Acadiana Sky

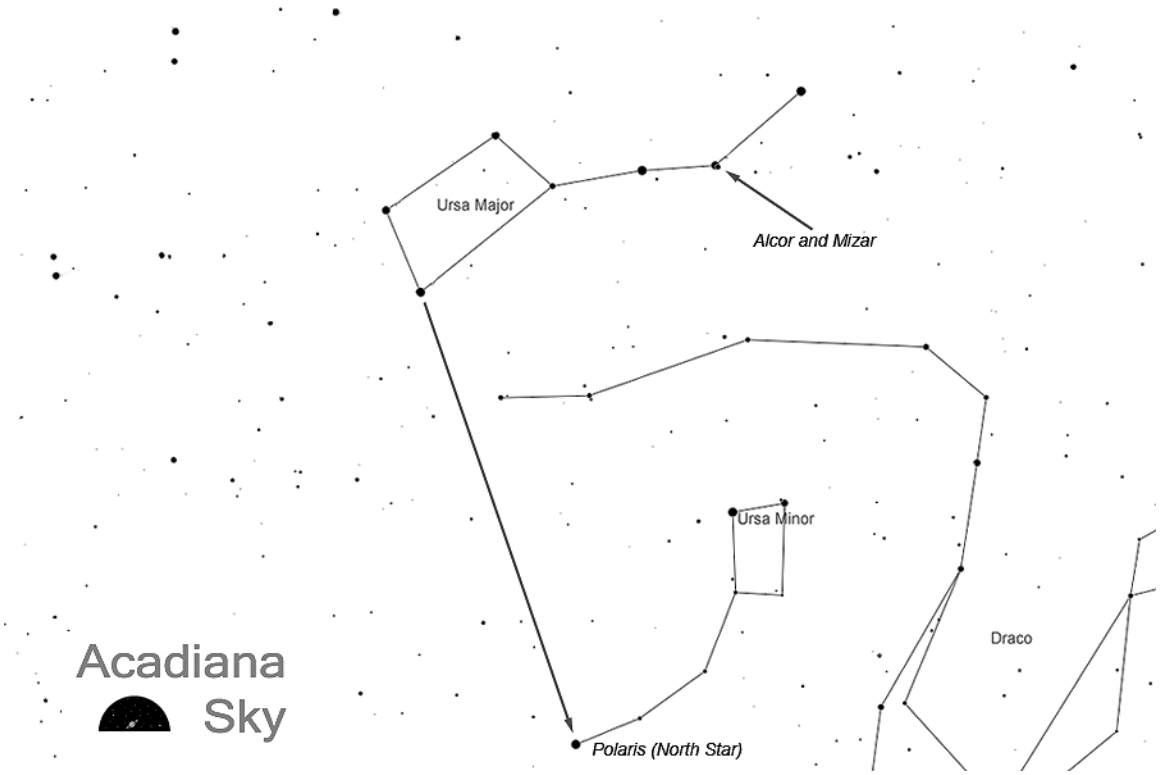
Alcor and Mizar

Find this part of the sky using Acadiana Sky Star Maps

What It Is

Alcor and Mizar make an unaided eye double star in the handle of the Big Dipper. Mizar itself is a visual binary that can be split in most low-power telescopes.

Where It Is



Alcor and Mizar are easy to find! They are seen with the unaided eye as the star at the bend of the Big Dipper's handle.

Why It's Cool

With low power, Mizar looks double, with Alcor well away from them and an unrelated star making a triangle with Alcor and Mizar. If the Dipper is visible, this is a good "first double" to find! In fact, Mizar was the first star discovered to be binary by telescope. Three solar systems would fit between the two components of Mizar, and over 170 solar systems would fit between Mizar and Alcor. Both components of Mizar, as well as Alcor, are themselves binary, making this a 6-star system. Only Mizar A & B, and Alcor, can be directly seen, however. The entire system is about 83 light years from the sun.

