



Evening sky in December 2018

Make the most of the warm summer evenings to locate the rather faint Andromeda galaxy trailing behind Pegasus (winged horse) before it sets into the north-western horizon. Using binoculars to view Pleiades (isiLimela) in the north-east reveals an impressive open cluster of stars. In African starlore, the appearance of these 'digging stars' in Southern Africa heralded the start of the growing season.

The summer constellations Taurus (bull) and Orion (hunter) return to our evening skies, followed closely by the Milky Way as it stretches across our eastern horizon. Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, lies within Canis Major (big dog) in the east. The second brightest star, Canopus, is in the south-east in Carina (ship's keel). Since Sirius rises

later than Canopus, in |Xam Bushman starlore, Sirius was thought of as “the grandmother of Canopus”, trailing behind the more agile Canopus.

Keep an eye out for the Geminids meteor shower, which peaks on the 14 December. Best observed after 23:30, the favourable dark observing conditions (first quarter moon) and high rate of meteors predicted (~50 per hour) make this an astronomical event not to miss.

The moon will be in the evening sky from 8 to 22 December, with both full moon and the Summer Solstice (longest day) coinciding on 22 December.