

Our Night Sky for March 25th, 2024

Although last week I described the stages of darkness and pointed out that darkness is not upon us until about two hours after sunset, there is still much to enjoy even before complete darkness. Darkness is described by and measured by, Limiting magnitude. This is a measure of the absolute faintest object you can see at a given level of darkness, in other words contrast. If the background sky is only just grey, then you will not see stars dimmer than that grey so that is the limiting brightness or limiting magnitude. Generally, constellations are made up of fairly bright stars so even before it's totally dark you can pick out constellations. The fact is that it's very difficult to pick out constellations in a good dark sky location. There are hundreds more stars and picking out a constellation even for an experienced astronomer is very difficult.

So, if you would like to learn some constellations to help you find your way around the sky, your best time is early evening or even a moon washed sky with a nearly full moon. We previously identified the circumpolar dippers and the giant W of Cassiopeia. These constellations are always in our night sky rotating around the North star. We also identified magnificent Orion in the southern sky which is setting earlier each night and will return to our skies again in the fall. Next week we will add another constellation that follows the ecliptic across [Our Night Sky](#).