



# ***STARRY TRAILS***

***APRIL 2019***

Although I'm looking forward to warmer spring nights and the sounds of spring peepers filling the air, I will miss stepping out on a clear night and seeing our magnificent Orion, the Hunter! Orion sets earlier each night as we go through the month. Meanwhile, Mars and the Pleiades make a lovely pair in the west after sunset the first week of April (Illustration 1). Our spectacular planet show continues in the predawn sky with Venus low in the southeast and Jupiter and Saturn in the south (Illustration 2).

Time to get out and enjoy a clear spring night! Our sun sets later now, so our hike will begin around 9:00 pm. You may still need to grab your jacket, hat and gloves. Don't forget your Starry Trail Map and binoculars. Take a minute to listen to the sounds of spring peepers filling the air! It is time to say farewell to the magnificent Hunter, Orion. Orion will return to our night sky once again in early winter. Our first stop is the western sky or direction of the sunset. There you will find the beautiful star cluster, Pleiades or the Seven Sisters. One last view of our lovely sisters until fall. To the left of the Pleiades you will see a bright red-orange star, Aldebaran, the eye of Taurus, the Bull.

Hike to the left of Taurus and there you will see Orion's magnificent star pattern. The three stars in a row make up the belt of Orion. The bright red-orange star up and to the left of the belt is Betelgeuse. The bright blue-white star down and to the right of the belt is Rigel. Now with your binoculars scan just below the belt. You will notice a small fuzzy area. That is the Orion Nebula (M42). New stars are forming in that hydrogen gas cloud! We call this a stellar nursery. Trek down and to the left from Orion's Belt. One last visit with Orion's friend Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest star in our night sky! Farewell until early winter. Now let's make a clockwise loop up from Sirius. We will check out the bright star Procyon, next to the two stars that look almost identical, Gemini the Twins and finally to Capella (Illustration 3). Fantastic star hopping in this part of the sky!

Journey to the opposite part of the sky, or north. You will see the Big Dipper, high overhead, pouring water out of the cup like the spring rains! Take the two stars at the end of the cup and draw an imaginary line to the next bright star. You have reached the North Star! The North Star, or Polaris, is at the end of the handle of the Little Dipper. Queen Cassiopeia, the sideways w-shape, is very low in the north (Illustration 4). Hike back to the Big Dipper. Take the flat part of the cup and look slowly overhead to the shape of a backwards question mark. This is the head of Leo, the Lion. How about a challenge? Take your binoculars and scan to the left of Leo, almost to Gemini, the Twins. Do you see the beautiful Beehive Star Cluster (M44)?

For the last part of our hike, turn right or east. The bright yellow - orange star, is Arcturus. Look down and to the right of Arcturus and you will see a blue star, Spica, in the constellation Virgo (Illustration 5). Virgo hosts the sky's richest zone of galaxies. Great telescope viewing!

Next month, a Blue Moon and the greatest and strongest hero, Hercules!

Take one last deep breath of fresh spring air and head inside. So glad spring is here!

## **Highlights**

**April 1** – The Moon passes south of Venus in the predawn sky.

**April 5** – New Moon.

**April 9** – The Moon passes south of Mars.

**April 12** – First Quarter Moon.

**April 16** – Mars passes north of Aldebaran.

**April 19** – Full Moon. According to folklore, it is called the Pink Moon or the Egg Moon.

**April 22** – Lyrid Meteor Shower peaks.

**April 23** – The Moon passes 1.6 degrees north of Jupiter in the predawn sky.

**April 25** – The Moon passes south of Saturn in the predawn sky.

**April 26** – Last Quarter Moon.

**Brightest Stars:** **West** – Sirius, Betelgeuse, Rigel, Aldebaran, Procyon, Capella, Castor, Pollux. **Overhead** – Regulus. **East** – Arcturus, Spica.

**Binocular Highlights** The Moon, Pleiades, Orion Nebula M42, Beehive Cluster M44, Deep sky objects around Capella (M36, 37, 38).

**Telescope Highlights** The Moon, Mars, M51, M42, M44, M81, M82, M35, 36, 37, 38 (near Capella).

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Night Sky Illustrations created by Suzie Dills using Starry Night Backyard & Stellarium.

*Illustrations courtesy of Cassandra Dills*

Written by Suzie Dills – Remember to download your Illustrations & Star Map!