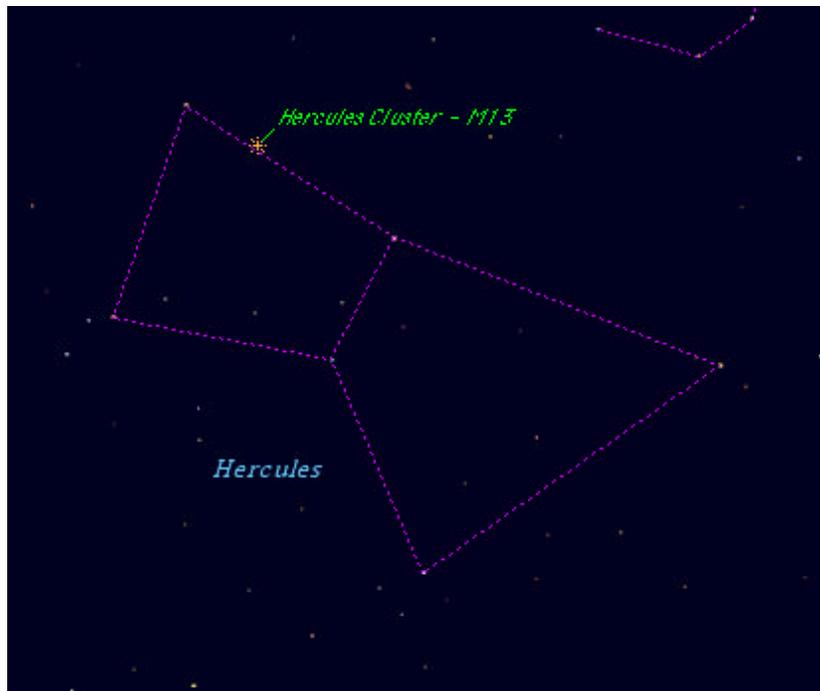


# The Constellations

## Hercules

You can see him during the spring and summer. Included within Hercules is M13, a magnificent globular cluster. In the stars, Hercules rests his foot on the head of Serpens.

Hercules was the bastard son of Zeus and Alcmena. Hera hated him for this because he was a reminder to her of Zeus's infidelity. Since Hera doesn't like him, Hercules has to perform 12 labors under the King Eurystheus. The 12 labors are: kill the Nemean lion named Leo, kill Hydra the many headed monster, capture the Cerynean hind which was a stag with golden horns, capture the Erymanthian bore, clean the Augean stables, kill the Stymphalian birds, capture the Cretan bull, capture the mares of Diomedes, steal the girdle of Hippolyta the queen of the Amazons, steal the man-eating cattle of Geryon, steal the three headed guard dog Cerberus of the Underworld, and obtain the golden apples of Hesperides. Wow!!



**Ursa Major and Ursa Minor (Big and Little Dippers)**

They can be found all year long, and they rotate around the north



star, Polaris.

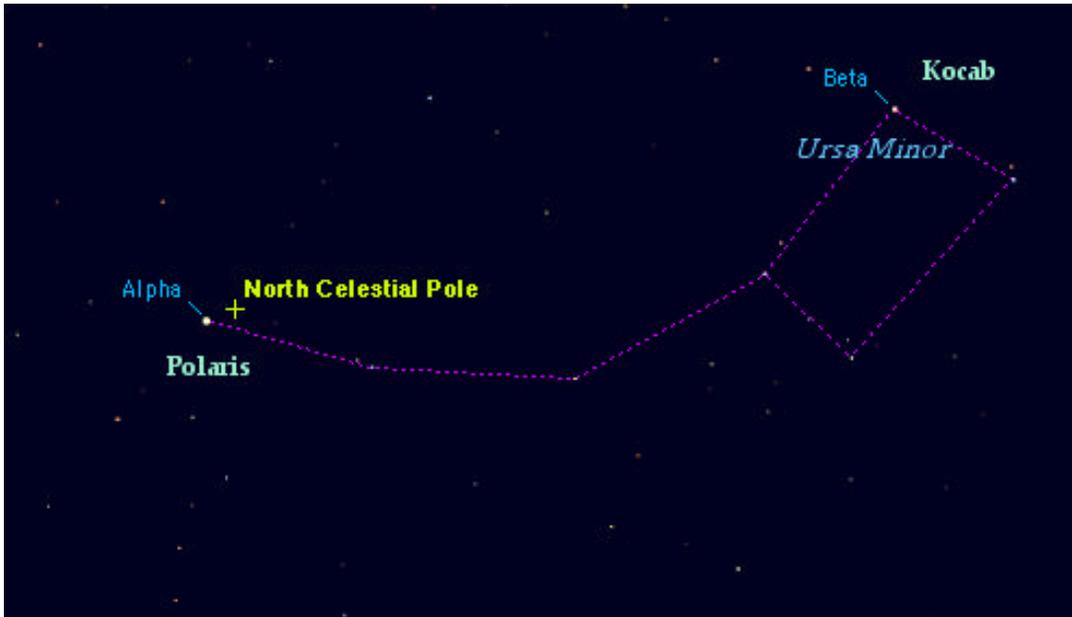
Polaris is located in the Little Dipper. Mizar and Alcor look like one star at times on poor viewing nights and appear as the second star in the handle of the Big Dipper. You can use the arc of the dipper to find Arcturus and Spica - “Arc to Arcturus, speed on to Spica.” You can also use the side of the Big Dipper to point to the North Star, Polaris.

