



→ A Guide to Using Stellarium

Stellarium is an interactive planetarium program that allows you to explore the night sky from any location on earth, at any time of the year.

Stellarium can be used as an educational tool to learn about the night sky, as well as a tool for planning observations through a telescope. It is ideally suited as a resource for gaining an understanding of the celestial sphere, and the seasonal movement of astronomical objects across the sky

The default installation (current version 0.10.5) contains over 600,000 stars as well as numerous deep sky catalogues and images. Stellarium is also expandable, with a many free plug-ins and educational resources available for download. In addition, Stellarium includes a basic scripting interface that allows custom simulations to be created by the user.

Stellarium is provided as an open-source project. Its source code is available and is freely modifiable and redistributable as per the GNU Public License.

Stellarium can be downloaded at www.stellarium.org



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Starting Stellarium

On opening a new installation of Stellarium, you will be presented with a 60° view of the sky as currently seen from Paris.



At the bottom of the screen you can see additional information describing the location, date and time.



Cardinal indicators located on the horizon show the direction you are facing.

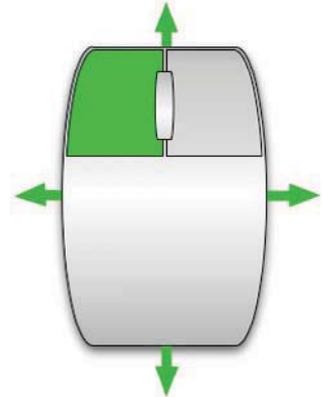


Basic Moves

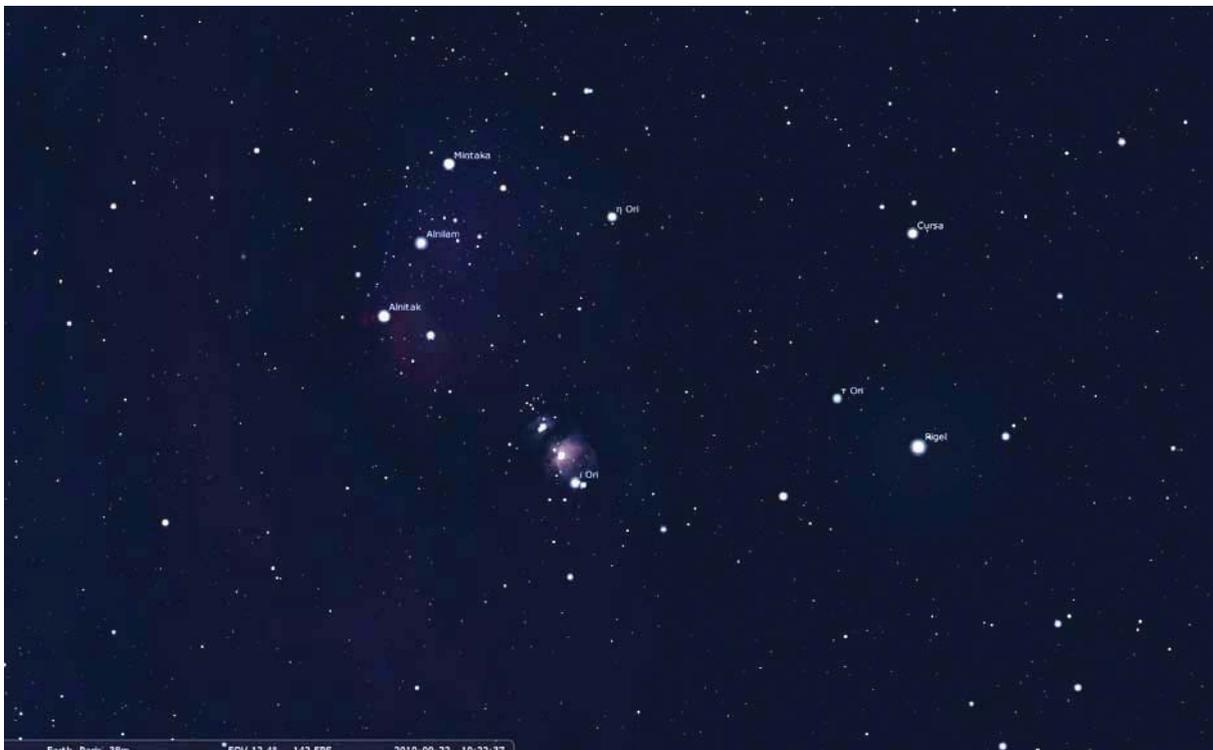
Moving around Stellarium can be accomplished using mouse and keyboard commands.

