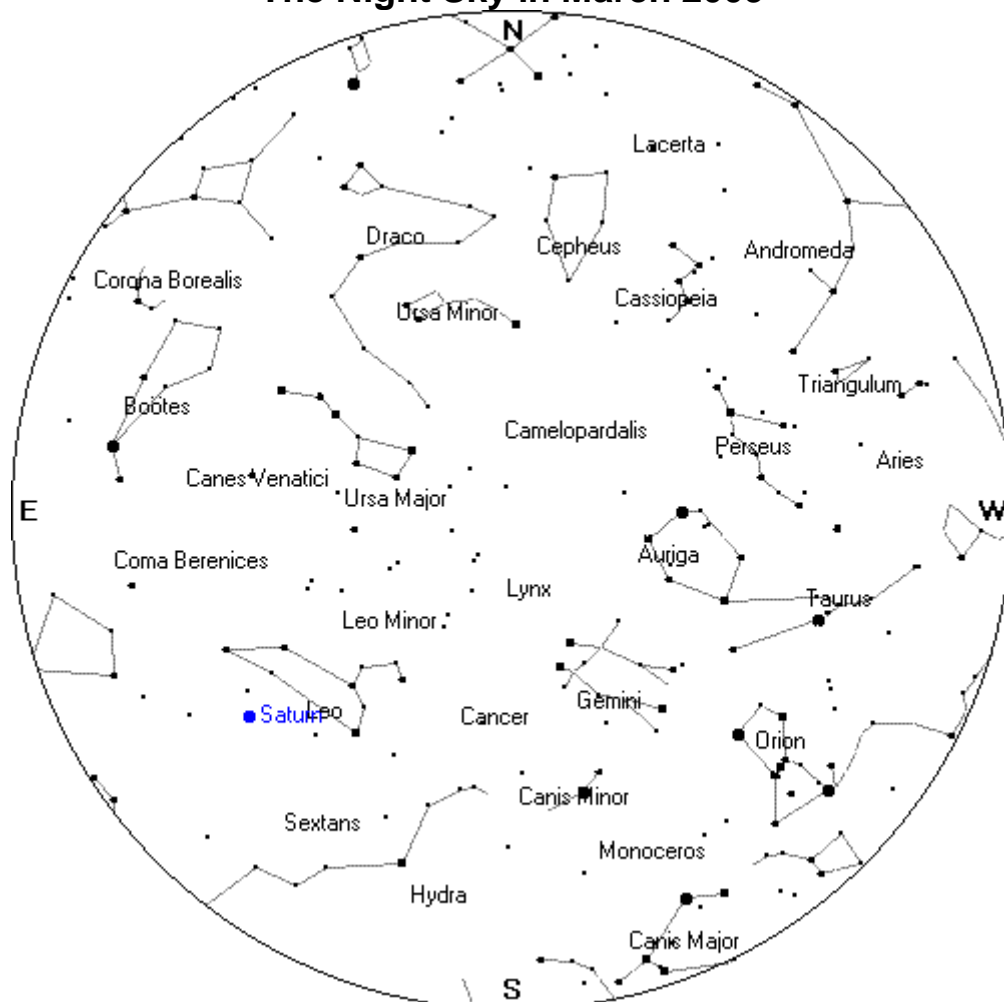


## Dundee Astronomical Society The Night Sky in March 2009

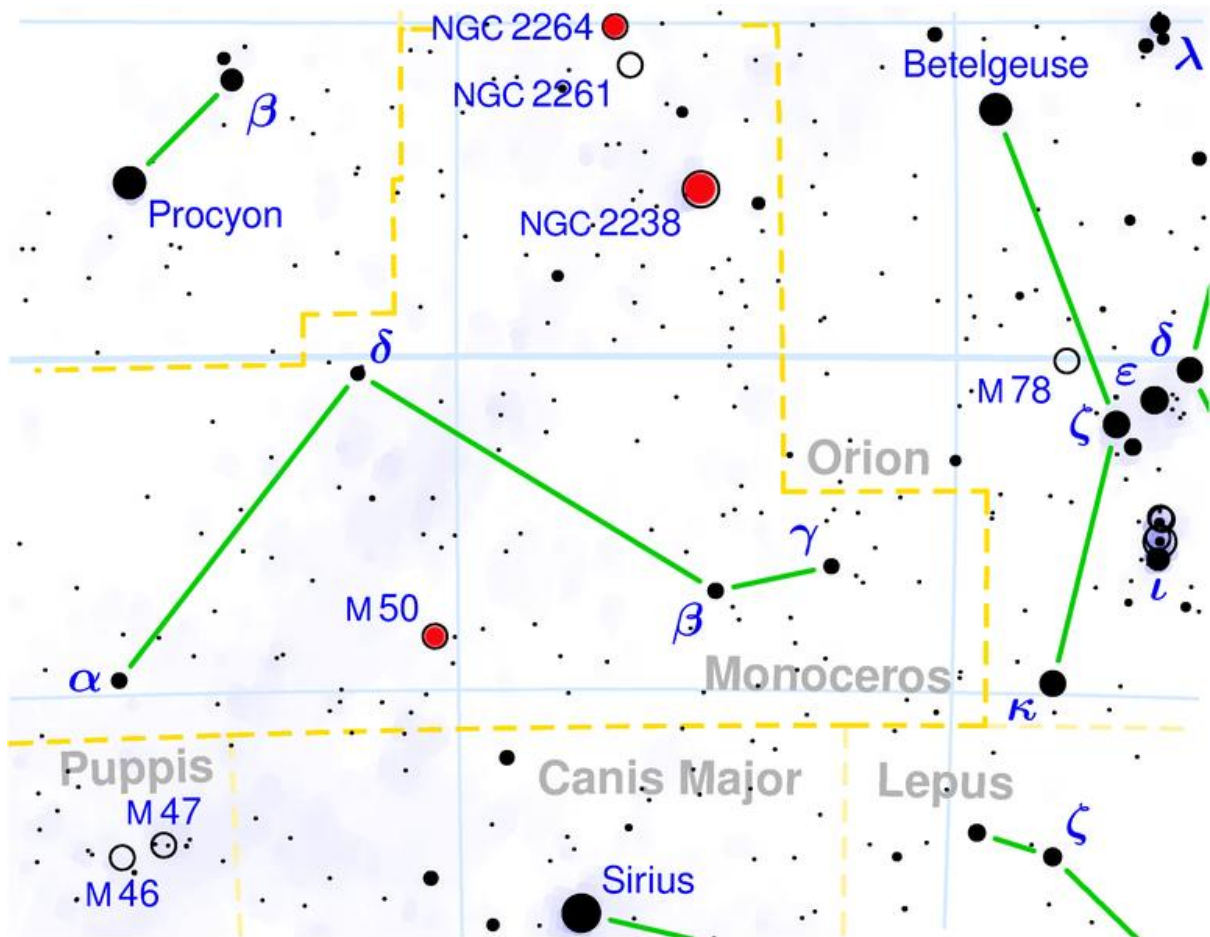


### The Sky at 9pm on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2009

[chart courtesy of [www.heavens-above.com](http://www.heavens-above.com)]

