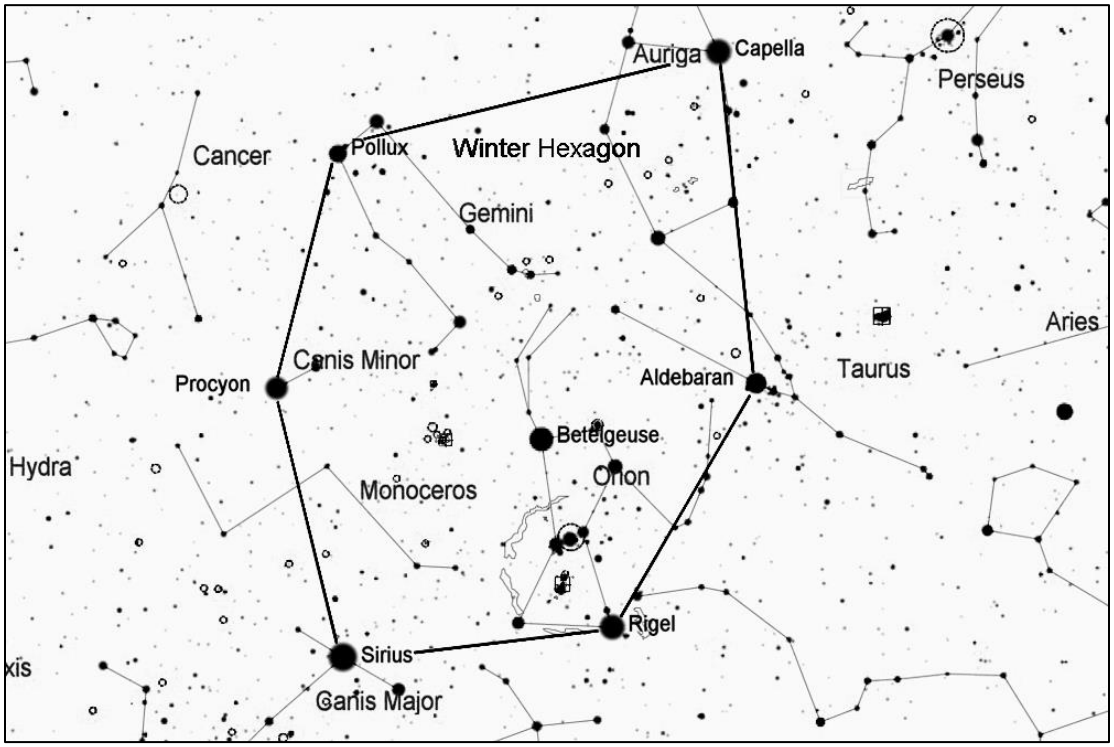
Messier 48, Open Cluster in Hydra

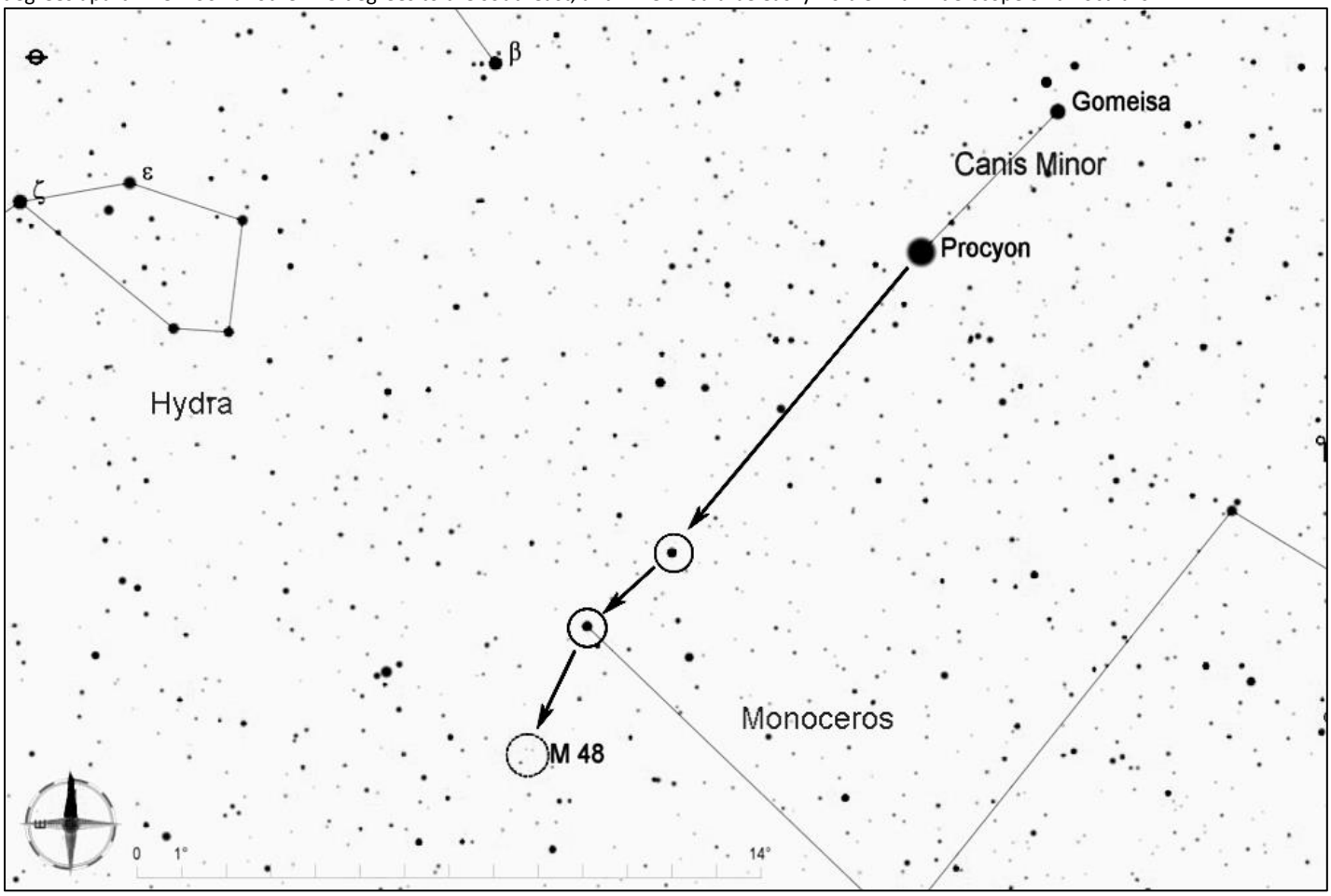
Messier 48 is a large sprawling cluster that covers an area of sky about the size of the full Moon. It includes about 80 stars. At magnitude 5.8, this is a good target for binoculars or any telescope at low power. M48 is about 24 light years across and about 2500 light years away.



Find the Winter Hexagon, which is composed of six of the brightest stars in the sky--Sirius, Procyon, Pollux, Capella, Aldebaran, and Rigel. On mid-winter evenings, these stars form a large oval stretching from low in the south to nearly overhead. As spring begins, the Winter Hexagon sinks toward the west. The constellation Orion and its bright red star Betelgeuse are inside the Hexagon.

For this star hop, find Procyon in the constellation Canis Minor.

Procyon and 3rd magnitude Gomeisa are the only two bright stars in Canis Minor. Use them as a pointer, extending a line about twice their separation to the southeast. Look for the two 4th magnitude stars in Monoceros that are circled in the chart below. These two stars are about 2.5 degrees apart. Then look another 2.5 degrees to the southeast, and M48 should be easily visible in a finderscope or binoculars.



Star hop from www.skyledge.net by Jim Mazur. Star charts created with *Cartes du Ciel.*