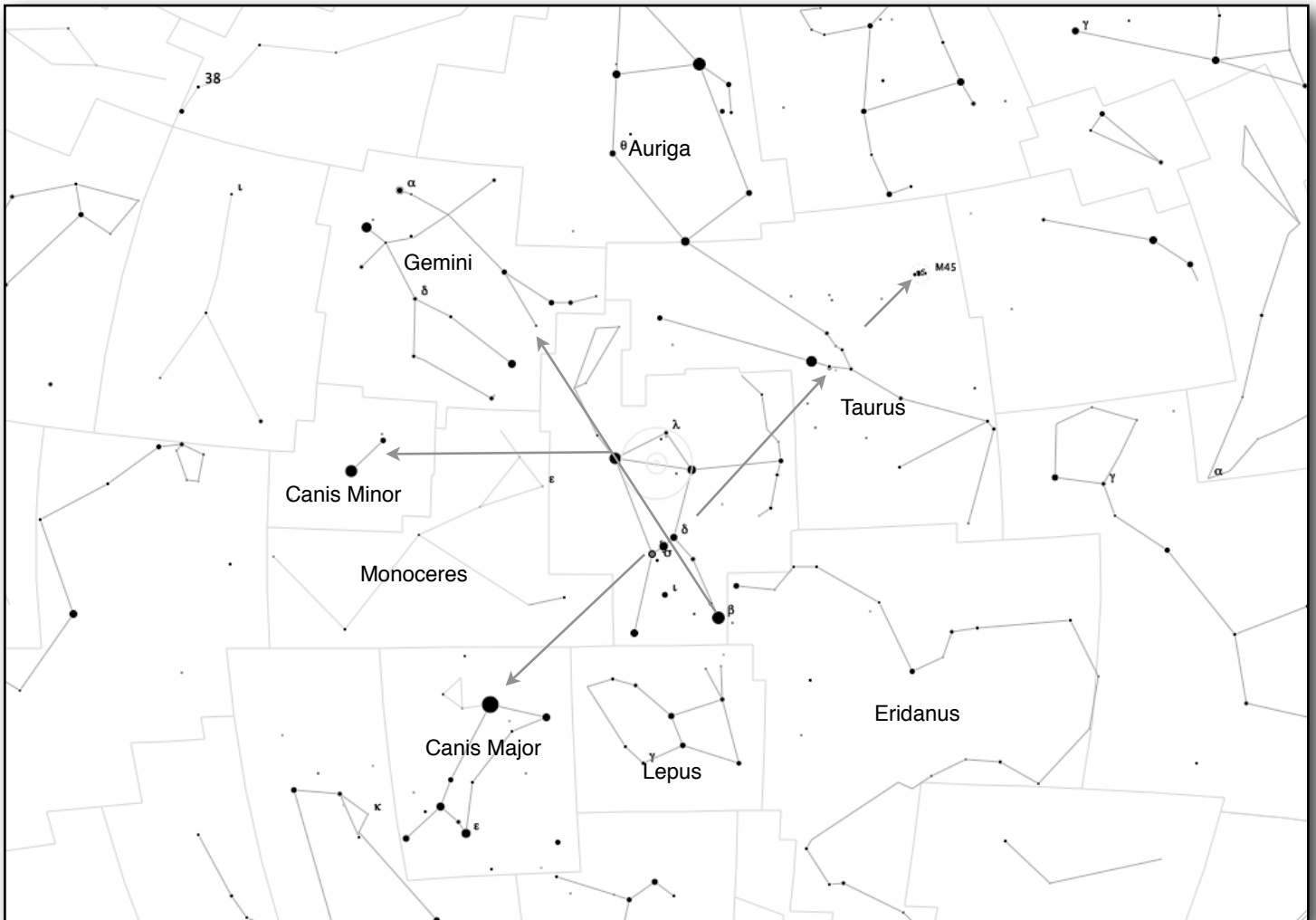


Hopping Around Orion



Orion's distinctive belt stars make it an excellent starting point to "hop" to neighboring constellations. If you can recognize Orion you can use some of the following tricks to find other constellations and observing objects.

☞ Imagine a line extending from Orion's belt going up and to the right. You'll come across a tilted V of stars called the Hyades star cluster. Bright Red Aldebaran starts the left side of the V. It is the red eye of the bull Taurus, and the V is the face of the bull. The long horns extend over Orion. Although the chart above shows part of the torso and front legs of Taurus, they're not as easy to pick out. If you continue along the imaginary line from Orion's Belt, you will find the Pleiades star cluster which is a beautiful sight in binoculars.

☞ If Orion is high enough, you can make an imaginary line along Orion's belt going down and to the left. You will find that it points to Sirius the brightest star in the night sky. It's known as the "Dog Star" and it's part of the constellation Canis Major, the great dog. The head of the dog consists of a triangle of stars that is sometimes hard to make out, but the body and tail are easier to see.

☞ Next, follow the line from Rigel, the bright blue star at the bottom right in Orion, to Betelgeuse, the bright red star that is the opposite shoulder star and continue through Orion's club, and you will find

the constellation Gemini, the twins. The stars that are the “heads” of the twins are Castor (the higher star in the chart above) and Pollux (the lower one). Another way to remember them is that Castor is closer to Capella and Pollux is closer to Procyon. (If you don’t know those stars, don’t worry, they’re described below)

☞ If you imagine Orion standing up and go straight up above his head past the horn tips of Taurus, you find a bright pentagon of stars in the constellation Auriga, the charioteer. The brightest of these stars is Capella, the goat star. Just to the south of it is a little triangle of stars called “the kids” (small goats are called kids, right?) Auriga holds three Messier open clusters, M36, M37 and M38. Hunt around with binoculars and you’re bound to find them. You may also note that one of the stars in the Auriga pentagon is “shared” with Taurus as the tip of one of the horns.

☞ Imagine a line connecting Orion’s two shoulder stars and follow it to the left. You’ll come across a bright star Procyon, in the constellation Canis Minor. The stick figure in the chart only has Procyon and one other star, making just a line to mark the constellation. You’ll have to use a lot of imagination to see a dog. Procyon’s name is interesting because it means “before the dog”. It earned this name because it rises before Sirius, the dog star. Once you can recognize Procyon and Capella, go back to Gemini and see if you can figure out which star is Castor and which is Pollux.

☞ Right below Orion is the constellation Lepus the Hare. You can imagine him cowering there hoping that Orion and his hunting dogs are too busy battling Taurus to notice him. I’ve always had a hard time imagining a hare in this constellation. Instead I see something that looks like a bow tie.

☞ Two other constellations border Orion but they’re more difficult to pick out. To the left of Orion is Monoceros the Unicorn. It doesn’t have many bright stars or a distinctive stick figure to identify it.

☞ To the bottom right of Orion is the constellation Eridanus, the river. It is a *very* long meandering series of stars that goes far down into the southern hemisphere. You won’t be able to see all of it unless you travel far south. With some practice it’s possible to pick out the stars that belong to Eridanus, but as a winding river, it’s not obvious what shape it’s supposed to be so don’t be discouraged if you can’t make it out.

The tricks above aren’t the only way to find other constellations. Feel free to make up your own! The same goes for the constellation figures. If you see other shapes figures that’s fine! Anything that helps you recognize the night sky is good!

Clear skies and good observing!