

What's Up – July 2021

What's Up – July Sun and Moon

The Last Quarter Moon falls on the 1st of July at 23h10 and the New Moon occurs on the 10th of July at 03h16. The First Quarter Moon falls on the 17th of July at 12h10 and the Full Moon occurs on the 24th of July at 04h36. There is a second Last Quarter; it falls on the 31st of July at 15h15.

The Moon will be at perigee (closest approach to Earth) at a distance of about 364 520 km on the 21st of July at 12h23. On the 5th of July at 16h46, the Moon will be at apogee (furthest from Earth) at a distance of about 405 341 km.

Planetary and Other Events – Morning and Evening

Venus and Mars, located near the stars of the constellation Cancer, are still visible in the evening sky. Venus will be very close to Mars on the 12th and the 13th of July. Mercury, the smallest planet in our solar system, is located near the stars of the constellation Taurus and is visible in the morning sky, just before sunrise. Jupiter is located near the stars of the constellation Aquarius and is also visible in the morning sky. Jupiter will be near the Moon on the 26th of July. Saturn, is also visible in the morning sky and can be located near the stars of the constellation Capricornus. Saturn will be near the Moon on the 24th of July. Uranus is also visible in the morning sky and, though not well positioned, can be located near the stars of the constellation Aries. Neptune can also be seen in dark skies in the morning sky near the stars of the constellation Pisces. You need good eyesight and dark skies to spot Uranus, and you need at least a good pair of binoculars to view Neptune.

The dwarf planet Pluto reaches opposition on the 18th of July and is therefore well positioned for observation, although you need a large telescope to see it. It can be located near the stars of the constellation Sagittarius.

Four meteor showers are active in July. Of these, observing prospects are good for the July Phoenicids. The July Phoenicids meteor shower is active from the 10th of July to the 16th of July, peaking on the 13th. To view the shower, find a dark spot and look near the constellation of Phoenix. The best time to view the July Phoenicids is from 23:00 PM low in the SE to 05:00 AM, when they'll be nearly overhead towards the SE.

The Southern delta Aquariids meteor shower is active from the 21st of July to the 29th of August, peaking on the 29th of July. To view the Southern delta Aquariids, find a dark spot and look near the constellation of Aquarius for the Southern delta Aquariids radiant. The best time to view the Southern delta Aquariids is from around 21:30 PM in the east until dawn, when they'll be in the NW.

The alpha Capricornids meteor shower is active from the 15th July to the 25th August peaking on the 30th July. To view the shower, look near the constellation of Capricornus for the alpha Capricornids radiant. The best time to view the alpha Capricornids is from around 20:00 PM in the east until 04:00 AM, when they'll be in the west.

The Piscis Australids are active from the 19th of July to the 17th of August, peaking on the 28th July. They are best viewed between 21:30 PM (east) and 05:00 AM (west) looking towards the constellation of Piscis Austrinus (the Southern Fish, not to be confused with Pisces).

The Evening Sky Stars

The Milky Way is a dominant presence on July evenings, with the brilliant stars of Centaurus nearly overhead and the Cross just to the south. Marking the southern edge of the Milky Way below the Centaur are the dimmer stars of the Housefly and the Southern Triangle. To the west of Centaurus along the Milky Way is the great ship Argo, with Canopus, second brightest star in the night sky, glowing low in the SW. Sirius appears brighter in our sky only because it's so much closer (9 light years as compared to Canopus' distance of 313 light years). Canopus is

a supergiant star, 8-9 times as massive as our own Sun, 65 times the Sun's diameter and 15,000 times as bright. Although the surface temperature of Canopus is 'only' 7800 degrees, its atmosphere is heated to about 20 million degrees, meaning plenty of hard radiation for any alien astronaut unfortunate enough to be nearby.

To the east of the Centaur are the stars of the Wolf and the Scorpion, with the Altar just to the south at the edge of the Milky Way. But the thickest part of the Milky Way lies around Sagittarius, the Archer, and the stars of the Scorpion's sting. In this direction is the centre of our galaxy, and hidden by thick dust clouds is the black hole in the exact centre, 4 million times the mass of our Sun and a bit smaller than the size of Earth's orbit.

