



Evening sky in FEBRUARY 2015

Nowhere else in the sky does one find three evenly spaced bright stars in a straight line, making it easy to locate the Belt of Orion, the Hunter in the northern sky. These three stars are among the furthest we can see with the naked eye. At the eastern end of the Belt is Alnitak which is a triple star system, 100 000 times the luminosity of the Sun and 800 light years away. The middle star is Anilam, a blue-white supergiant, 1340 light years distant and 375 000 times as luminous as the Sun. Mintaka, at the western end, is 900 light years away and 90 000 times as luminous as the Sun. In Arabic, Anilam means the "string of pearls". In the Xhosa culture these stars are called *damaKroza* and one is not permitted to point towards these stars as they represent three sacred places.

On 22 February planets Venus and Mars form the tightest grouping of naked-eye planets this year. In the course of the month they move from Aquarius (Water Bearer) into Pisces (Fishes). Planet Jupiter is in Cancer (Crab).

The Moon is in the evening sky until 6 February and again from 21 February.