

STAR MAP



Marek Kukula, of the Royal Observatory Greenwich, guides you through April's night sky

Getting started

Begin by trying to identify the more prominent star patterns with your naked eye: the saucerpan shape of The Plough, the “W” of Cassiopeia, or the bright stars of Gemini - Castor and Pollux. Light pollution can actually help as it blots out all but the brightest stars making it less confusing. Think about getting a basic telescope. Mine cost just £50 and it allows me to see mountains and craters on the Moon, as well as the moons of Jupiter.

Our chart

Appropriate for stargazing around mid-April, from anywhere in the UK



The Plough

The Plough is quite far north, so never sets in our sky. It's even there in the day. The Plough is an 'asterism' (group of stars), in the constellation Ursa Major, the Great Bear. Follow the handle and you'll reach Arcturus, the fourth brightest star in the sky, 26 times larger than the Sun



The Moon

The darker grey blotches on the moon's surface are the lunar 'seas', or 'maria'. These plains of solidified lava, date back to the early days of the solar system when giant asteroids cracked open the moon's crust, and molten lava flowed out



Saturn

Saturn will rise in the south-east later in the night. To the naked eye it appears as a bright, yellow-white star but a telescope will show the planet's disc and its famous rings

TOP TIP
The website Moonwise tells you what phase the moon is in

W

MOON

SATURN

Libra

MARS

Spica

Virgo

Bootes

Draco

Ursa Min

Cepheus

Deneb

Cygnus

Vega

Hercules

Serpens

Arcturus

The Pl

A quick guide to (astro) photography

1 You don't need any special kit. Just place a digital camera on a solid surface, and point it towards the Pole Star

2 Set the longest exposure you can with your camera, ideally a time of several minutes

3 After a few attempts you should be able to see 'star trails' as the other stars in the sky appear to circle round Polaris

S



Mars

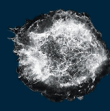
Mars comes the closest it will to Earth this year on 14 April. It will rise later in the evening in the south east, in the constellation of Virgo and appears as a prominent orangey-red object



Satellites

A point of light moving swiftly from west to east is probably an artificial satellite. The biggest and brightest is the International Space Station. The website heavensabove.com will tell you when the ISS is passing over the UK. Remember to wave in case the six astronauts on board are looking down

TOP TIP
There are several great apps for smartphones and tablets that can help you find your way around the night sky in real time. Try Star Walk for iPhone/iPad or Sky Map for Android devices. Point your phone or tablet at the sky, and it will tell you what you are looking at



Cassiopeia

The great winter constellations are giving way to those of summer. Orion the Hunter, which dominated the winter sky, has now slipped below the western horizon. Instead look for Cassiopeia, which forms a 'W' above the northern horizon



The Pole Star

Also known as the North Star, Polaris (part of the constellation Ursa Minor), appears static as the Earth rotates. This is because, it happens to lie directly above the Earth's north pole. So if you're pointing towards Polaris, you're facing due north



Jupiter

Jupiter is visible in the early evening. The largest planet in the solar system appears as a very bright star-like object in the Western part of the sky. If you have a telescope, you can see its four moons: Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto

TOP TIP
The Society for Popular Astronomy is good at explaining stargazing to beginners. Or check out the Federation of Astronomical Societies to find your local amateur astronomy group

What next?
Why not enter the Astronomy Photographer of the Year competition? It closes on 24 April, see rmg.co.uk for details

