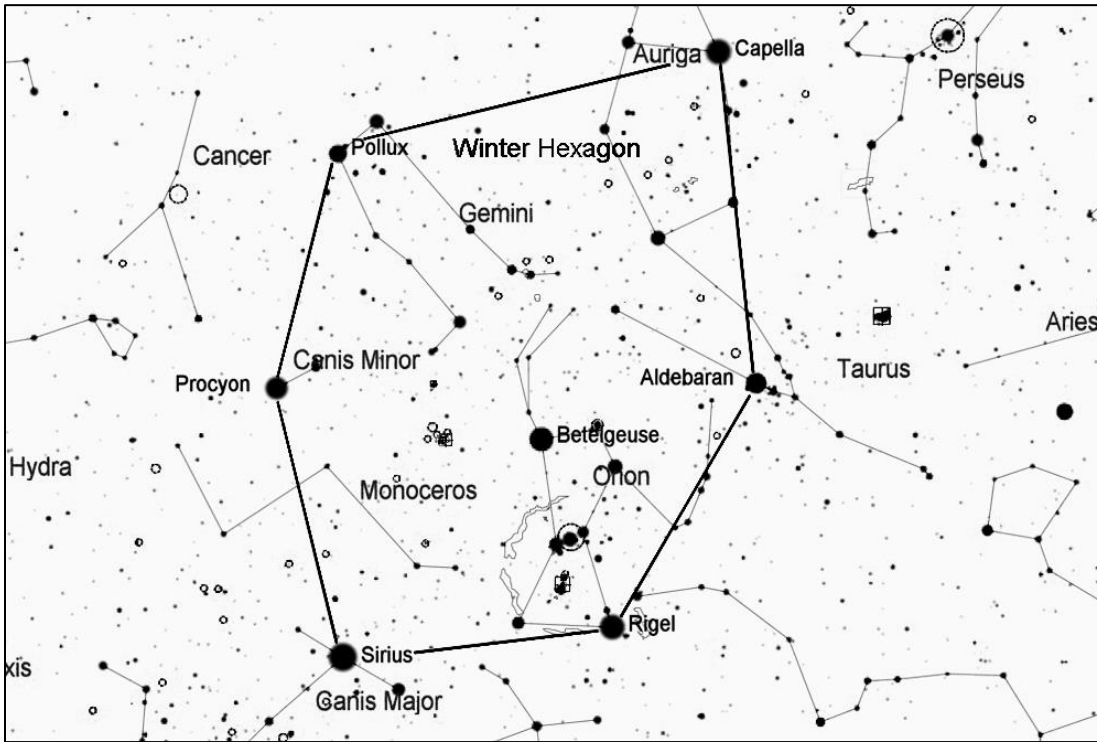


NGC 2237-9 & 2244 (Caldwell 49 & 50), Rosette Nebula and Cluster

The Rosette Nebula (Caldwell 49) is a very large but dim emission nebula that surrounds an open cluster of young, blue-white stars. The cluster is NGC 2244 (also known as Caldwell 50 or the Rosette Cluster), and at magnitude 4.8 it is bright enough to be seen with binoculars or even the naked eye. The Rosette Nebula, however, has a low surface brightness, and although it is about twice the apparent diameter of the full Moon, it can be difficult to see except from a dark location. The nebula is about 5500 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.

Start from bright red Betelgeuse, and look about 10 degrees to the east for a triangle of three dim (4th magnitude) stars, which are supposed to represent the head and neck area of Monoceros, the unicorn. As shown in the chart below, the Rosette Nebula and cluster are located within this triangle. At magnitude 4.8, the cluster should be easy to spot in binoculars. The large diffuse nebula around the cluster will be more difficult to see.

