

25 Showpiece Open Clusters for Northern Observers

A year-round tour of the finest open star clusters visible from the northern hemisphere, ordered by right ascension so they trace the seasons from autumn through summer. Open clusters are among the most rewarding telescopic objects – from the naked-eye splendor of the Pleiades to the dense swarm of the Wild Duck Cluster, each has its own character. This list spans the full range: young and old, sparse and rich, binocular and telescopic, including several that contain hidden treasures like planetary nebulae or dramatic asterisms.

25

Objects

25

Easy

Cas · Aur · Per · Tau · Mon · Pup · Cnc · Oph · Cyg · And · Cam · Gem

Visibility scored for: **150mm Reflector** · Bortle 4

1 Owl Cluster C13

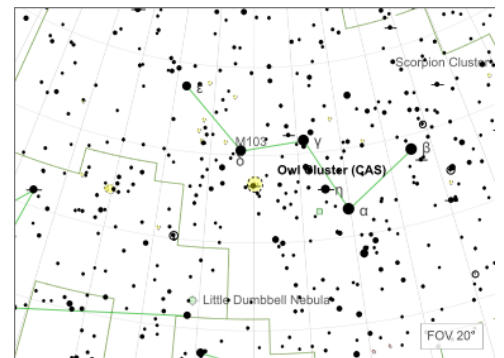
● Open Cluster · Cas · NGC 457

Easy

Position	RA 01h 19m 30.0s Dec +58d 19' 59"
Magnitude	6.4 mag
Size	7.8'
Distance	7.9 kly
Visibility	9.9 / 10

Notes

Also called the ET Cluster or Dragonfly Cluster – two bright stars form 'eyes' with chains of fainter stars spreading out like wings. The pattern is unmistakable at 50-80x. The bright star Phi Cassiopeiae (mag 5.0) marks one eye. A fun cluster to show newcomers, especially children. About 80 stars in a 13' field.

 Observed


2 C28

● Open Cluster · And · NGC 752

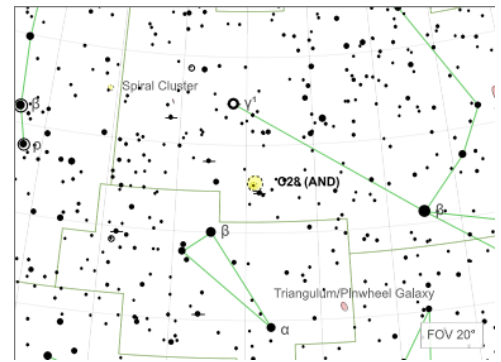
Easy

Position RA 01h 57m 24.0s Dec +37d 49' 1"
Magnitude 5.7 mag
Size 39.0'
Distance 1.3 kly
Visibility 10.0 / 10

Notes

One of the oldest open clusters at 1.5 billion years — most clusters dissolve long before this age. Its 60+ scattered stars fill a wide 50' field, best in binoculars or a rich-field telescope at low power. Many members are evolved orange and yellow giants, giving the cluster a warm, golden hue. Located 5° south of Gamma Andromedae.

Observed



3 Double Cluster C14

● Open Cluster · Per · NGC 869

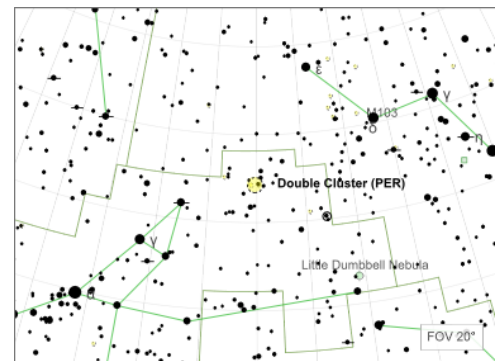
Easy

Position RA 02h 20m 42.0s Dec +57d 07' 59"
Magnitude 4.3 mag
Size 14.4'
Distance 7.3 kly
Visibility 10.0 / 10

Notes

The crown jewel of all open clusters — two rich swarms (NGC 869 and NGC 884) side by side, each containing several hundred stars. Visible to the naked eye as a bright patch between Perseus and Cassiopeia. At 40-60x both fit in one field, dazzling with blue-white supergiants sprinkled with orange-red giants. A desert-island deep sky object.

