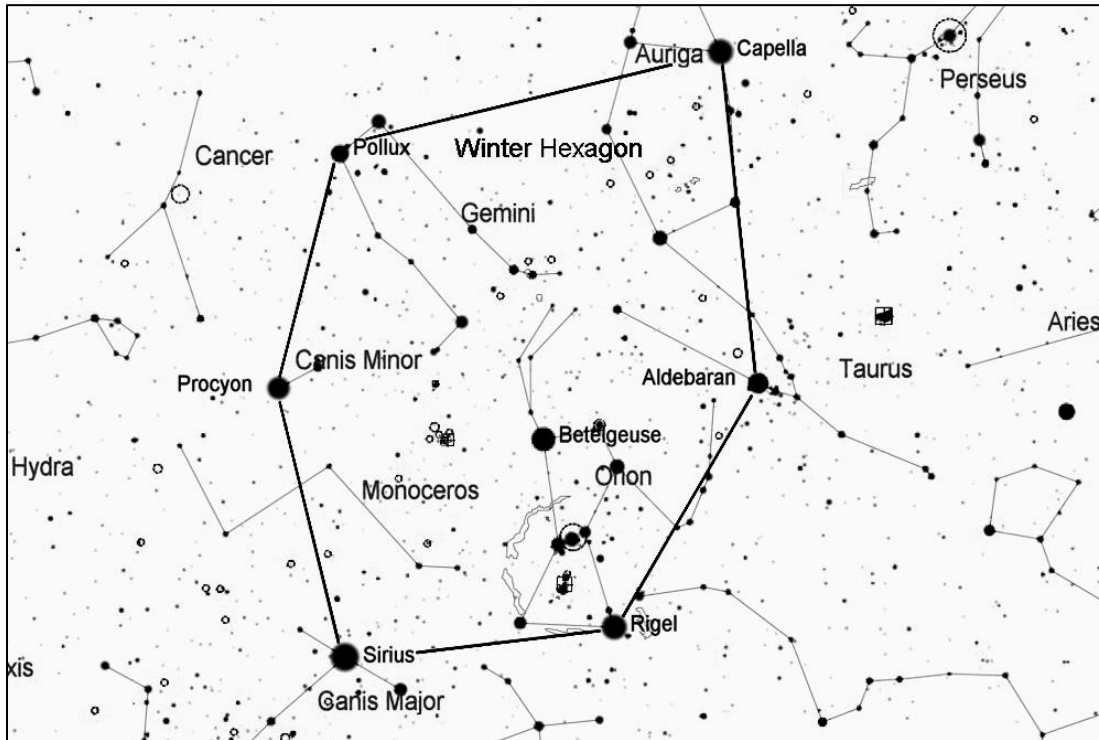


Messier 50, Open Cluster in Monoceros

Messier 50 is a nice open cluster for telescopes of all sizes, filling an area of sky about half the diameter of the Moon. It lies about 3100 light years away, and it is about 13 light years in diameter. Look carefully at the star colors. The cluster contains mainly white and blue-white stars, but a few red and yellow stars are visible as well.



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 Sirius, the brightest star in the sky.

Look 5 degrees to the north of brilliant Sirius to find a much dimmer star, 4th magnitude θ Canis Majoris. From θ , follow this same line another 4 or 5 degrees and you will arrive at the location of M50. There are no bright stars in the vicinity, but M50 should be visible in binoculars or a finder scope as a hazy circular patch.