Acadiana Sky

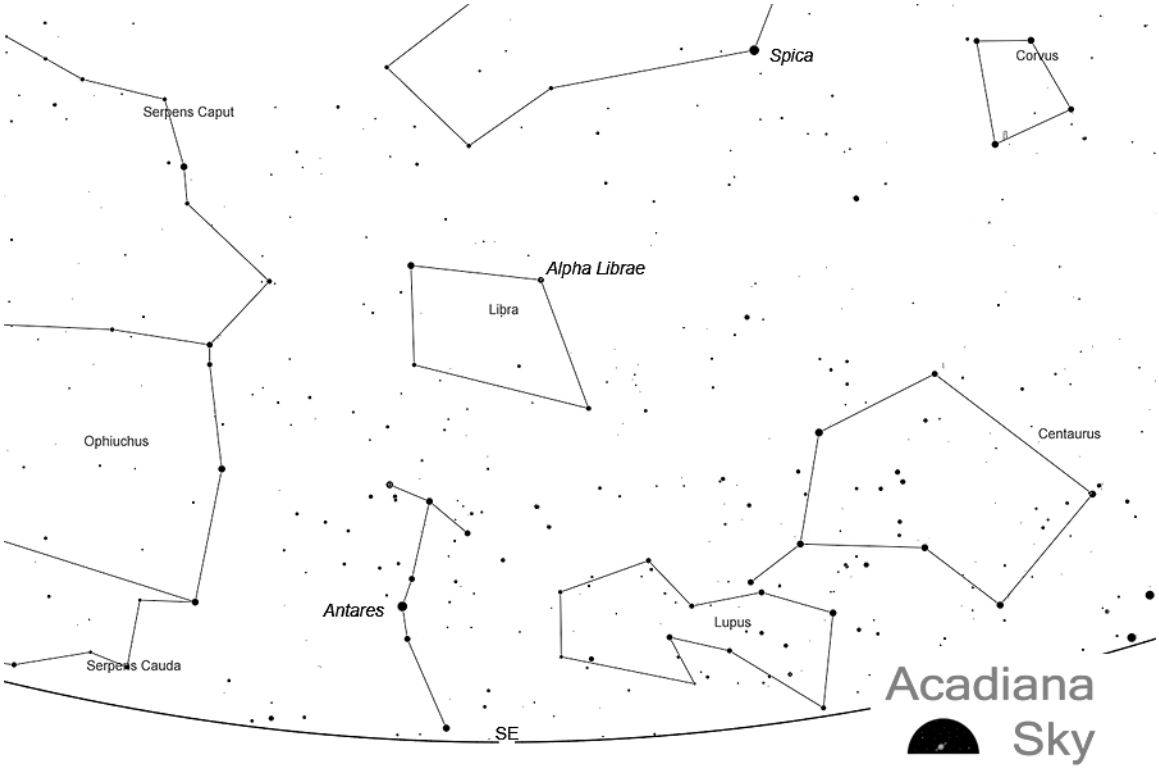
Alpha Librae

Find this part of the sky using Acadiana Sky Star Maps

What It Is

Alpha Librae is a wide binary star, two stars orbiting each other. The components are far enough apart for the separation to be seen in any telescope.

Where It Is



Alpha Librae is in the faint constellation Libra, the Scales, which is roughly diamond-shaped. Visible to the unaided eye, it will be a moderately bright star about halfway between the bright stars Spica (in Virgo) and Antares (in Scorpius). It will look double in most finder scopes.

Why It's Cool

Over 50 solar systems could be dropped between Alpha Librae's components! Although it appears binary, each component is itself a binary star with components too close together to be split. The system is about 77 light years from the sun. The name "Alpha Librae" would ordinarily mean it is the brightest star in the constellation Libra, but for some reason Beta Librae is slightly brighter. Perhaps the two stars have varied their brightnesses slightly in the 400 years since they were named. The traditional Arabic name for Alpha is Zubenelgenubi, with Beta as Zubeneschamali: The Southern Claw and the Northern Claw. These names date back to before Libra was a constellation, when these stars were seen as the claws of Scorpius, the Scorpion.