Observed



4 M34

● Open Cluster · Per · NGC 1039

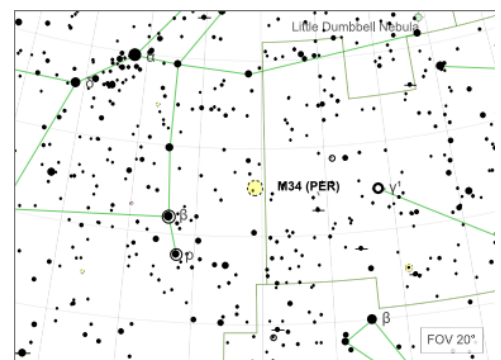
Easy

Position RA 02h 42m 6.0s Dec +42d 46' 0"
Magnitude 5.5 mag
Size 22.5'
Distance 1.5 kly
Visibility 10.0 / 10

Notes

A bright, loose cluster whose stars trace curving chains reminiscent of spiral arms — hence the name. About 80 stars spanning 35', best at 30-50x where the spiraling pattern is most apparent. Contains several attractive double stars. Located midway between Algol and Gamma Andromedae, making it easy to find with binoculars.

Observed



5 M45

Easy

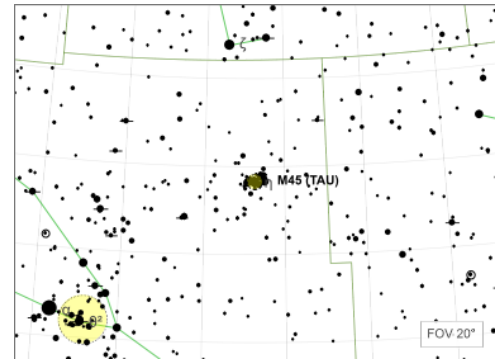
● Open Cluster · Tau · -

Position RA 03h 47m 24.0s Dec +24d 07' 0"
Magnitude 1.6 mag
Distance 445 ly
Visibility 9.5 / 10

Notes

The most famous star cluster in the sky — known across every ancient culture from Japan (Subaru) to the Maori. Six to seven stars visible to the naked eye; binoculars reveal dozens more in a stunning field. Under dark skies with clean optics, the blue reflection nebulosity around the brightest stars is visible. Best at lowest magnification. A timeless wonder.

Observed



6 Kemble's Cascade Cluster NGC 1502

● Open Cluster · Cam

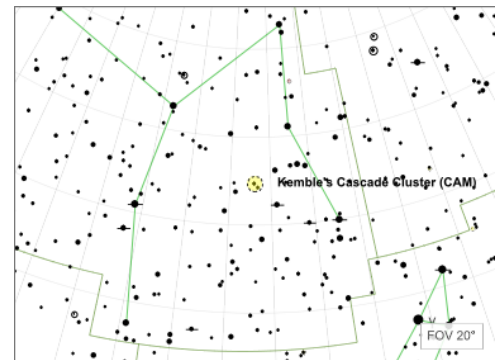
Easy

Position RA 04h 07m 42.0s Dec +62d 19' 60"
Magnitude 5.7 mag
Size 10.2'
Visibility 10.0 / 10

Notes

A compact, bright cluster of about 45 stars anchoring the southern end of Kemble's Cascade — a stunning 2.5°-long chain of 20+ stars visible in binoculars. The cluster itself features a bright double star (Struve 485, mag 6.9 + 6.9 at 18") at its heart. Start at the cascade's northern end near Alpha Camelopardalis and sweep south to arrive here.

Observed



7 Hyades C41

● Open Cluster · Tau

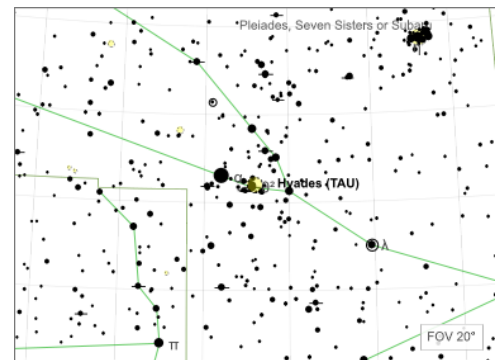
Easy

Position RA 04h 28m 0.0s Dec +16d 00' 0"
Magnitude 0.5 mag
Distance 151 ly
Visibility 8.5 / 10

Notes

The nearest open cluster to Earth at just 153 light-years — so close its stars are scattered across 5° of sky, forming the V-shaped face of Taurus. Best with the naked eye or binoculars (too large for most telescopes). The brilliant orange star Aldebaran is a foreground interloper, not a true member. Contains many fine double stars and over 400 members.

