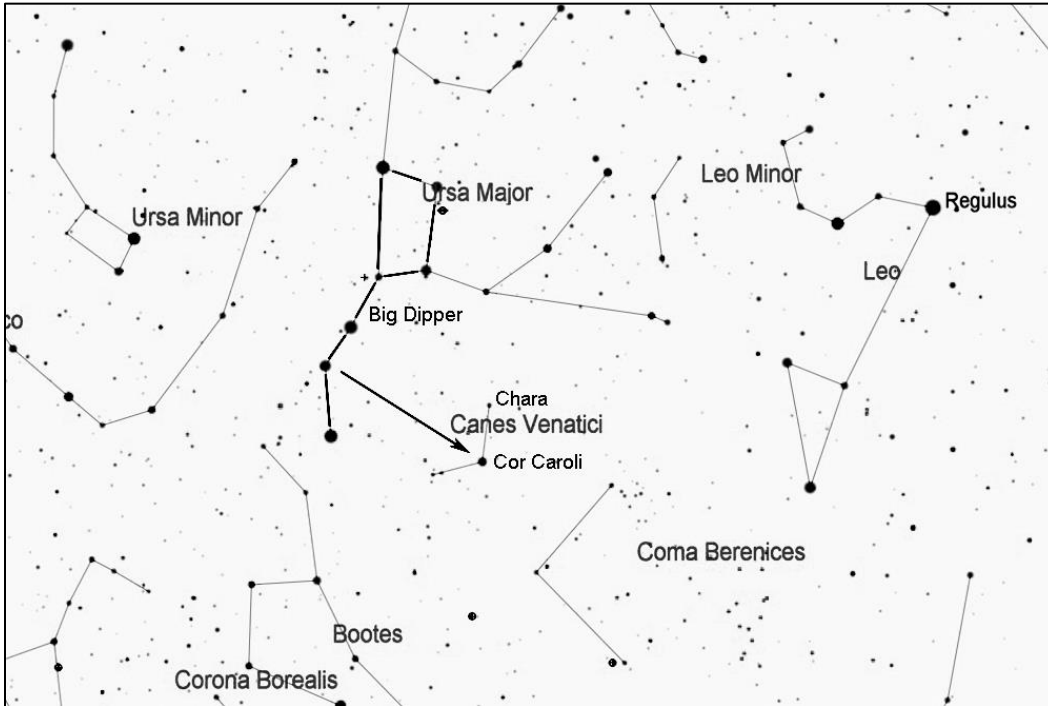


NGC 4631 (Caldwell 32, Whale Galaxy) and NGC 4656 (Hockey Stick Galaxy)

These are two large and fairly bright galaxies in Canes Venatici. Both have distinctive shapes. NGC 4631 is called the Whale Galaxy or Herring Galaxy because its edge-on shape resembles the profile of a sea creature. Just to its north is a dimmer companion galaxy, NGC 4627. NGC 4656 is an edge-on galaxy with a hook at one end that led to its nickname, the Hockey Stick. These galaxies are estimated to be about 25 million light years away.



Start by finding the Big Dipper, one of the most recognizable star patterns in the sky. It is part of the constellation Ursa Major, the big bear. It is shown here on its side as it appears on early spring evenings. For other seasons and times of night rotate the chart as needed to match what you see in the northern sky. Then look "underneath" the curved handle of the Big Dipper for Cor Caroli, the brightest star in the small constellation Canes Venatici at magnitude 2.8.

The second-brightest star in Canes Venatici is Chara, magnitude 4. Visualize a right triangle pointing to the south with Cor Caroli and Chara forming the shorter edge, as shown in the chart below. At the third point of this triangle, about 7 degrees southwest of Cor Caroli, is a 5th magnitude double star that is easy to spot in a finder or a wide-field eyepiece. NGC 4631 is about two degrees southeast of this double star, and NGC 4656 is another 1/2 degree away. They can be seen together through a low-power eyepiece.

