

The Sky This Month

11 March – 08 April 2024

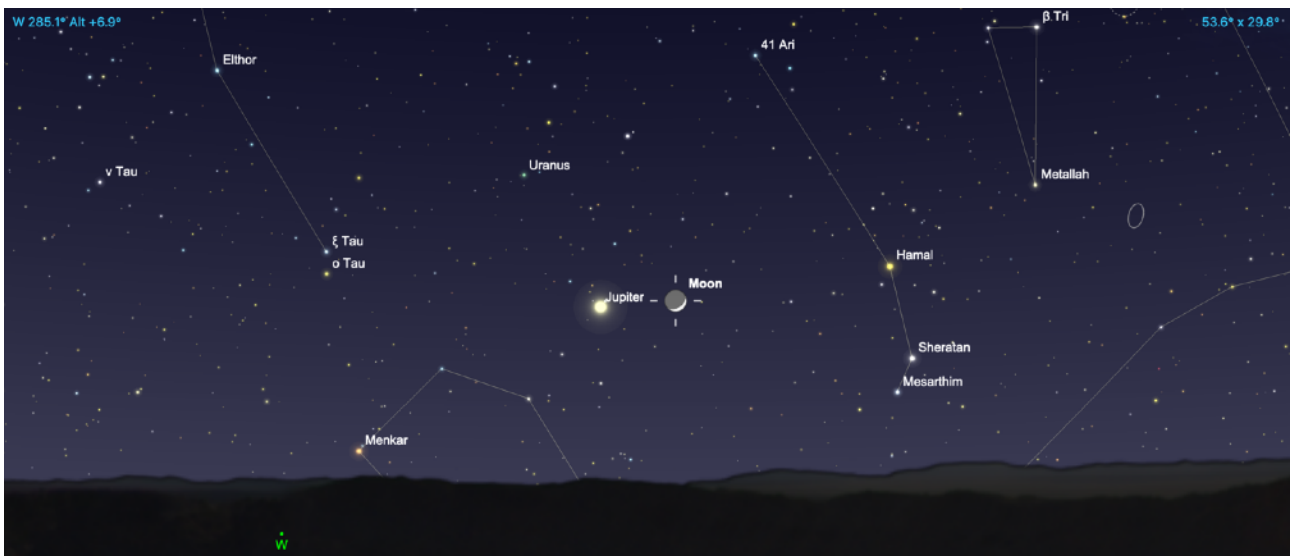


What's On

Wednesday, 13 March @ 21:47

1. Moon & Jupiter

Keep watch after sunset on 13th March to see a close encounter between Jupiter and the waxing crescent moon. At 21:47, the pair will be visible 9° above the western horizon, passing within only 2.89° each other in the constellation Aries.



Sunday, 24 March @ 18:30

2. Best evening to see Mercury

The planet Mercury reached its greatest eastern elongation of 19° on 24 March. Evenings within about a week of this night will be your best opportunities to view the magnitude -0.2 planet. At sunset on this night, Mercury will be 16° above the western horizon and begin to appear against the darkening sky. It will set just one hour 52 minutes afterward at 20:22.

Constellation of the month:

3. Camelopardalis [*cuh-MEL-oh-PAR-dul-liss*] ‘The Giraffe’

Draw an imaginary line from Polaris towards Ursa Major. Camelopardalis lies along this line, between Ursa Major and the North Star. Look for a faint group of stars forming a somewhat irregular shape.

The celestial giraffe contains no stars brighter than 4th magnitude – and only four at that. Long, faint, and straggling, the pattern is a challenge unless viewed under dark skies, but don't let that put you off!

4. β Camelopardalis

Shining at fourth magnitude, β Camelopardalis is the brightest star in the constellation outperforming the constellation's alpha star by 0.25 magnitude. This pale-yellow supergiant star is seven times more massive than the Sun and blazes forth with over 1,500 times the energy of our star. It looks dim because of its great distance – 872 light years.

5. Kemble's Cascade

Although not a true cluster, Kemble's Cascade is a striking asterism within Camelopardalis. It is a 20° long celestial waterfall of stars that 'cascade' into the misty pool of open cluster NGC 1502. It can be viewed through binoculars and is a stunning sight in the smallest of telescopes at low power.

6. NGC 1502

Visible through binoculars at the south-east end of beautiful Kemble's Cascade, NGC 1502 is an irregular sphere of starlight, surrounded by a prickly shell of outliers. Through a small telescope, a 7th magnitude ruby (actually the double star Struve 485), lies at the centre of more than a dozen suns – many in pairs.

7. NGC 1501 (Oyster planetary nebula)

Just about 1° south and slightly west of open cluster NGC 1502 (and in the same low power field of view) is the subtle Oyster planetary nebula. Easy to spy in small telescopes, this young eclipse of light “frothy” gas and dust was expelled by a dim and dying sun-like star as its core. At a low power, it

appears as an 11th magnitude star. A magnification of 100x will transform that “star” into a graceful circle of smoky light.

8. NGC 2403 (Camelopardalis Galaxy)

This spiral galaxy is located within Camelopardalis and is visible with a telescope. It is a relatively bright galaxy, making it a fascinating target for amateur astronomers. Magnifications of 75–100x will show its inner lens brightening gradually to the centre. Larger telescopes should have no problem resolving its spiral arms.