

Observing Messier Objects in the Spring Sky - Activities (Ages 8-11)



Today we are going to investigate:

- Messier Objects you can see in Spring
- The giant globular cluster Messier 3
- The Beehive Cluster
- Messier objects which are galaxies

Activities

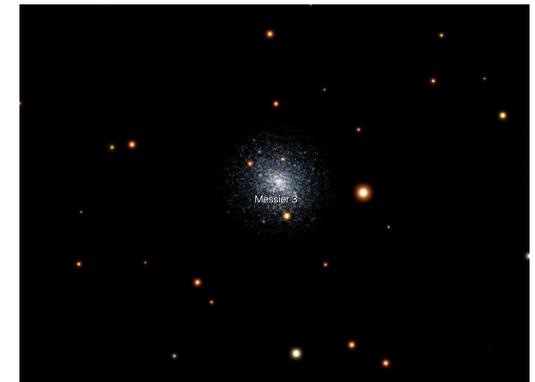
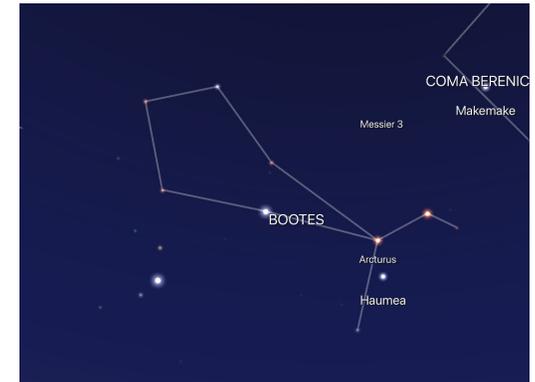
- 1 Various types of object are included in the Messier Catalogue which was drawn up by a French astronomer. Set Night Sky to an evening in March and look south. Our first object is globular cluster Messier 3, a giant ball of tight-together stars. Find the bright star Arcturus in the constellation of Bootes (Tip: use Search if you can't see it). Look east of Arcturus to see Messier 3 then tap on ⓘ to find out more about it. You will see Messier 3 is said to be halfway between Arcturus and another star.

Question: What is this other star called?

- 2 Messier 44 is in the constellation Cancer (the Crab). It is another type of star cluster called an open cluster. Find this constellation and zoom in to look for the cluster. It's difficult to miss. As it looks like a swarm of angry insects it is nicknamed the Beehive cluster! Compare Messier 3 and Messier 44.

Question: Globular clusters contain fewer stars than open clusters. True or false?

- 3 Let's find some galaxies from the Messier Catalogue, starting with Messier 51, the Whirlpool Galaxy. Find the constellation Ursa Major (the Great Bear), look to the stars of the Bear's tail. The star at the end of the tail is called Alkaid and the Whirlpool Galaxy is nearby. Find the Whirlpool Galaxy and tap on ⓘ to learn more. Surprisingly this galaxy is not part of Ursa Major, instead it is included in another constellation.



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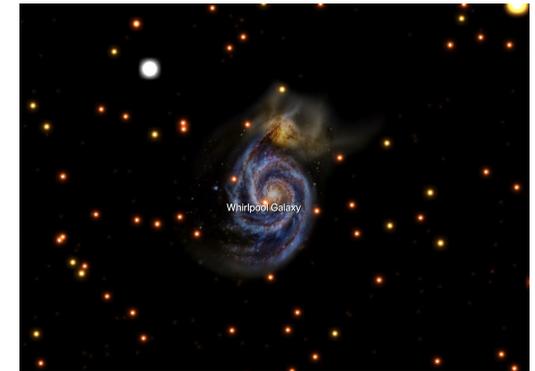


Question: Can you tell what constellation Messier 51 is a member of ?

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Leo (the Lion) has three well-known spiral galaxies. Two of them are Messier objects, together with a third spiral galaxy designated NGC3628 they make up a group called the Leo Triplet. To locate the Triplet, first find Leo. This constellation looks like a lion lying down, so next find the star Denebola at Leo's tail. The Leo Triplet is under the Lion close to Denebola. NGC3628 is not included in the Messier Catalogue but instead is part of another astronomer's catalog.

Question: What do you think NGC is short for? (Tip: You can check your answer by tapping on the information tile ⓘ for NGC3628.)



What we have discovered:

- How to find some springtime Messier objects
- Messier 3 and 44 are both star clusters but of different types
- Several Messier objects are spiral galaxies
- The NGC objects are in a separate list from the Messier Catalogue

Well done!
You're a Night Sky
Superstar!