Observed

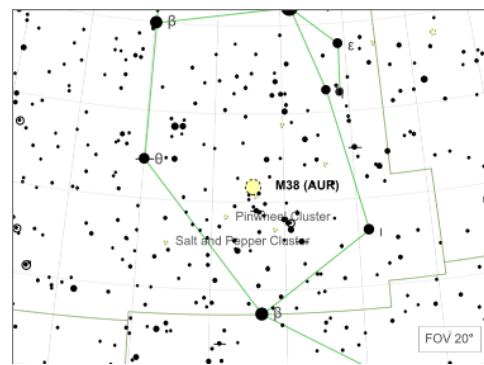


8 M38

● Open Cluster · Aur · NGC 1912

Easy

Position RA 05h 28m 42.0s Dec +35d 51' 18"
 Magnitude 7.4 mag
 Size 9.6'
 Distance 3.5 kly
 Visibility 9.9 / 10



Notes

The faintest of the three Auriga Messier clusters, but notable for its distinctive cross or starfish pattern of bright star chains. About 100 stars spread across 21'. The small cluster NGC 1907 lies just 30' to the south – both fit in the same low-power field for a nice contrast between a loose and a compact cluster.

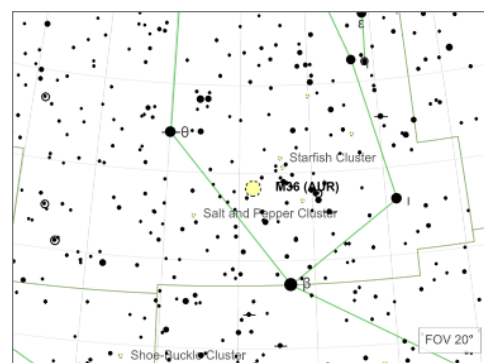
Observed

9 M36

● Open Cluster · Aur · NGC 1960

Easy

Position RA 05h 36m 12.0s Dec +34d 08' 4"
 Magnitude 6.3 mag
 Size 7.2'
 Distance 4.1 kly
 Visibility 9.9 / 10



Notes

The most compact of the Auriga trio – about 60 young blue-white stars packed into 12'. Its brightest members form a pinwheel pattern visible at 60-80x. Often compared to a miniature Pleiades. Located midway between M37 and M38, all three can be visited in a single sweep along the Milky Way through Auriga.

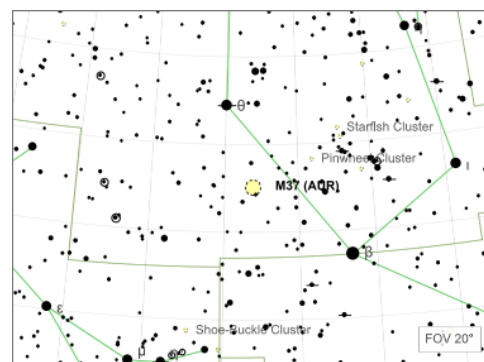
Observed

10 M37

● Open Cluster · Aur · NGC 2099

Easy

Position RA 05h 52m 18.0s Dec +32d 33' 2"
 Magnitude 6.2 mag
 Size 11.4'
 Distance 4.4 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

The richest and finest of the three Auriga clusters, with over 500 stars in a 24' field. At 100x, it is a dazzling carpet of faint stars peppered with a dozen orange giants – hence the salt and pepper name. A prominent red star sits near the center. Many observers consider it the best open cluster in Auriga and among the finest in the winter sky.