Acadiana Sky

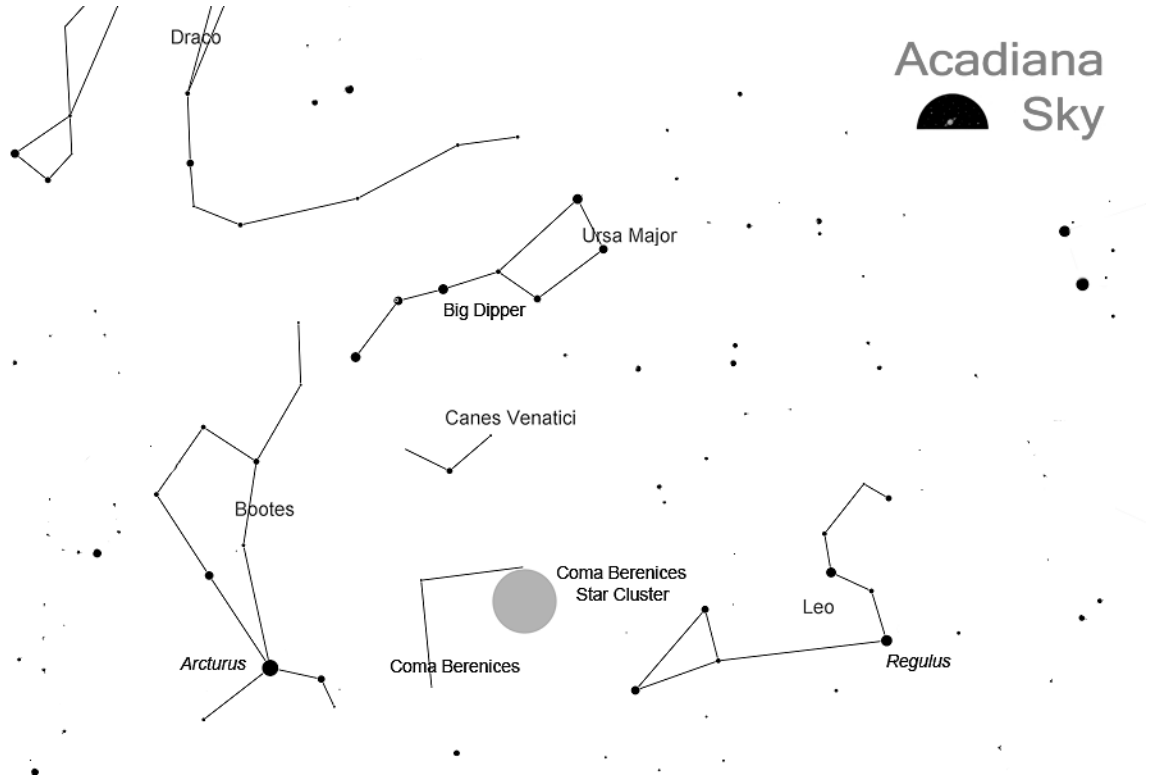
Coma Berenices Star Cluster

Find this part of the sky using
Acadiana Sky Star Maps

What It Is

The Coma Berenices Star cluster is a family of stars about 280 light years from the sun. It's a type of cluster called an open cluster, and has several dozen stars visible in small telescopes.

Where It Is



Moderately dark skies will help with the Coma Berenices Star Cluster. The constellation Coma Berenices is fairly difficult, with little visible except for three faint stars making a triangle, but on clear, dark nights the cluster itself is visible to the unaided eye as a scattering of stars. It looks very nice in a lensed finder or a pair of binoculars, and binoculars can help you spot it initially before aiming the telescope. Look for it very roughly halfway between the bright stars Regulus and Arcturus, not far from the triangle in Leo that marks the Lion's rear haunches.

Why It's Cool

This is one of the nearer star clusters to the solar system, and will fill the low-power eyepiece of a telescope. It's thought to be about 450 million years old.