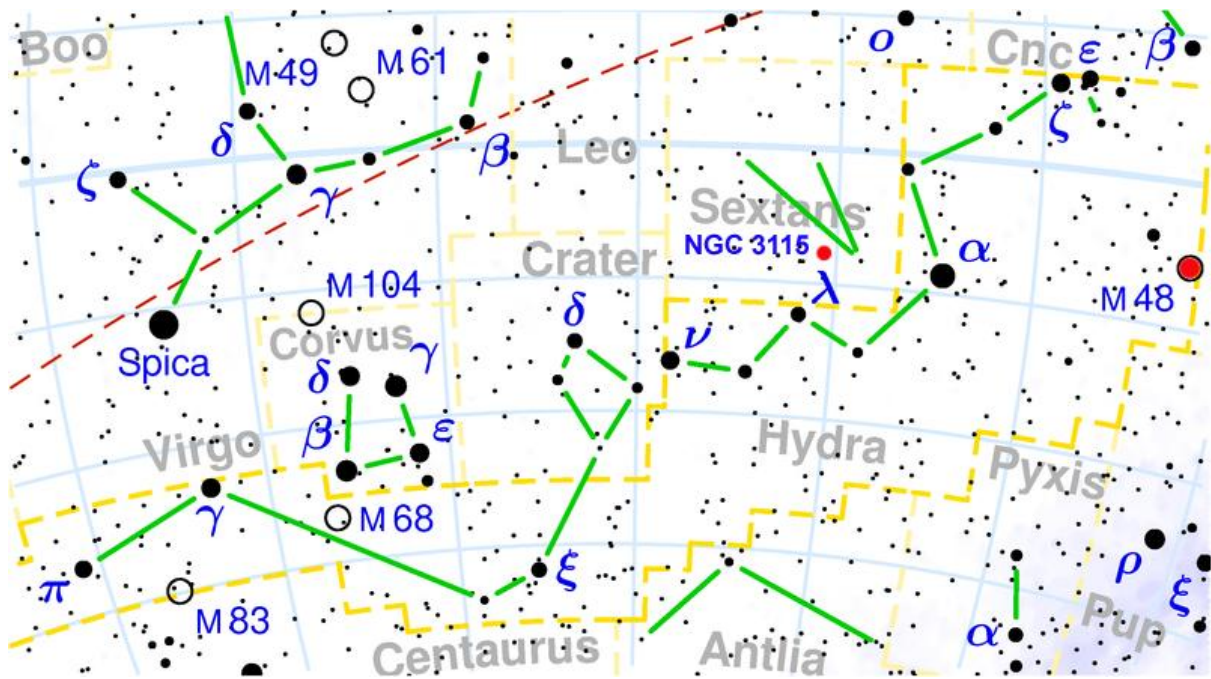
By March, Orion is heading west, but before we leave this area of sky it is worth having a look at the constellation of Monoceros. Following Orion and below Canis Minor it is not particularly noticeable with the brightest stars being of 4<sup>th</sup> magnitude.  $\beta$  Monocerotis is a fine triple star with magnitudes of 4.7, 5.2 and 6.1. It was discovered by William Herschel in 1781 and he found it to be *'one of the most beautiful sights in the heavens'*.

Monoceros has a few deep sky objects which are worth a look. M50 is an open cluster of magnitude 5.9 at a distance of 3,000 light years and is believed to be about 78 million years old. The Rosette nebula, NGC 2237 – 9, is an emission nebula with dark areas and Bok globules. It is best seen using binoculars or a low power telescope on a clear, moonless night as its size is 80'x60'. It lies at a distance of 5,200 light years. The third object of note is the combined Christmas Tree Nebula and Cone Nebula (NGC 2264). These are H II regions of star production at a distance of 2,600 light years and a size of 20'.



Moving east towards the brightest star of Hydra, Alphard the Solitary One, we should easily see the open cluster M48 using binoculars. This cluster is at a distance of 1,500 light years and is 300 million years old. Hydra occupies a place in the sky where there are few bright stars and Alphard is only very slightly brighter than second magnitude. The few deep sky objects in Hydra are too far south for us, at these latitudes, to see.

In keeping with the area, the nearby constellation of Sextans has its brightest star at magnitude 4.5. In passing, it is worth having a look for the Lenticular Galaxy NGC 3115, the Spindle Galaxy. It was discovered by William Herschel in 1787 and is several times bigger than our own Milky Way Galaxy. Although this has a magnitude of 9.7, the central region is quite bright and should be easily seen with a moderate sized telescope. This galaxy is 32 million light years distant.



## The Planets

Mercury, at superior conjunction on the 31<sup>st</sup>, is not visible this month.

Venus closes in on the sun during early March and reaches inferior conjunction on March 28<sup>th</sup>. It will not be observable from the third week in March.

Although Mars is becoming closer to the Earth, its diameter is still only about 4 arc seconds and little detail will be seen, even in a large telescope. Mars is in the constellation of Aquarius during March.

Jupiter may be seen in the eastern morning sky in the constellation of Capricornus. It will, however, remain quite low in the sky throughout the year.

Saturn is in opposition on the 9<sup>th</sup> and remains towards the eastern end of, and below, Leo.

Both Uranus and Neptune are poorly placed for observation.

## The Moon.

The moon is at first quarter on the 4<sup>th</sup>, Full on the 11<sup>th</sup>, last quarter on the 18<sup>th</sup> and new on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Ken Kennedy**  
**Director of Observations**