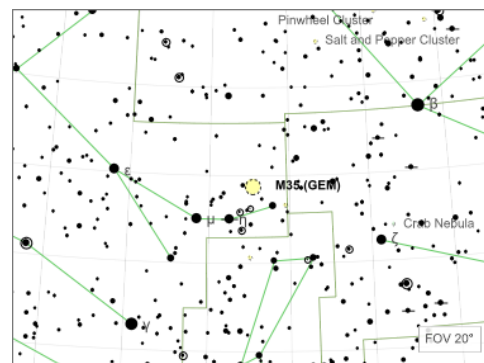
Observed

11 M35

● Open Cluster · Gem · NGC 2168

Easy

Position RA 06h 09m 6.0s Dec +24d 21' 0"
 Magnitude 5.3 mag
 Size 24.0'
 Distance 2.8 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A large, bright cluster visible to the naked eye at the foot of Castor in Gemini. About 200 stars fill a generous 28' field with curving chains and loops. Just 15' SW, the compact cluster NGC 2158 (mag 8.6) appears as a hazy patch – it is actually 5 times more distant, creating a remarkable depth-of-field comparison.

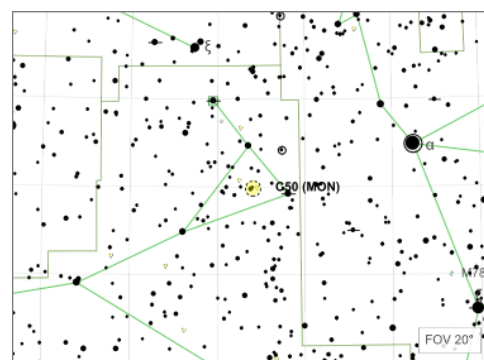
Observed

12 C50

● Open Cluster · Mon · NGC 2244

Easy

Position RA 06h 31m 52.1s Dec +4d 54' 0"
 Magnitude 4.8 mag
 Distance 5.2 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

The young, hot star cluster at the heart of the Rosette Nebula – its ultraviolet radiation has carved a central cavity in the surrounding gas. The cluster itself (NGC 2244) is visible in binoculars as a rectangular group of bright stars. With an OIII or UHC filter, the nebula's ring shape emerges in 4-inch scopes. One of the finest emission nebula-cluster combinations in the sky.

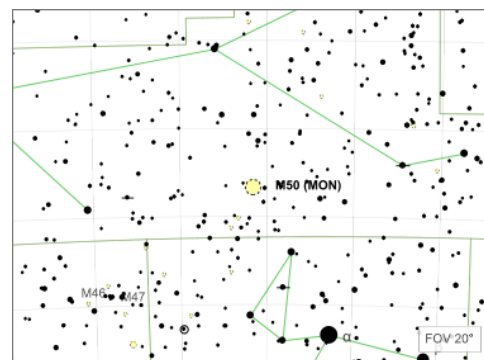
Observed

13 M50

● Open Cluster · Mon · NGC 2323

Easy

Position RA 07h 03m 12.0s Dec -8d 19' 60"
 Magnitude 5.9 mag
 Size 14.1'
 Distance 3.2 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A pretty cluster of about 200 stars forming a heart-shaped outline visible at 50-80x. A striking red giant (mag 7.9) near the center adds a splash of color against the blue-white field. Located in Monoceros between Sirius and Procyon, it is easy to find but often overlooked in favor of its brighter neighbors. Spans 16'.

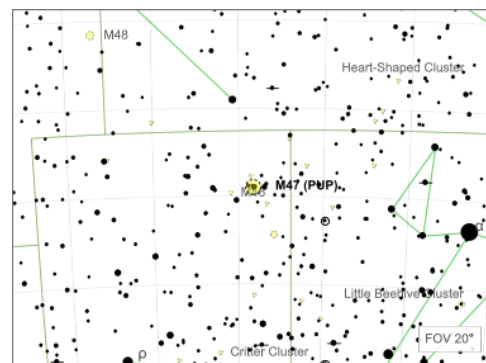
Observed

14 M47

● Open Cluster · Pup · NGC 2422

Easy

Position RA 07h 36m 36.0s Dec -14d 30' 0"
 Magnitude 4.4 mag
 Size 19.8'
 Distance 1.6 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

One of the brightest open clusters — a coarse group of 50 stars dominated by blue-white suns, some of 5th magnitude. Visible to the naked eye, and glittering in binoculars. Forms a spectacular wide-field pair with M46 just 1.5° to the east. The two are a study in contrasts: M47 is young, bright, and sparse; M46 is old, faint, and very rich.

