**The Southern Night Sky for May**

The nights are getting longer and cooler as Scorpius and Sagittarius become the dominant constellations of the night sky.

As the sky darkens **Takurua Sirius** appears midway down the western sky, setting in the southwest around 11 pm. It is the brightest of all the stars but much fainter than Venus. Sirius, 'the Dog Star', marks the head of **Canis Major** the big dog, now head down, tail up. This constellation is well placed for viewing and worth exploring with binoculars.

Below Sirius are bluish **Puanga** **Rigel** and reddish **Pūtara Betelgeuse**, the brightest stars in the constellation of **Orion**. Between them is a line of three stars, Tautoru Orion's belt. To southern hemisphere star watchers, the line of three makes the bottom of 'The Pot', now tipped on its side.

Extending the line down and left from the belt can usually find the beautiful Matariki cluster, also known as Pleiades. In May the stars of Matariki are lost to view as our line of sight is broken by the Sun.

**Mahutonga Crux**, the Southern Cross, is southeast of overhead, to the right of 'The Pointers'. **Uruao Alpha Centauri**, the brighter Pointer, is the closest naked-eye star, 4.3 light years away. Ranginui Beta Centauri, like most of the stars in Crux, is a blue-giant star hundreds of light years away.

**Atutahi or Canopus**, second brightest star of our sky**,** is visible in the southwest.

Following the Milky Way down into the southeast finds the constellation of **Scorpius**. Also known as Maui’s fishhook, Scorpius is seen rising in the early evening just as Orion is setting, Thus, Scorpius will become a dominant feature of our evening sky. Orange **Antares** marks the Scorpion's body, with its upside-down tail te tauihi curving to the right of the star. Rerehu Antares is a red-giant star like Betelgeuse: around 12 times the mass of the sun, bigger and 20,000 times brighter.

Orange **Ruawahia** **Arcturus** is the brightest star in the northern sky, about 100 times brighter than our sun. It is a red star, often twinkling red and green when low in the sky

**Te Mangoroa The** **Milky Way galaxy** is brightest in the southeast toward the constellations of Scorpius and Sagittarius. In a dark sky it can be traced up past the Pointers and Crux and fading toward Sirius. The Milky Way is our edgewise view of our galaxy, the pancake of billions of stars of which the sun is just one. The thick hub of the galaxy, 30 000 light years away, is in Sagittarius. The nearby outer edge is by Orion where the Milky Way is faintest. A scan along the Milky Way with binoculars shows many clusters of stars and some glowing gas clouds, particularly in the constellations of **Carina** and Scorpius.

The Clouds of Magellan, LMC Large and SMC Small, are midway down the southern sky, easily seen by eye on a dark moonless night. They are small galaxies compared to our Milky Way Galaxy.

The full moon will look a little odd in the late morning hours on May 6th as it grazes the fuzzy edge of Earth’s shadow, the penumbra. The Moon’s bottom-right edge will be darkest around 5:30 a.m.

**MERCURY:** Mercury becomes well-placed for early morning viewing from the 10th just north of east, At first, it appears as a faintish star below and right of Jupiter. It slowly climbs toward Jupiter and brightens. By the 20th it is a medium-bright ‘star’. It continues to brighten but starts slipping lower after that. The Moon will be near Mercury on the 18th.

**VENUS:** Venus is the ‘evening star’ in the north-western sky, setting 2.5h after the sun. It is swinging out from the Sun as it catches up on Earth on the inside lane. In a telescope it looks like a first-quarter Moon. The crescent Moon will be below Venus on the 23rd , between Venus and Mars on the 24th.

**MARS:** Mars appears above and right of Venus, looking like a medium bright orange-red star in the north-western sky. The crescent Moon will be below and to the right of Mars on the 25th.

**JUPITER:** Golden Jupiter rises around 5 a.m. and is the brightest ‘star’ in the dawn eastern sky. The Moon will be by Saturn on the 14th, and near Jupiter and Mercury on the 18th.

**SATURN:** Saturn rises due east around 1 a.m., looking like a medium bright cream-tinted star. It is north of the zenith at dawn. The Moon will be by Saturn on the 14th, and near Jupiter and Mercury on the 18th.

Sources:

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<https://www.stardome.org.nz/star-charts--sky-spotter>