



MARCH
2016

Evening sky in MARCH 2016

The constellation of Orion, the Hunter continues to dominate the summer evening sky. In 1979 a mammoth ivory carving estimated between 32 000 and 38 000 years old was found in a cave in the Ach Valley in Germany, depicting what appears be the earliest example of this easily recognisable constellation. Three bright stars in a row form the well-known asterism of Orion's Belt. Their names are Arabic in origin and are from east to west Mintaka ("belt"), Alnilam ("string of pearls") and Alnitak ("girdle"). Alnitak is closest to us at a distance of 800 light years, while Mintaka is 1200 light years away. Alnilam, 1340 light years away, is one of the furthest stars we can see with the naked eye. In traditional Xhosa culture they represent a holy place in the sky and to show respect, only a bent finger may be used to point in their direction.

Planet Jupiter is in Leo (Lion).

The Moon is in the evening sky from 11 March until 27 March. Neither the penumbral lunar eclipse on 23 March, nor the total solar eclipse on 9 March is visible from Africa.

Autumn equinox is on 20 March.