Acadiana Sky

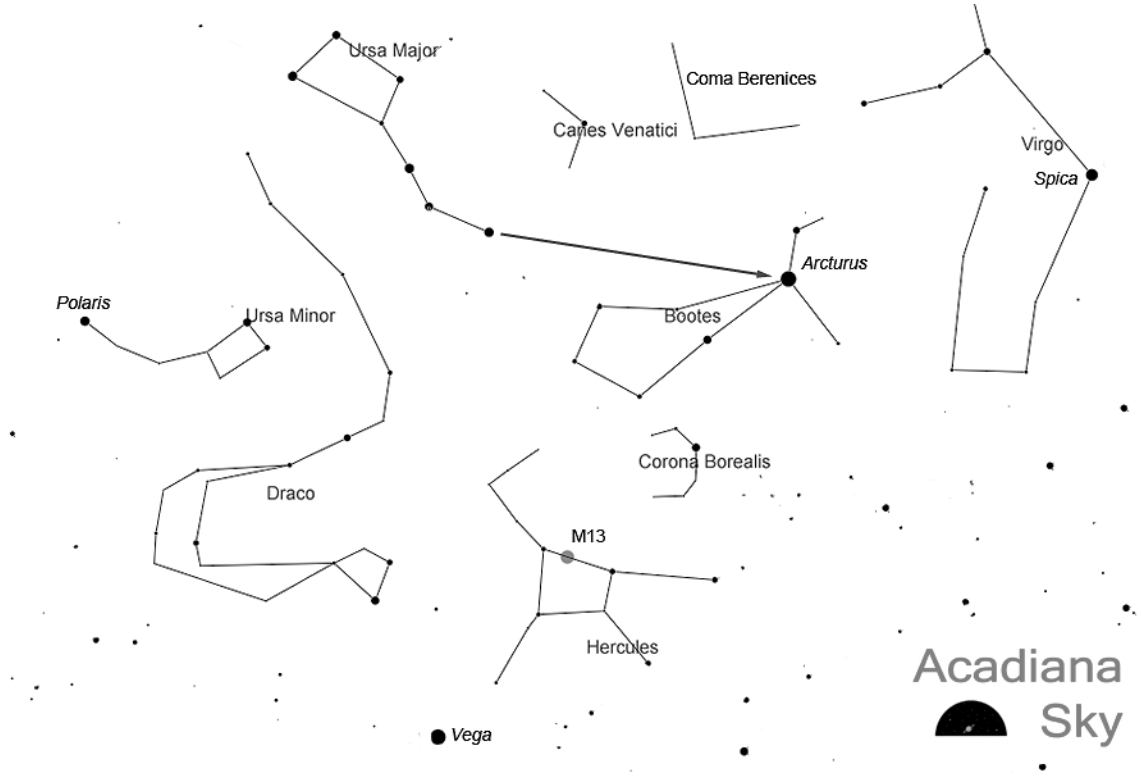
Messier 13

Find this part of the sky using Acadiana Sky Star Maps

What It Is

Messier 13 is a globular cluster, a family of stars moving through space. It has so many stars that their combined gravity holds the systems in a globe-like shape.

Where It Is



The constellation Hercules is faint enough that bracketing it between bright stars helps to locate it. Start with Ursa Major, also called the Big Dipper—the curve of the Dipper's handle takes you to the bright star Arcturus in Boötes, the Herdsman (shaped like a kite). Look for Hercules about 2/3 of the way from reddish Arcturus to bright, blue-white Vega. The "not quite square" Keystone of Hercules is distinctively shaped. Messier 13 is about 1/3 of the way from the top of the Keystone to the bottom, along the side that leads the way as Hercules rises and appears to move across the sky. It may not look like much in a finder or binoculars, but is wondrous in a low to medium power telescope!

Why It's Cool

Messier 13 will look like a faint, round patch of light in a finder scope, but resolves into a ball of tiny sparkling stars in the telescope! Faintly visible to the unaided eye on very dark, clear nights, it is about 25,000 light years from the sun and 145 light years in diameter, with a population approaching a million stars! Messier 13 and Messier 22 (in the summer sky) are among the best globular clusters for backyard telescopes.

