

January Skies

For sky watchers south of about latitude 34 degrees we are once again approaching what I like to call the "Canopus hour." This is a narrow window of time, 2 to 3 hours where you can see the second brightest star viewable from Earth, Canopus! The key is to find Sirius, the Dog Star and the brightest star seen from Earth! It is the bright star in Canis Major (large dog) the follows the constellation Orion.

When Sirius is directly south of your position, look further south just above the southern horizon. The bright star you see will be Canopus.

Whizzing along in its tight orbit around the sun the fleet footed Mercury is now on the opposite side of the sun but will be seen again in late January in the southwestern skies. At the end of the month it can be found below and to the right of brilliant Venus. The two bright planets should put on quite a dazzling show on the 31st of January!

At magnitude -3.9, Venus is still fairly low on the southwestern horizon. However, as the month progresses it will steadily rise higher and higher and will be visible for almost two hours after sundown by month's end.

Jupiter continues to rise earlier each morning. Due to its position in the southeastern skies it will, at magnitude -1.8, be a bit difficult to find above the horizon. On January 9th it passes 5 degrees north of the orange/red supergiant star Antares in the constellation Scorpius.

Mars, not far behind, begins to slowly rise higher in the early morning twilight. You will probably need binoculars to get a good view of it below and to the left of Jupiter at the end of the month.

Saturn, situated 6 degrees west of the bright star Regulus in the constellation Leo, rises at about 8 pm at the beginning of the month and two hours earlier by month's end. As it approaches opposition in early February, Saturn will become a prime target for telescopic or binocular viewing in the early evening hours. Its rings, tilted toward us at 13 degrees, will continue to open up more as the month progresses.

The Moon will be full on the 3rd, last quarter on the 11th, new on the 18th and first quarter on the 25th.

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