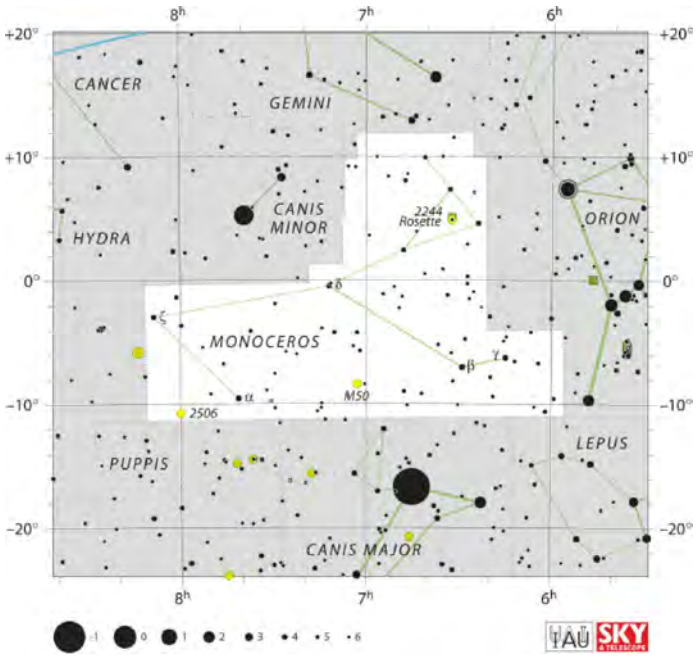
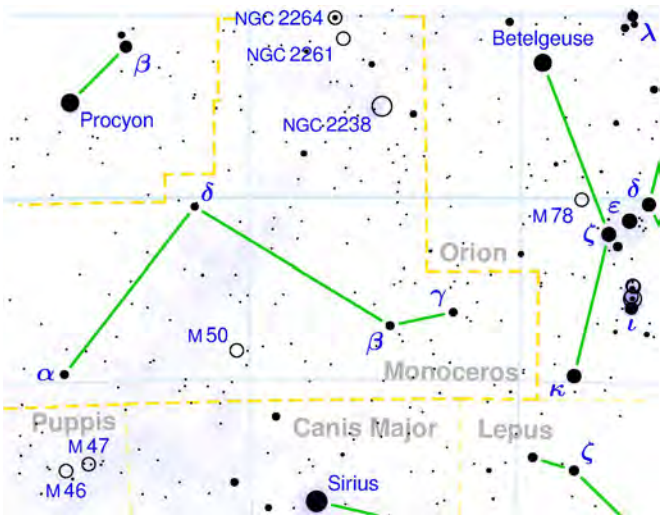
CONSTELLATIONS OF THE SOUTHERN SKY
MONOCEROS







Monoceros is a faint constellation on the celestial equator. Its name is Greek for unicorn. Its definition is attributed to the 17th-century Dutch cartographer **Petrus Plancius**. It is bordered by Orion to the west, Gemini to the north, Canis Major to the south and Hydra to the east. Other bordering constellations include Canis Minor, Lepus and Puppis.

It is a relatively modern constellation. Its first certain appearance was on a globe created by the Dutch cartographer Petrus Plancius in 1612 and it was later charted by **Jakob Bartsch** as *Unicornus* in his star chart of 1624.

Heinrich Wilhelm Olbers and **Ludwig Ideler** indicate that the constellation may be older, quoting an astrological work from 1564 that mentioned **"the second horse between the Twins and the Crab has many stars, but not very bright"**; but this refers to a horse and not a unicorn. **Joseph Scaliger** is reported to have found Monoceros on an ancient Persian sphere.

The constellation contains 66 naked-eye stars according to **Argelander**, and is interesting chiefly from its many telescopic clusters, being located in the Milky Way. It is not very easily seen with the naked eye, with only a few fourth magnitude stars. *Alpha Monocerotis* has a visual magnitude of 3.93, slightly brighter than *Gamma Monocerotis* at 3.98.

However, Monoceros does have some interesting features to observe with the aid of a small telescope. ***Beta Monocerotis*** is an impressive triple star system, the three stars forming a triangle which **William Herschel** in 1781 called "one of the most beautiful sights in the heavens". ***V838 Monocerotis*, is a variable red supergiant star that had an outburst starting on 6 January 2002, when its brightness increased by a factor of 10,000 in one day**. After the outburst was over, the Hubble Space Telescope was able to observe a light echo surrounding the star. **Plaskett's Star** is a massive binary system whose combined mass is estimated to be that of 100 Suns. Monoceros contains two super-Earth exoplanets: COROT-7b and COROT-7c detected in 2009. COROT-7b was the smallest exoplanet to have its diameter measured, at 1.58 times that of Earth (a volume 3.95 times Earth's). Monoceros contains many clusters and nebulae, most notable among them: M50, an open cluster and the **Rosette Nebula** NGC 2237 – A nebulous region over 100 light-years in diameter with many Bok globules in its dark areas. It was independently discovered in the 1880s by **Lewis Swift** (early 1880s) and **Edward Emerson Barnard** (1883). Different parts of it have been named NGC 2238, NGC 2239 (Discovered by John Herschel) NGC 2244 an open cluster within the nebula (Discovered by John Flamsteed in 1690) and NGC 2246 (part of the nebulous region). The unicorn is a mythical beast depicted with the body of a horse and a spiral horn on its forehead. The unicorn's horn was said to have the property of being able to neutralize poisons. **The picture of a Unicorn used to be the apothecaries' symbol**. A likely representation on Earth of this mythical beast is believed to be the rhinoceros, the only known land animal to possess a single horn. Its horn is also credited with great healing properties. Unlike the horns of other horned mammals which are bony, the rhino's horn consists of keratin, densely compacted hair.

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