Just north of the Centaur is the tail of Hydra, the giant water snake, with its body extending far into the west almost parallel to the Milky Way. Low in the west is Alphard (Arabic for 'the solitary one'). Low in the NW are the stars of the Lion, while low in the northeast are the dim stars of the great hero Hercules with the delicate semi-circle of the Northern Crown between it and a bright orange Arcturus (the 'Bear Guard') low in the north.

Arcturus is the brightest star in Boötes (the Herdsman), which some say is the most ancient constellation in the sky. It looks brighter than any other star in the northern hemisphere, and is an orange giant 37 light years away, 215 times as bright as our sun, and 26 times the Sun's diameter. Arcturus' orbit around the centre of the galaxy is quite different from the orbits followed by most stars in our neighbourhood, and it has only 20% as much iron. One possible explanation is that it may originally have been part of a small galaxy that merged with our Milky Way billions of years ago.

The Morning Sky Stars

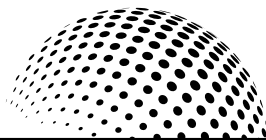
The Milky Way runs completely around the horizon on July mornings, appearing low in the sky in every direction. That means that when you look overhead you are looking straight from our Milky Way galaxy toward the South Galactic Pole.

Orion the Hunter, with orange Betelgeuse and blue-white Rigel, is rising in the east. From the northeast, the V-shape of the Bull's head (with bright Aldebaran as the Bull's glowing eye) charges Orion. And riding on the back of the Bull is the open cluster of stars called the Pleiades, which is about 400 light-years away. The Pleiades are also widely known as the Seven Sisters, and known to the Namaqua as "the daughters of the sky god".

On the low in the ESE we see brilliant Sirius, brightest star in the night sky, among the other stars of Orion's Large Dog, while the Hare scampers between the Dog and the Hunter. The second brightest star in the night sky is Canopus, seen in the southeast on July mornings, and marking the Keel of the upside-down Ship Argo. (As most of the constellations were invented in the northern hemisphere, we tend to see them bottom side up.) High in the south is bright Achernar, marking one end of the celestial river Eridanus. The other end is near Rigel about where Orion's knee would be. Below Achernar in the south are the southern Water Snake and the Toucan, with the Peacock a bit lower in the SW. Alpha Pavonis is actually a pair of hot, luminous blue-white stars about 183 light years away, revolving around each other every 11.75 days. It's about 450 times as luminous as the Sun.

High in the W are the Crane and the Southern Fish, with its bright star Fomalhaut, with the stars of the Sea Goat making a dim irregular triangle a bit lower in the W. High in the N and NE is the appropriately large constellation of the Whale, reminding us that in a couple of months it will be time for whale-watching again along the Cape coast.

