



Evening sky in JANUARY 2016

Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, is high in the north-east. In Xhosa it is called iQhawe, the Champion. Sirius lies in the constellation of Canis Major (Big Dog). Lower down towards the horizon is the bright star Procyon, in Canis Minor (Little Dog). The Dogs accompany Orion, the Hunter, whose distinctive Belt contains three bright stars in a row. From our perspective in the Southern Hemisphere, Orion appears upside down. Two bright stars above the Belt represent his legs and two below, his shoulders. The easternmost shoulder star, Betelgeuse, is a red supergiant nearing the end of its lifetime. Astronomers expect it to run out of fuel, collapse under its own weight and then explode in a spectacular supernova explosion within the next million years.

Close by, high in the south-east, is Canopus, the second brightest star in the night sky. Canopus is in the constellation of Carina (Keel), one of three constellations that constitute Argo, a ship from Greek mythology. The ship is completed by Vela (Sails) and Puppis (Rear Deck).

The bright stars of the Southern Cross (Crux) and Pointers are low in the south-east, but gradually rise higher as the month progresses.

The Moon is in the evening sky from 12 January to 25 January.