Polaris, the North Star, is the star at the tip of the Little Dipper’s handle.

According to Greek legend, Calisto, a maiden hunter, was raped by Zeus and bore a son named Arcas. Hera was upset with Calisto and so she turned her into a wandering bear in the forest. One day, Calisto’s son who was now a hunter came across her as a bear. Before he could kill her, Zeus turned him into a smaller bear. Then, he thrust both of them into the heavens and they became Ursa Major and Ursa Minor.

The Native Americans said that Ursa Major was a bear being chased by three hunters. In fall, when the bear was close to the horizon, it was said that it was the bear’s blood that turned the leaves on the trees red.

Slaves used the Bigger Dipper to find their way North to freedom. They called it the Drinking Gourd.



## Pleiades



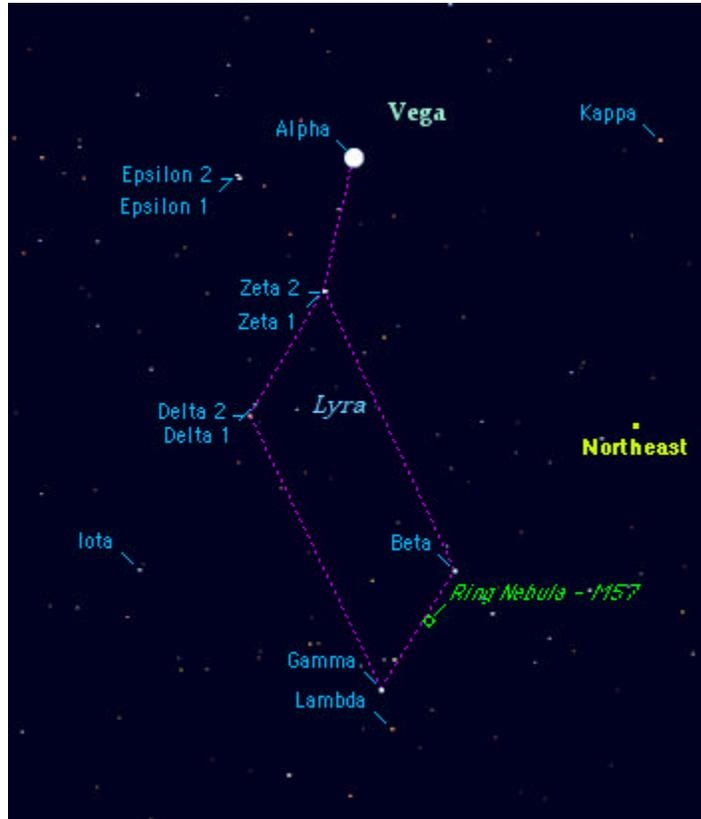
This constellation is seen relatively close to Taurus.

This constellation is also called the Seven Sisters.

Native American legend says that Devil's Tower in Wyoming (a geologic structure jutting hundreds of meters out of the plain) was created to protect seven maidens being chased by bears. When all was said and done,

the seven maidens were thrust into the heavens. To this day there is an astrogeologic relation between Devil's Tower and the constellation Pleiades.

