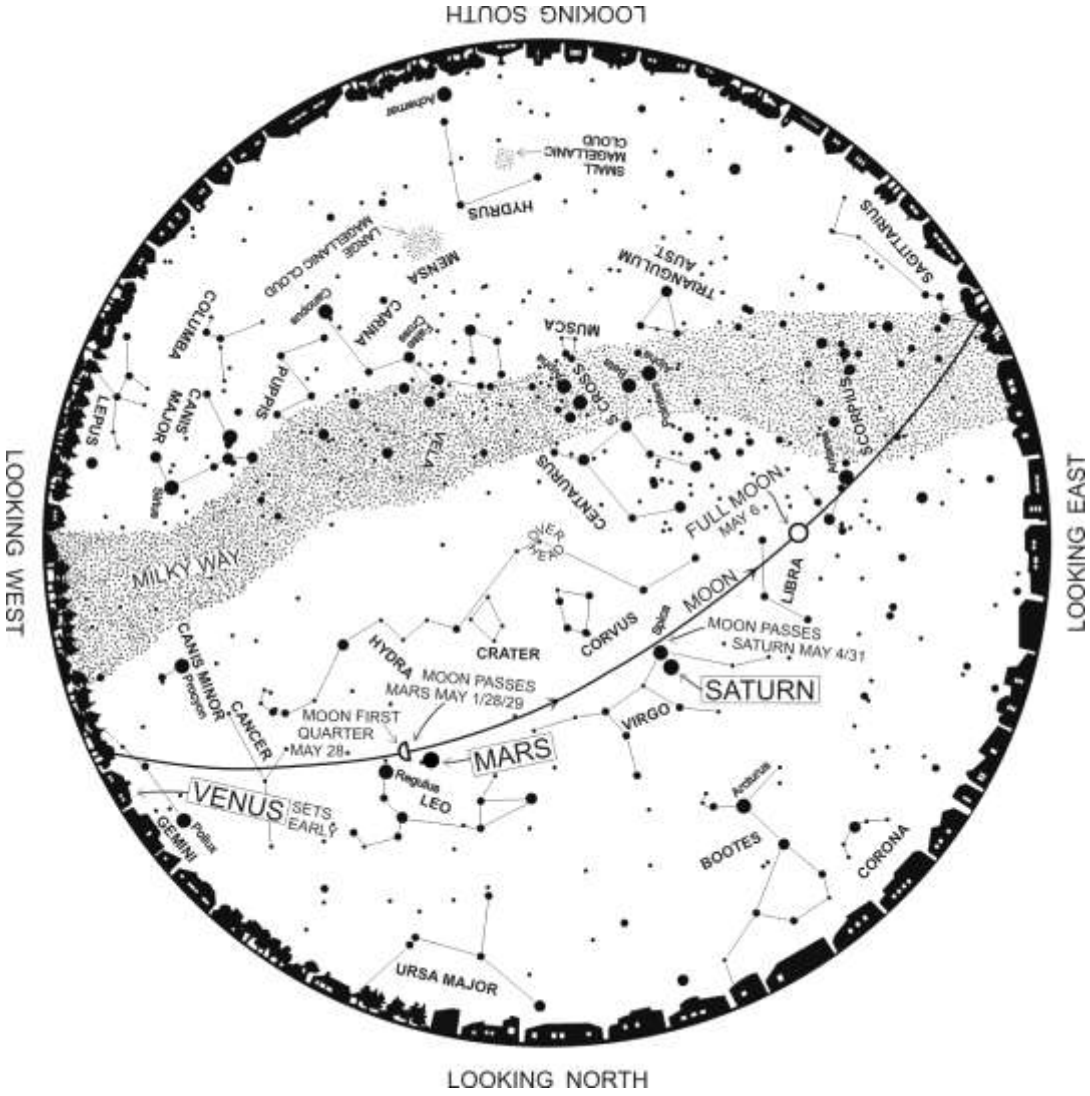

Evening sky in MAY 2012

The onset of winter is heralded by the appearance of the constellation of the Scorpion rising in the east. Towards the south the Southern Cross appears almost upright with the Pointers alongside. To the southwest is the bright star Canopus in Carina, the Keel. It is the second brightest star in the night sky.

Regulus (Alpha Leonis), the brightest star in the constellation Leo, is approximately 77.5 light years from Earth. It is a multiple star system composed of four stars and forms the 21st brightest star in the night sky. In Arabic it is known as Qalb al-Asad, meaning "heart of the lion".

Planet Mars can be seen close to Regulus. Planet Saturn is in Virgo close to the bright star Spica. By month end Planet Venus will no longer be visible as the bright "evening star". In June it will reappear in the east in the early morning sky as the "morning star".

The Full Moon of 6 May is the largest in apparent diameter for the year 2012. The Moon is in the evening sky until 8 May and again from 25 May.

An annular eclipse occurs on 20 May but is not visible from Southern Africa.