

Evening sky in July 2018

Take advantage of the long beautiful winter nights to do some chilly stargazing this July, as the prominent winter constellations of Scorpius and Sagittarius take centre stage overhead. This region, containing several bright nebulae and star clusters, reveals a treasure trove of fascinating celestial objects to explore with your binoculars (see the 2018 Sky Guide South Africa available from local bookshops for reference).

In July, all five naked eye planets can be observed each night throughout the month. Venus continues to dominate the early evening sky as our brilliant evening 'star', making its way through the constellation of Leo.

This month is also the best time of year to observe Mercury, close to the western horizon. As Mercury sets (2 hours after sunset), shift your gaze over to the eastern horizon as Mars begins to rise. Jupiter and Saturn can be observed in the evening sky in the constellations of Libra and Sagittarius respectively.

July also offers South Africans the exciting opportunity to witness a total lunar eclipse, occurring on the 27 July (maximum occurring at 22:21).

The moon will be in the evening sky until the 3 July, and then from the 14 July till month end, with full moon and eclipse on the 27 July.