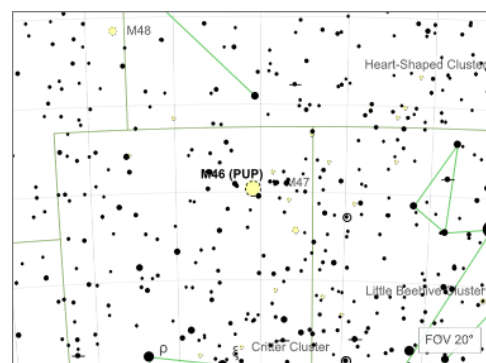
Observed

15 M46

● Open Cluster · Pup · NGC 2437

Easy

Position RA 07h 41m 48.0s Dec -14d 49' 0"
 Magnitude 6.0 mag
 Size 21.0'
 Distance 5.4 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A rich, symmetrical swarm of 500+ stars appearing as a fine granular haze that resolves beautifully at 80-100x. Its hidden treasure: the planetary nebula NGC 2438 sits on its northern edge — a tiny smoke ring visible as a small gray disc among the stars. The nebula is actually a foreground object, not a true cluster member. One of the richest Messier clusters.

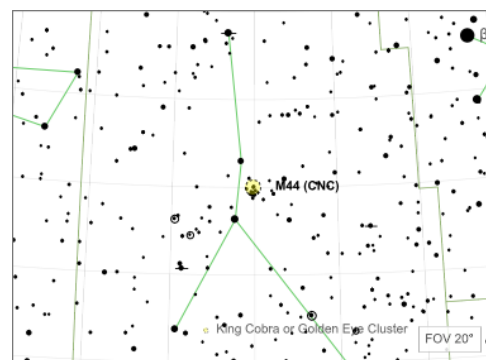
Observed

16 M44

● Open Cluster · Cnc · NGC 2632

Easy

Position RA 08h 40m 24.0s Dec +19d 58' 60"
 Magnitude 3.7 mag
 Size 108.6'
 Distance 610 ly
 Visibility 9.5 / 10



Notes

One of the nearest open clusters at 577 light-years, visible to the naked eye as a misty glow in Cancer. Known since antiquity as Praesepe (the Manger). Best in binoculars or a rich-field scope — over 1,000 stars spread across 1.5°. Ancient Greeks used its visibility as a weather predictor: if it vanished, rain was coming.

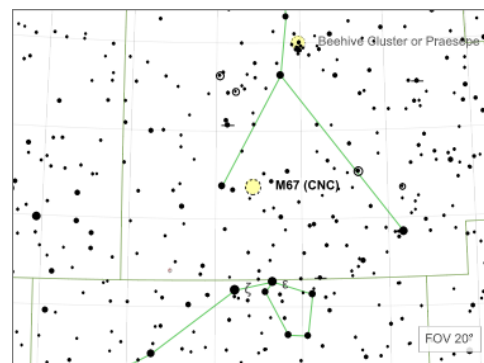
Observed

17 M67

● Open Cluster · Cnc · NGC 2682

Easy

Position RA 08h 51m 18.0s Dec +11d 49' 0"
Magnitude 6.1 mag
Size 33.0'
Distance 2.9 kly
Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

One of the oldest known open clusters at nearly 4 billion years — its stars have a similar age and composition to our Sun, making it an important benchmark for stellar evolution. About 500 stars in a compact 30' area, beautifully resolved at 50-80x. Located 2° south of Alpha Cancri. A quiet but deeply satisfying cluster.

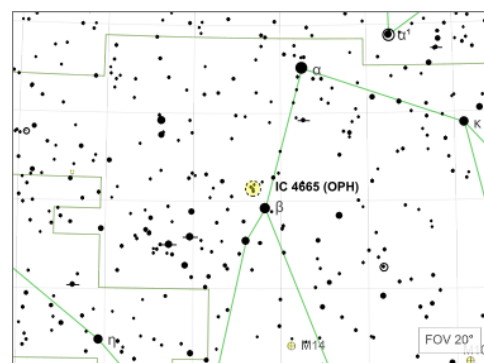
Observed

18 IC 4665

● Open Cluster · Oph

Easy

Position RA 17h 46m 18.0s Dec +5d 43' 0"
Magnitude 4.2 mag
Size 24.6'
Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A large, sparse cluster spanning over 1° — best in binoculars or a finder scope. About 30 bright stars scattered loosely, making it nearly invisible at high magnification. At just 36 million years old, its members are hot blue-white stars. Located 1.5° NE of Cebalrai (Beta Ophiuchi). A fine summer binocular object often overlooked.

