

# Stars over Sisters

By Rylee Funk  
Correspondent

Very faint in the May sky, Leo Minor is a constellation to look for. It may appear small because its stars are pretty dim, but the satisfaction of finding it will be worth the effort.

The constellation consists of only three main stars brighter than 4.5 magnitude while 37 other stars are much dimmer, most beyond the range of naked-eye detection. Leo Minor is located below Ursa Major, and above the constellation Leo. Though it won't be easy, Leo Minor can be seen on a clear, dark night.

Leo Minor doesn't have a Greek story to go with it. This is because the constellation is a newer discovery. Early astronomers such as Ptolemy and Aratus didn't think that the dim stars formed any specific pattern, and left it unnamed. The constellation was officially established by Johannes Hevelius in 1687, but it wasn't researched until about 1845.

The brightest star within Leo Minor is called 46 Leonis Minoris. It is an orange giant that is 95 light-years away. The star has a magnitude of 3.8. The second-brightest star, Beta Leonis Minoris, is slightly dimmer at magnitude of 4.4 and is 37 light-years away. Beta Leonis Minoris is a binary star system. This star denotes the tip of the triangle that is closest to Ursa Major while 46 Leonis Minoris is to the left of Beta Leonis Minoris.

Within Leo Minor there are no Messier objects, but there are several other deep-sky objects that won't fail to amaze. For example, the barred spiral galaxy NGC 3344, located 22.5-million light-years away, is found in Leo Minor. One of the main deep-sky objects in the constellation is NGC 3021. Located at a distance of 100-million light-years, this spiral galaxy is an important object of study because it contains Cepheid variable stars that are used to work out the distance to the galaxy.

In 1995 a type 1a supernova was observed in NGC 3021 that was used as a tool to measure how rapidly the universe is expanding. The ongoing research of these types of stars is allowing astronomers to more accurately determine the universe's true expansion rate.

While spotting Leo Minor may be somewhat of a challenge, finding the planets Mars, Jupiter and Saturn this month will be a slam-dunk.

Mars reaches opposition on May 22. This is the day that Mars makes its closest approach to the earth, at 47.4 million miles. It will easily be seen between 9:21 p.m. and 4:35 a.m. and will be at its highest point above the southern horizon at 1:00 a.m.

Mercury can be seen low in the west during the first few days in May, but will rapidly fall toward the sun and be gone by mid-month. Although Jupiter has already passed its opposition, it will remain bright in the sky and set around 5 a.m.



PHOTO COURTESY NASA

NGC 3021 is a spiral galaxy located a distant 100-million light-years away in the constellation of Leo Minor.

Venus will not be easy to spot as it moves behind the sun. Saturn, on the other hand, will rise around 12 a.m. (midnight) and can be seen within the constellation Ophiuchus.

The month will start off with a waning moon, but on May 6 the new moon starts. The full moon will be on May 21, and we will end the month with a waning

crescent.

The new moon on May 6 ensures dark skies for the annual Eta Aquariids meteor shower that will be at its best from 3 a.m. until dawn on mornings of May 5 and May 6. To see the shower, look in the direction of the constellation Aquarius, which is bordered by Pegasus and Capricornus.

To learn more about the

night sky, come out to a Star Watch event put on by Sisters Astronomy Club on Saturday, May 28. The event is free and it starts at 9 p.m. at the SPRD building located at 1750 McKinney Butte Rd, Sisters. After a brief presentation, there will be an opportunity to observe the night sky through telescopes in the high school parking lot, weather permitting.

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**THIS WEEK'S FEATURED PROPERTY**  
  
**16015 Fox Ridge Circle ~ \$874,000**  
Best-kept secret of Sisters! Fabulous Cascade mtn. views from this award-winning timber-framed home located in a private, gated community. Open floor plan, vaulted ceilings, master bedroom on the main floor plus 2 bedrooms & office. Only 7 minutes from Sisters, has onsite horse facility w/stalls, private tack area, outdoor paddocks, & adjoining public lands.  
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