

# THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE



With Glenn Dawes

The constellation of Corvus reveals its deep-sky treasures and the comet Pons–Brooks drops by

## When to use this chart

**1 May at 00:00 AEDT (30 Apr, 14:00 UT)**  
**15 May at 23:00 AEST (13:00 UT)**  
**31 May at 22:00 AEST (12:00 UT)**

The chart accurately matches the sky on the dates and times shown for Sydney, Australia. The sky is different at other times as the stars crossing it set four minutes earlier each night.

## MAY HIGHLIGHTS

Periodic comet 12P/Pons–Brooks orbits the Sun every 71 years, having a favourable return in 2024. After reaching perihelion on 21 April, it opens May around mag. +4.5, close to the western horizon as twilight ends. The comet can be found below Rigel (Beta Orionis) early in the month, rising slowly and passing within 5° of the star on 17–23 May. If a tail is visible, it should point towards Rigel in early May. The month closes with Pons–Brooks in Lepus, possibly faded to mag. +6.0.

## STARS AND CONSTELLATIONS

The Milky Way's most southerly region is brilliantly displayed in May. The closest obvious asterism to the South Celestial Pole is the trapezium in Musca, beneath (south of) the Southern Cross (Crux). Flanking it are two rivals to this claim: Triangulum Australe to the left (east) and the Diamond Cross (part of Carina) to the right (west). Within these are the closest second-magnitude stars to the pole: Atria (Alpha Triangulum Australe) and Miaplacidus (Beta Carinae).

## THE PLANETS

Evenings contain no planets in May. Saturn rises around 01:30 mid-month, followed by Neptune an hour later, Mars at 03:30 and finally Mercury around 05:00. The eastern pre-dawn sky finds Saturn, Mars and Mercury in a line, with the waning

crescent Moon in conjunction with each on 4, 5 and 6 May respectively. The month commences with Mars and Neptune only 1° apart then swiftly separating. Early May sees the best morning return for Mercury this year, rising one hour before dawn.

## DEEP-SKY OBJECTS

This month, a trip to Corvus the Crow, whose most obvious feature is four main stars in a trapezium shape. The northeast corner is mag. +3.0 Delta (δ) Corvi, a nice naked-eye double with mag. +4.3 Eta (η) Corvi 0.6' away. Binoculars show them to be blue and yellowish-white respectively. Move 4' northeast to discover the double star Struve 1669 (RA 12h 41.3m, dec. -13° 01'). It's ideal for small telescopes, presenting two yellow components with

matching brightness (mag. +5.9), separated by a snug 5.5 arcseconds.

Corvus is home to a little-known but bright and large planetary nebula, NGC 4361 (RA 12h 24.5m, dec. -18° 47'). The nebula is a circular disc (around 100 arcseconds across) with a central 13th-magnitude star. Its total magnitude is -10.5, being brightest in the centre and gradually fading towards the edge.

## Chart key

GALAXY	DIFFUSE NEBULOSITY	ASTEROID TRACK	STAR BRIGHTNESS: ● MAG. 0 & BRIGHTER ● MAG. +1 ● MAG. +2 ● MAG. +3 ● MAG. +4 & FAINTER
OPEN CLUSTER	DOUBLE STAR	METEOR RADIANT	
GLOBULAR CLUSTER	VARIABLE STAR	QUASAR	
PLANETARY NEBULA	COMET TRACK	PLANET	