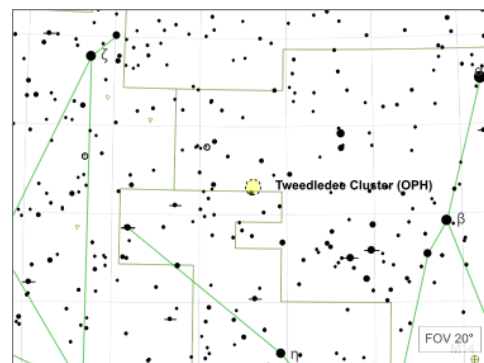
Observed

19 Tweedledee Cluster NGC 6633

● Open Cluster · Oph

Easy

Position RA 18h 27m 42.0s Dec +6d 34' 0"
Magnitude 4.6 mag
Size 12.0'
Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A bright, loose cluster of about 30 stars spanning 27' in eastern Ophiuchus. Its brightest stars form a distinctive arrowhead or V-shape visible in binoculars. Just 3° SE of IC 4756, the two make a fine binocular double cluster for summer evenings. Easy to find between Ophiuchus and Aquila along the Milky Way.

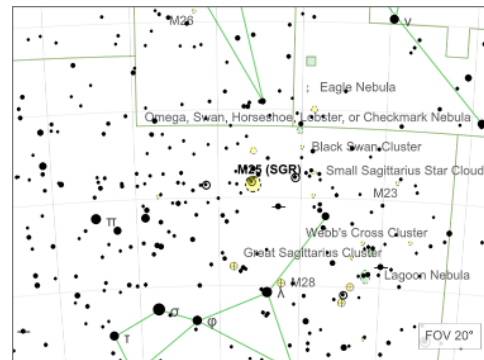
Observed

20 M25

● Open Cluster · Sgr · IC 4725

Easy

Position RA 18h 31m 36.0s Dec -19d 15' 0"
 Magnitude 4.6 mag
 Size 14.1'
 Distance 2.0 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A bright, scattered cluster of about 80 stars in the rich Sagittarius Milky Way. Its jewel is the Cepheid variable U Sagittarii (mag 6.3-7.1, period 6.7 days) — one of the few naked-eye Cepheids in a cluster. Spans 32', best at 30-50x. Located 6° north of the Teapot lid. A fine summer binocular and small-telescope target.

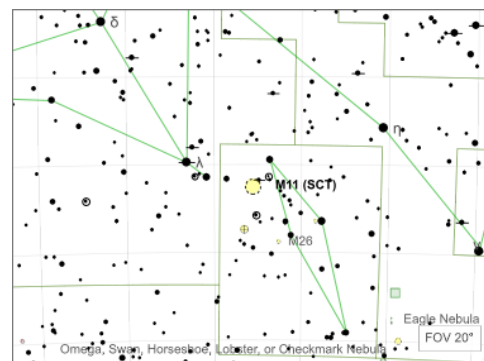
Observed

21 M11

● Open Cluster · Sct · NGC 6705

Easy

Position RA 18h 51m 6.0s Dec -6d 16' 0"
 Magnitude 5.8 mag
 Size 9.0'
 Distance 6.2 kly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

The richest and most concentrated open cluster in the Messier catalog — nearly 3,000 stars packed into 14', rivaling a loose globular in density. A bright star at the apex leads a fan-shaped wedge of stars like a flock of wild ducks in flight. Needs 80-100x to resolve the dense stellar background. One of the top deep sky objects of summer.

