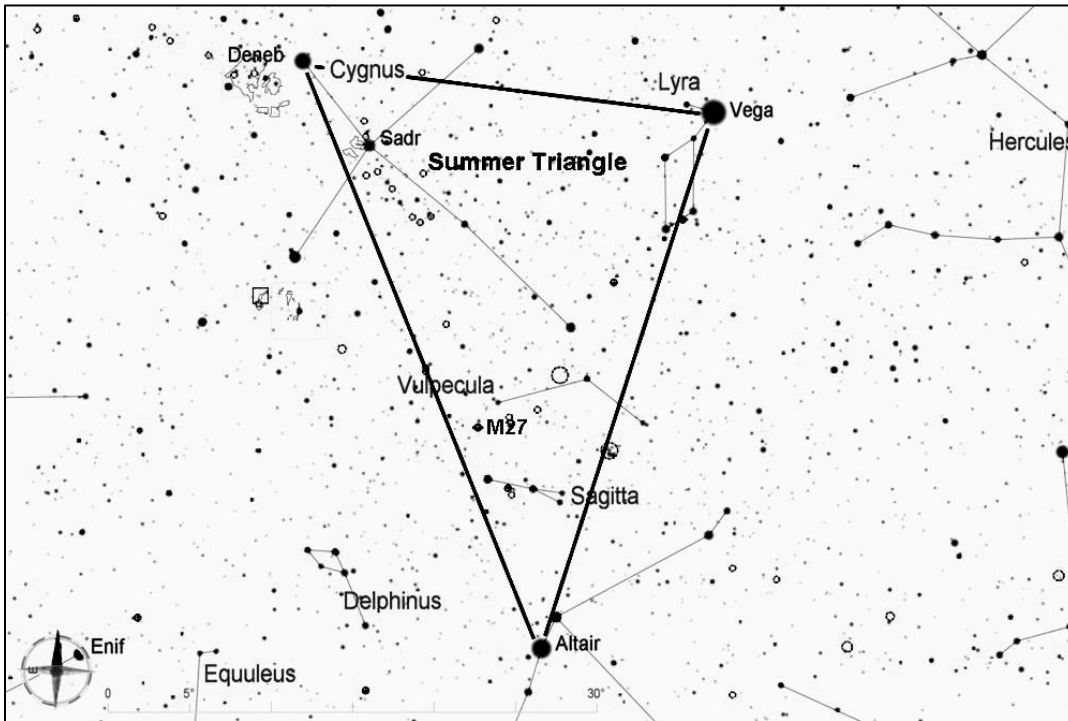


Messier 11 (Wild Duck Cluster) and Messier 26, Open Clusters in Scutum

Messier 11 is one of the richest and densest open clusters, with more than 1000 stars. Through binoculars or a small telescope at certain magnifications, it has a wedge shape that may look a bit like a flock of wild ducks in flight. M26 is similar in size but contains only about 100 stars, an attractive mixture of bright and dim ones. Both of these clusters are displayed against a background of countless dimmer stars in this rich section of the Milky Way.



Start by finding the Summer Triangle, which consists of the three of the brightest stars in the sky--Vega, Deneb, and Altair. The Summer Triangle is high overhead throughout the summer, and it sinks lower in the west as fall progresses.

For this star hop, start from Altair in the constellation Aquila, the eagle.

From Altair, follow the stars that form the middle of the eagle's body and end with three stars that form a slightly hooked "tail". Extend the line of those three stars one more step to the southwest and you will arrive at M11, which is in the small and dim constellation Scutum, the shield. After observing M11, you can look for M26 about 3.5 degrees to the south-southwest. To get to the right location, note the position of M26 relative to two stars of about magnitudes 4 and 5 in Scutum (circled in the chart below).

