

THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE



With Glenn Dawes

With countless beautiful regions on show, autumn is a great time for our magnificent southern skies

When to use this chart

1 Mar 00:00 AEDT (28 Feb, 13:00 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.
15 Mar 23:00 AEDT (12:00 UT)
31 Mar 22:00 AEDT (11:00 UT)

MARCH HIGHLIGHTS

On 23 March, Earth passes through the plane of Saturn's rings, when the magnificent rings will be just a straight line across the centre of the planet. Our view will switch from the north to the south side of the rings, a rare event that persists until 2038. Unfortunately, Saturn is only five days past solar conjunction on the 23rd and unobservable. However, 45 minutes before sunrise on the 30th it will be low in the east and still showing a very narrow perspective, the rings tilted by only 0.3°.

STARS AND CONSTELLATIONS

The northern sky at twilight still shows the distinctive icons of the Winter Hexagon enclosing the bright stars of Taurus, Orion (plus his faithful hunting dogs) and Gemini. Evenings present the most southerly regions of the Milky Way stretched out overhead, with Crux (Southern Cross) and pointers, and then west to Carina and its gorgeous nebulae and star clusters. The mornings see the arrival of the distinctive winter asterisms of Scorpius and Sagittarius's teapot.

THE PLANETS

March opens with Saturn, Mercury and Venus very close to the western horizon but quickly lost to the twilight glow. The early evening sees Jupiter in the north, spending March close to bright Aldebaran. To its west is Mars, forming a triangle with

Gemini's twin stars, the Red Planet being noticeably brighter than both and showing good colour contrast with yellow Pollux and white Castor. The morning sky is quite sparse until the end of March when Saturn arrives, rising around the start of dawn.

DEEP-SKY OBJECTS

The constellation of Vela, the Sails is our destination this month. North of the Eta Carinae region, just across the border lie two fourth-magnitude stars separated by 2.5°. The first is x Velorum (HD 86111) (RA 10h 39.3m, dec. -55° 36'), a double star dominated by a mag. +4.4 yellow primary with a mag. +6.1 companion a distant 52 arcseconds away. The second, due west, is J Velorum, a triple star. The dominating white member (mag. +4.5) has

two companions: mag. +7.2 and mag. +9.2, separated from 'J' by 7 arcseconds (to the east) and 36 arcseconds (to the south), respectively. Next up, a brilliant globular cluster, NGC 3201 (RA 10h 17.6m, dec. -46° 25'). Visible as a small hazy patch in binoculars, a telescope reveals a bright (mag. -6.7), wide (7-arcminute) core, quite diffuse, with no central condensation. Under good seeing, a scattering of faint stars can be seen across its face.

Chart key

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

