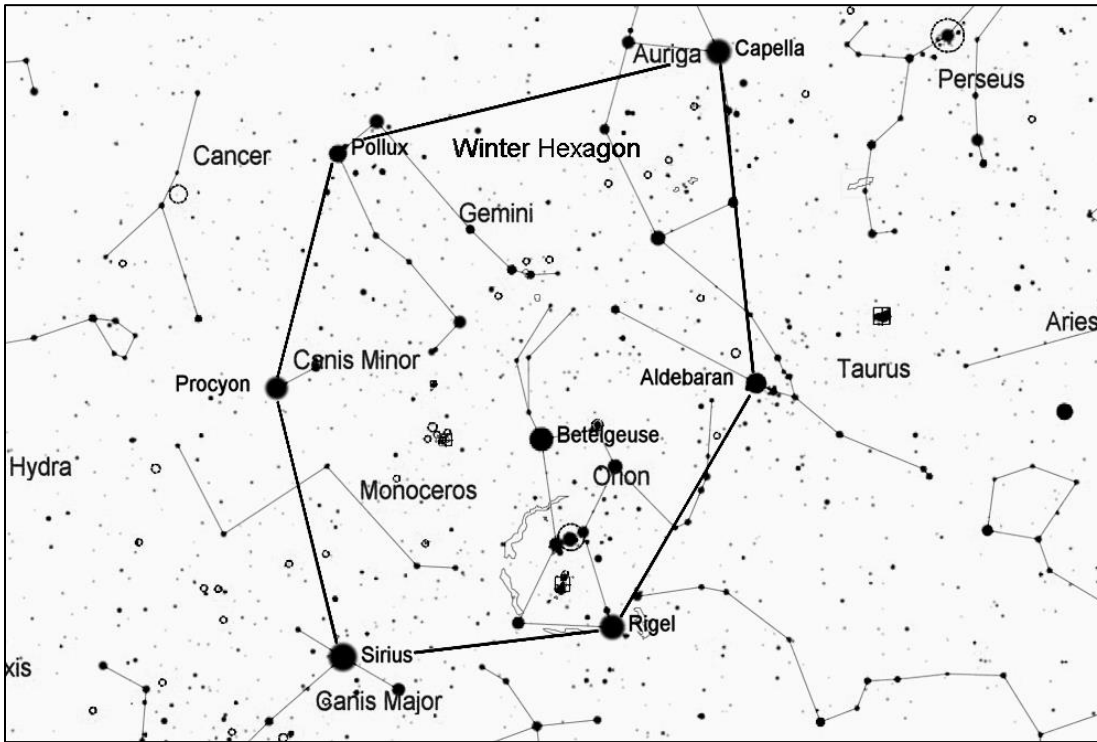


NGC 2506 (Caldwell 54) and NGC 2539, Open Clusters

NGC 2506 (Caldwell 54) is a nice dense open cluster of about 150 stars in the constellation Monoceros. It is a fairly distant group, about 12,000 light years away. Just about 3 degrees to the southeast, across the constellation border in Puppis is another open cluster, NGC 2539. This group contains about 100 stars and is about 4,400 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 Sirius, the brightest star in the sky.

Look 5 degrees to the northeast of brilliant Sirius to find a much dimmer star, 4th magnitude γ Canis Majoris, which represents the eye or head of the big dog. From γ , follow roughly this same line twice as far to the northeast and you will arrive at the bright cluster M47. After viewing M47, move about 7 degrees in the same direction to reach NGC 2506. (As shown below, NGC 2506 is also 4 degrees east of α Monocerotis.) From NGC 2506, NGC 2539 is about 3 degrees to the southeast. On the south edge of NGC 2539 is 19 Puppis, a magnitude 4.7 star that can help in locating it.