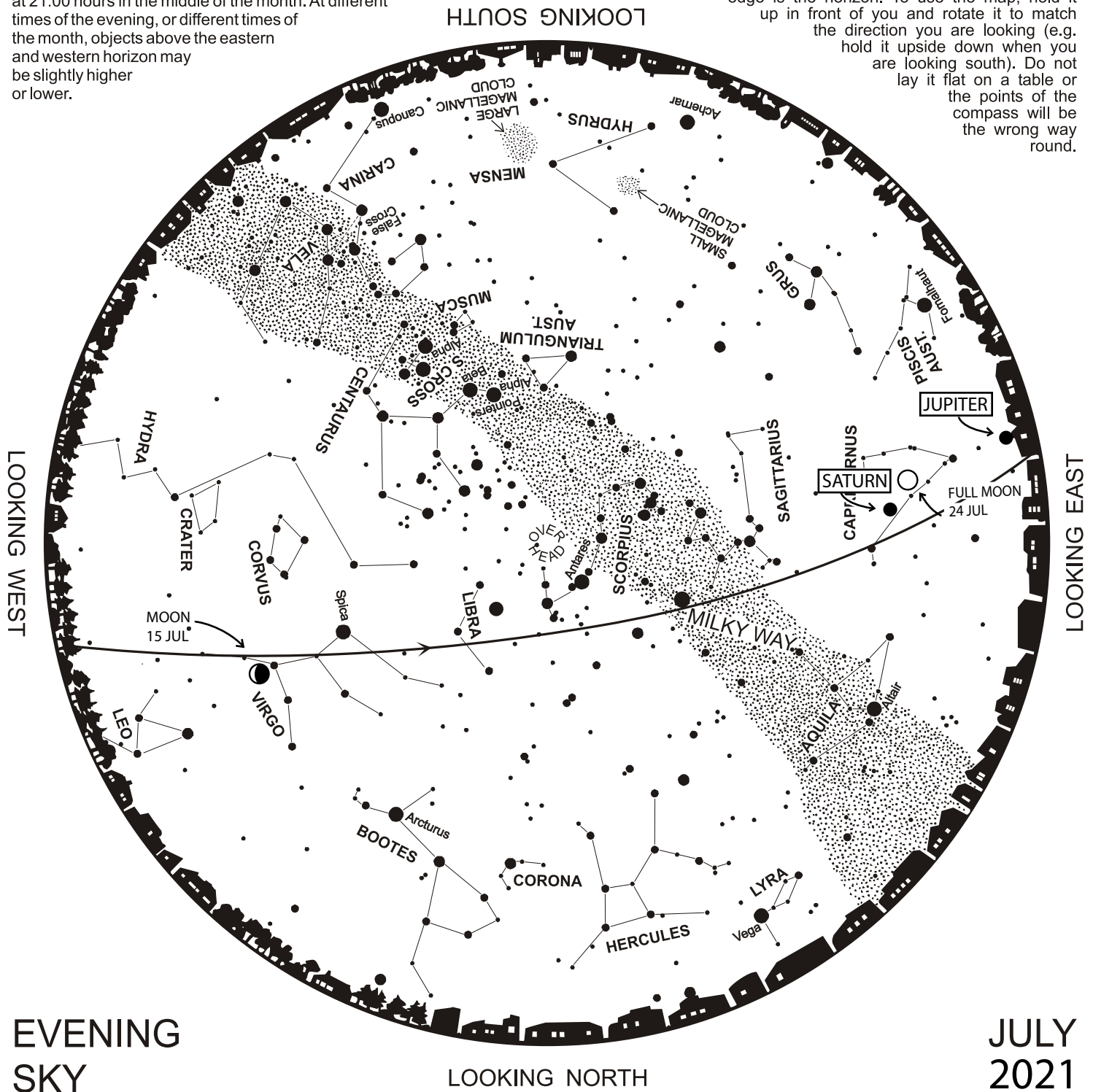
Sivuyile Manxoyi 01 July 2021
Sivuyile@saa.ac.za



IZIKO PLANETARIUM AND DIGITAL DOME

The map shows the night sky visible above the Cape at 21:00 hours in the middle of the month. At different times of the evening, or different times of the month, objects above the eastern and western horizon may be slightly higher or lower.

The centre of the map is the overhead point, the edge is the horizon. To use the map, hold it up in front of you and rotate it to match the direction you are looking (e.g. hold it upside down when you are looking south). Do not lay it flat on a table or the points of the compass will be the wrong way round.



EVENING SKY

JULY 2021

Take advantage of the longer nights to do some chilly stargazing, as prominent Winter constellations Scorpius (scorpion) and Sagittarius (archer) take centre stage overhead. This region reveals a treasure trove of fascinating celestial objects to explore with your binoculars (see the 2021 Sky Guide South Africa, available from local bookshops, for reference). In this region, you can find the impressive open star cluster Messier 6 (Butterfly Cluster) and Messier 4, a globular cluster (a group of older gravitationally bound stars) located close to the bright red star Antares in Scorpius. Nearer towards Sagittarius lies Messier 8 (Lagoon Nebula) huddled among several open clusters.

M8 is a beautiful emission nebula, bright enough to observe with your naked eye in dark conditions.

This month, keep an eye out for Venus and Mars low in the west just after sunset. These two bright planets will appear very close together, especially from 12 – 14 July where they will reside close to Leo (lion). Jupiter and Saturn rise mid-evening and can be found in Aquarius (water bearer) and Capricornus (sea goat) respectively. The moon will be in the evening sky from 12 - 29 July with Full Moon on 24 July. This month, the Full Moon is known as the 'Meerkat Moon' in South Africa (visit cfah.org.za/fullmoon/ to find out more).