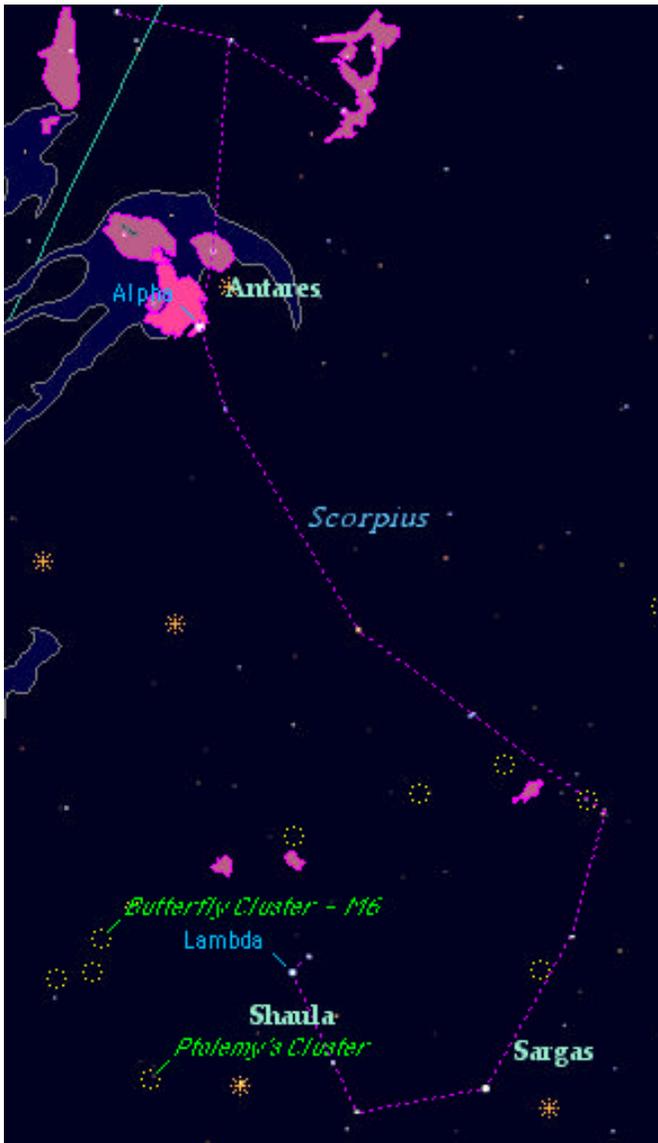
## Lyra



Lyra is seen during the late spring and summer.

This constellation contains the star Vega which will become our Pole Star in 11,000 years. Vega also forms part of the summer triangle with Altair and Deneb.

Lyra is a lyre (harp) created by Hermes who gave it to Apollo who then gave it to Orpheus. Orpheus was one of the argonauts and one day his wife was killed by a snake bite. Orpheus then traveled to the underworld playing his harp all the way. Hades was so enchanted by his fine music that he told Orpheus he could have his wife back if he could make the journey back to the world without looking back at his wife who would be following. Unfortunately, Orpheus looked over his shoulder just before reaching the upper world, and his wife was forever gone. Orpheus was so distraught that he rejected all other women. A group of Thracian women who were so upset with his rejection, that they dismembered his body and threw his head and lyre into the river Hebrus. Zeus then placed Orpheus' lyre into the heavens.



## Scorpius

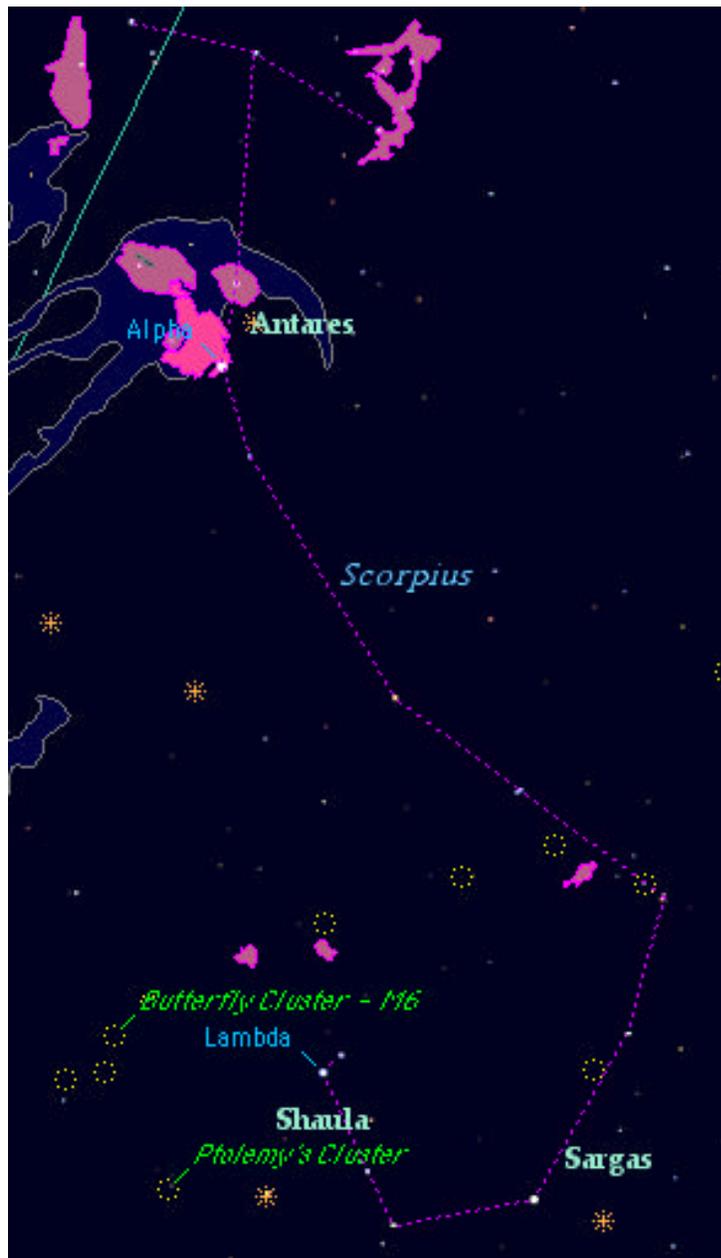
Scorpius is one of the Zodiac constellations and can only be seen during specific times of the year.