Acadiana Sky

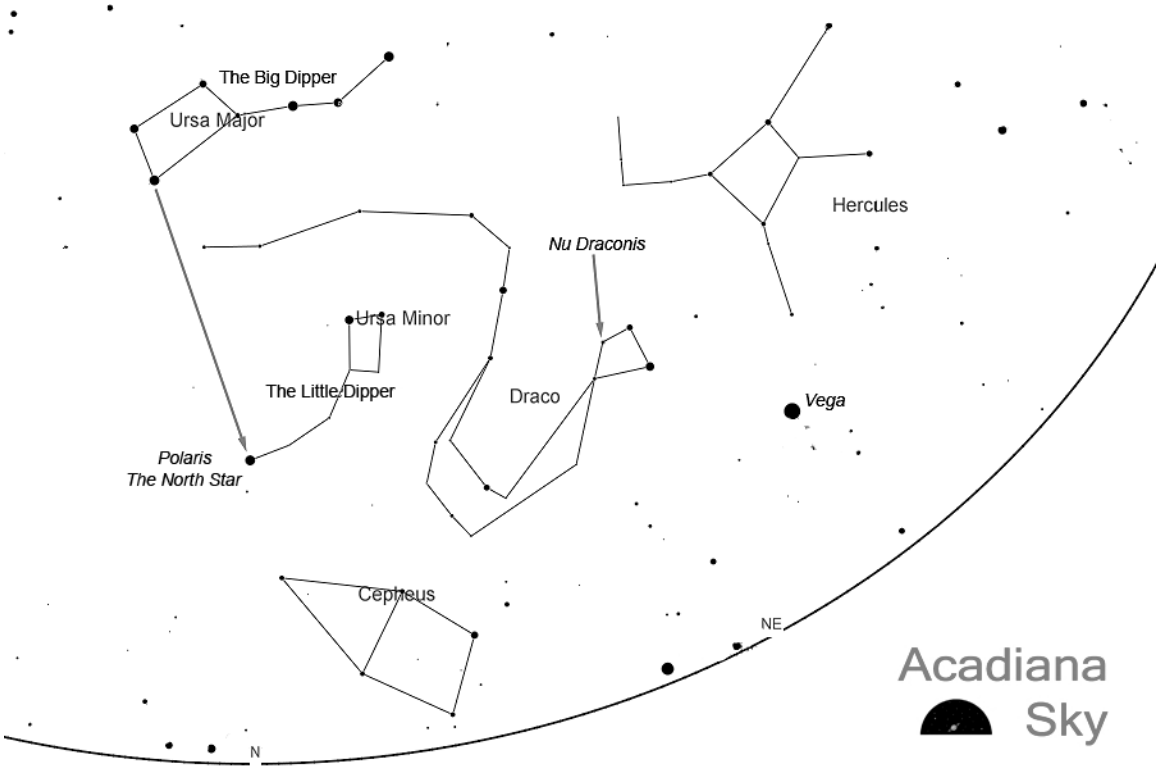
Nu Draconis

Find this part of the sky using Acadiana Sky Star Maps

What It Is

Nu (rhymes with "new") Draconis is a double star in the constellation Draco, the Dragon.

Where It Is



Nu Draconis is the faintest star in the head of Draco, the Dragon, a large, curving, faint constellation. Despite that, the lozenge-shaped head stands out surprisingly well, perhaps because there are only fainter stars around it. The Big Dipper's Pointers take you to the North Star, Polaris (itself not overly bright), and Draco's head is roughly between Polaris and very bright Vega. You can also pick up Draco's tail between the Big and Little Dippers, and follow the twists and turns to Draco's head.

Why It's Cool

The two component stars of Nu Draconis are easily split by almost any telescope, and in fact can be split in some finders and binoculars. They are about 99 light-years from the solar system. Almost 450 solar systems could fit between these two stars! Astronomers are unsure if they are a pair of stars simply moving together through space, or if they actually orbit each other (a "binary" system). If they orbit each other, the orbital period must be over 100,000 years. Both stars are a little hotter, brighter, and bigger than our sun.