gilmore, Mt John Observatory of the University of Canterbury, P.O. Box 56, Lake Tekapo 7945, New Zealand. www.canterbury.ac.nz

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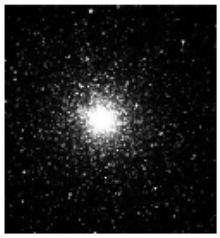
Interesting Objects in the Autumn Southern Sky

Large & Small Clouds of Magellan (LMC & SMC) appear as two luminous patches below Canopus on autumn evenings, easily seen by eye in a dark sky. They are two galaxies like the Milky Way but much smaller. Each is made of billions of stars. The Large Cloud contains many clusters of young luminous stars seen as patches of light in binoculars and telescopes. The LMC is about 160 000 light years away and the SMC 200 000 l.y away, both very close by for galaxies. (1 light year is about 10 000 billion km, 10^{13} km.)



47 Tucanae, looks like a faint fuzzy star just below the SMC. It is a globular cluster, a ball of millions of stars. A telescope is needed to see a peppering of stars around the edge of the cluster. Though it appears near the SMC it is much closer, 15 000 light years away, and has no connection to the Small Cloud. Globular clusters are mostly very old, 10 billion years or more; at least twice the age of the sun. **Omega Centauri**, left of the Pointers, is similar but larger than 47 Tucanae, around 17 000 light years away.

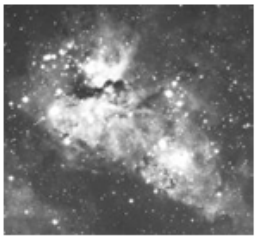
Tarantula nebula is a glowing gas cloud in the LMC. The gas glows in the ultra-violet light from a cluster of very hot stars at centre of the nebula. The cloud is about 800 light years across. It is easily seen in binoculars and can be seen by eye on moonless nights. This nebula is one of the brightest known. If it was as close as the Orion nebula (in The Pot's handle or Orion's sword) then it would be as bright as the full moon. The nebula is glowing in ultra-violet light from very hot, massive newly-formed stars in the region.

Canopus is the second brightest star after Sirius. It is 14 000 times brighter than the sun and 313 light years away. The planets Venus and Jupiter, and sometimes Mars, are brighter.

Alpha Centauri, the brighter and lower Pointer, is the closest naked-eye star: 4.3 light-years away. Alpha Cen is a binary star: two stars about the same size as the sun orbiting around each other in 80 years. A telescope magnifying 50x will split the pair. (A very faint and slightly closer star, Proxima Centauri, orbits a quarter of a light-year, or 15 000 sun-earth distances, from Alpha.)

Coalsack nebula is a cloud of dust and gas about 600 light years away, dimming the more distant stars in the Milky Way. Many similar 'dark nebulae' can be seen, appearing as slots and holes in the Milky Way. These clouds of dust and gas eventually coalesce into clusters of stars.

The Jewel Box is a compact cluster of young luminous stars 6400 light years away. The cluster formed less than 14 million years ago. To the eye it looks like a faint star.



Eta Carinae nebula is a glowing gas cloud about 8000 light years away. The golden star in the cloud, visible in binoculars, is Eta Carinae. (Eta is the Greek 'e'.) It is estimated to be to be 60 times heavier than the sun and more than a million times brighter but is dimmed by dust clouds around it. It is expected to explode as a supernova any time in the next few thousand years. Many star clusters are found in this part of the sky.

The **Theta Carinae cluster** of stars is at one point of the 'Diamond Cross'. It is also called the 'Five of Diamonds' cluster, the reason obvious when viewed in a telescope. The cluster is 550 light years away and is around 14 million years old.

NGC **2516** is right of the False Cross. To the eye it looks like a faint comet. It is a nice sight in binoculars. The cluster is about 1300 light years away.

Text and photos by Alan Gilmore, Mt John Observatory of the University of Canterbury,
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Members Interest Section

This section is for members who have as an interest under the umbrella of Astronomy. Your interests could be around Meteors / Comets / Photometry / Solar observing / Photography / Telescope building / Spectroscopy / Aurora's / Occultation's / Variable Stars / Satellite tracking / Lunar observations/ Jupiter impact monitoring / Radio Astronomy / Eclipses. You are welcome to share your thoughts and see who other like minded people would like to join you. You can form your own interest section. Below are a few members who have started their own interests sections. You can also use the CAS forum to discuss other ideas to check out who else would be interested in starting a new members interest section.

- **Tune into Jupiter or the Sun with Radio Astronomy**

Radio astronomy can be done during the day and even cloudy nights. Terry has built a receiver and with his computer can log activity of the Sun and Jupiter.
For more information contact Terry Richardson, email: vice.president@cas.org.nz Cell: 021 776 458

- **Bounce Signals off the Moon**

Beam a signal at the Moon or at a lunar orbiting satellite
For more information contact Simon Lewis Vice, email: president@cas.org.nz Cell: 022 640 6649

- **Spectroscopy**

CAS has recently purchased a diffraction grating which can be attached to a telescope eyepiece or camera on the telescope. The grating, like a prism, spreads the light from starlight into component colours (distribution of wavelengths). Thus begins the engaging look into the not so private lives of stars, nebulas and galaxies.
For more information contact Ray Pointon, email: rpointon@cyberxpress.co.nz

Other Information

***** IMPORTANT NOTE - UC PARKING ******

There are bollards now installed by the Rehua Building and these will be raised at 6pm daily till 7am. Do not park in the areas by these as you risk getting locked in! Please note its just this one area where the EV chargers are located that has been protected by bollards. All the rest of the campus remains the same. Be wary where you are parking!! The map at this link shows where accessibility parks are >>> https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/about-uc/our-campus-and-environment/maps

CASMag will be published every alternate month and will contain information on CAS activities, articles contributions from CAS members, monthly star charts. I'd like to invite members new and experienced, young and mature to send in your contributions, can be short articles (50 – 100 words) on what your experience has been being a CAS member, what you have learnt, what astronomy projects you're working on etc. Send your contributions to Editor@cas.org.nz by the 3rd week of the month at the latest.

Application for Membership

If you wish to apply for CAS membership, then please head on over to our website https://cas.org.nz/register to register and apply for membership.

Contacts information:

For Public Group Bookings - bookings@cas.org.nz

CAS COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS 2025/2026

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You can also see the contact information page on www.cas.org.nz

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