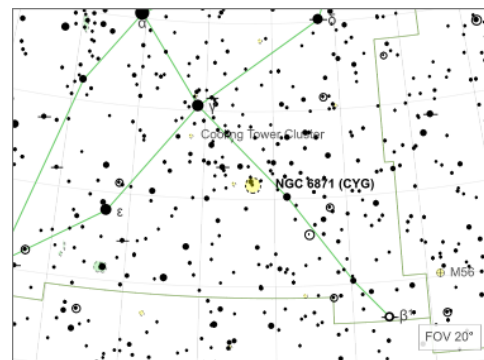
Observed

22 NGC 6871

● Open Cluster · Cyg

Easy

Position RA 20h 05m 54.0s Dec +35d 46' 60"
 Magnitude 5.2 mag
 Size 9.3'
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A bright, loose cluster of young blue supergiants embedded in the Cygnus Milky Way. About 30 stars in a 20' area. Part of the Cygnus OB3 association, one of the most active star-forming regions in our spiral arm. Its rich surroundings make it a stunning binocular sweep — the cluster fades into a spectacular star field with subtle dark lanes.

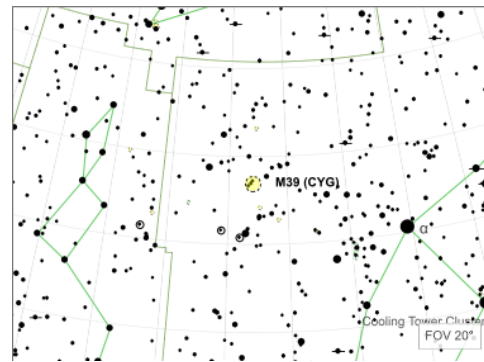
Observed

23 M39

● Open Cluster · Cyg · NGC 7092

Easy

Position RA 21h 31m 42.0s Dec +48d 25' 60"
 Magnitude 4.6 mag
 Size 19.5'
 Distance 800 ly
 Visibility 10.0 / 10



Notes

A bright, sparse cluster of about 30 stars forming a distinctive triangular pattern. Its members are scattered across 32', requiring low power (20-30x) or binoculars to appreciate the overall shape. Located 9° NE of Deneb in a beautiful Milky Way field. Best in early autumn when Cygnus rides high overhead.

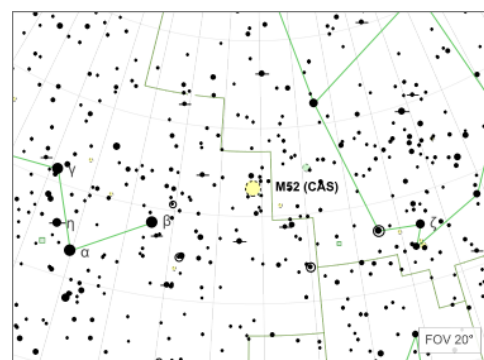
Observed

24 M52

● Open Cluster · Cas · NGC 7654

Easy

Position RA 23h 24m 12.0s Dec +61d 34' 60"
 Magnitude 7.3 mag
 Size 9.9'
 Distance 4.6 kly
 Visibility 9.9 / 10



Notes

A rich, compressed fan of about 200 stars with a bright orange star at its western edge. Partially resolved at 50x with a granular, hazy background of fainter members. The famous Bubble Nebula (NGC 7635) lies just 35' to the SW. Located near the Cassiopeia-Cepheus border, it is circumpolar from mid-northern latitudes and visible year-round.

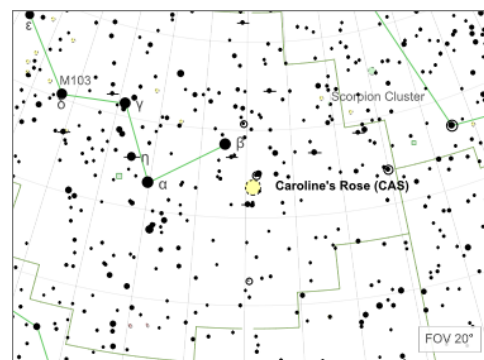
Observed

25 Caroline's Rose NGC 7789

● Open Cluster · Cas

Easy

Position RA 23h 56m 60.0s Dec +56d 43' 60"
 Magnitude 6.7 mag
 Size 14.4'
 Visibility 9.9 / 10



Notes

Discovered by Caroline Herschel in 1783, this is one of the richest open clusters in the sky – over 1,000 stars in a 16' field. At 80-100x, curving dark lanes between the stars create a rose-petal pattern. At 1.6 billion years old, many red giants dot the field among the blue-white stars. A breathtaking sight in 8-inch or larger scopes and a fitting finale to any Cassiopeia tour.

Observed