Antares is one of the major stars in Scorpius.

In Greek mythology it is legend that Scorpius was sent by Apollo to kill Orion because he was concerned with his sister's chastity.

Another legend believes that Gaia (Earth) sent Scorpius to kill Orion because she believed that he would destroy all the wild animals. Scorpius was never able to capture Orion, so in the heavens, when Orion is setting in the west, Scorpius is rising in the east. Thus Orion is being forever chased by Scorpius across the heavens.

A third legend states that Scorpius went to sting Orion because Orion had boasted that he could defeat any animal.



## **Draco**

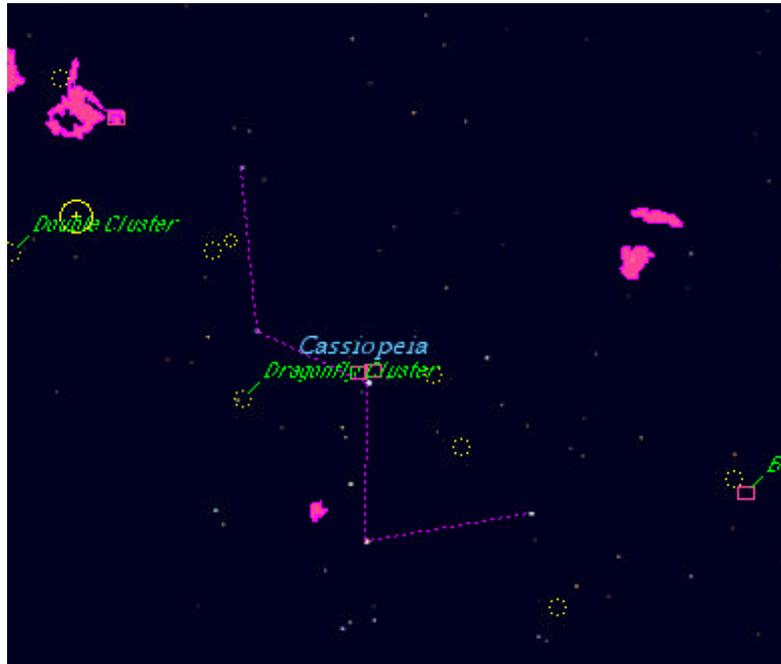
Draco is found between the Ursa Major and Ursa Minor in the heavens.

Draco was the dragon guarding Hera's tree of golden apples. One of Hercules tasks was to steal three apples from the tree. Hercules used a poison arrow to kill Draco, and then tricked Apollo into stealing the apples while he held up the world. Hercules then duped Apollo into returning to his labor while he ran off with the apples.

## Cassiopeia

She can be seen as either a letter “M” or “W” in the northern skies during the summer.

Cassiopeia is the wife of Cepheus and the mother Andromeda.



Andromeda was betrothed to Perseus, but Cassiopeia had second thoughts and she incited a battle at the wedding and cried out in the middle, “Perseus must die!” Perseus won the battle, by using Medusa’s head to turn his adversaries into stone. Then Cepheus and Cassiopeia were bound to their thrones and thrust into the heavens by Poseidon. As punishment, Cassiopeia must spend half her time up-side-down in the sky.

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## **Resources**

### **Web pages:**

- 1) **The Mythology of the Constellations**  
[www.emufarm.org/~cmbell/myth/myth.html](http://www.emufarm.org/~cmbell/myth/myth.html)
- 2) **The Constellations**  
[www.dibonsmith.com/stars.htm](http://www.dibonsmith.com/stars.htm)

### **Books:**

**Burnham's Celestial Handbook**