Hold the left mouse button down while moving the mouse to change your orientation.

You can also use the cursor keys on your keyboard to change your orientation.



Press and hold the keyboard *Page Up* and *Page Down* keys to zoom in and out.





Press the *space bar* to centre a selected object



Press the *forward slash* key “ / ” to quickly zoom in on a selected object



Press the *back slash* key “ \ ” to return quickly to a 60° field of view.



Setting the Location and Time

Setting the correct location and time must be done before Stellarium can be used to plan an evening's observations.

Press F6 to open the *Location Window*. Alternatively, click on the *Location Window* icon in the tool bar.

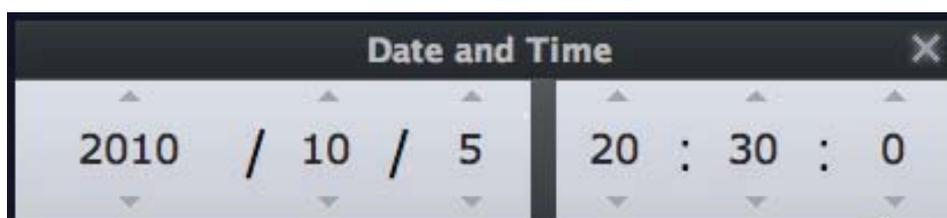
Type the name of the city in the search box, then select it. Click on "use as default" if you wish to retain the setting the next time Stellarium starts. Close when finished.



The main display should reflect the new location details:



Press F5 to bring up the *Date and Time* window. Set the time to 8:30 PM.



Time

Stellarium also allows us to manipulate time.

Press the “L” key 3 times to see the stars move across the sky.

Press the “K” key to return time to normal speed.

Press the “J” key repeatedly to make time move backwards.

Press the “8” key to reset the date and time to current.

Press the “7” key to freeze time.

If you get lost, remember:

The “8” key sets the date and time to current.

The “K” key set the simulation to normal speed.



Refer to the status bar at the bottom of the screen at any time to check on the date, time, and simulation speed.



Controls for time can also be found on the lower tool bar:



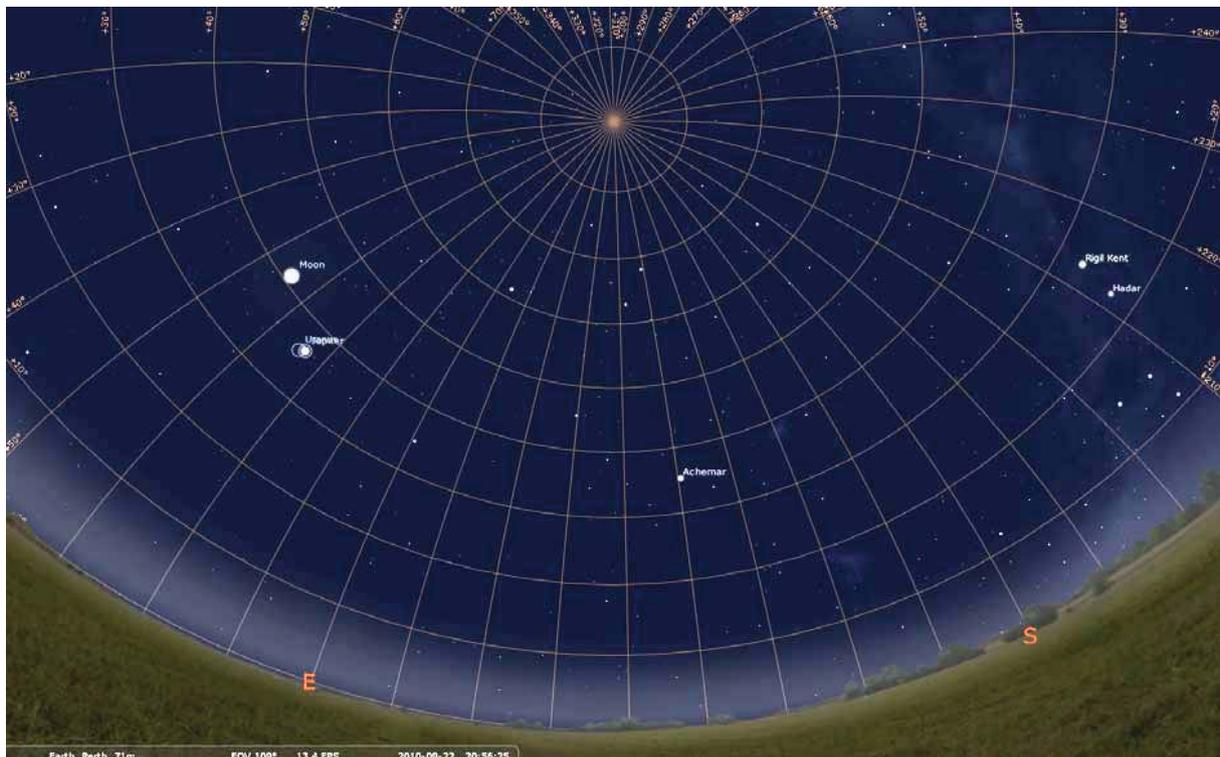
Markings

Various grids, lines and markings can be displayed on the celestial sphere.

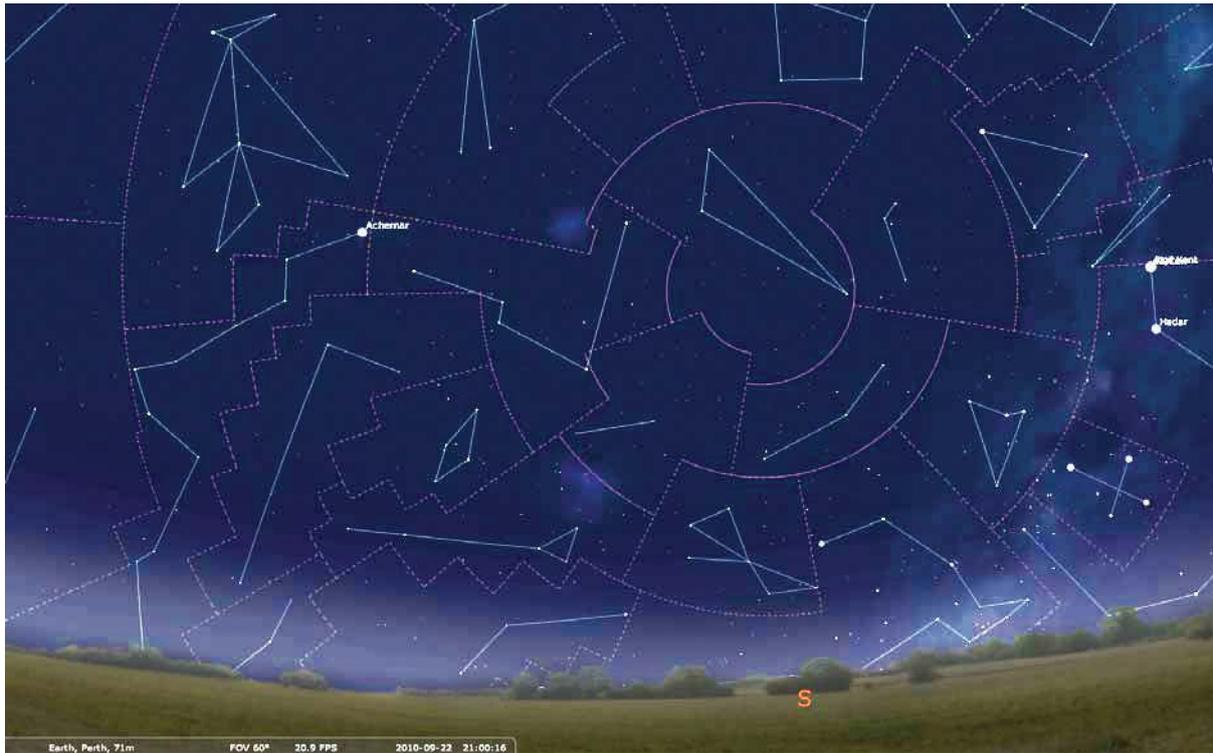
Pressing “e” toggles an equatorial grid:



Pressing “z” toggles the Altitude / Azimuth grid:



Constellation lines and boundaries are toggled on and off using the “b” and “c” keys.



Constellation art can be displayed by using the “r” key.



Labels

Labels can be toggled on and off using the *Sky and Viewing Options* menu, or by pressing “F4”.

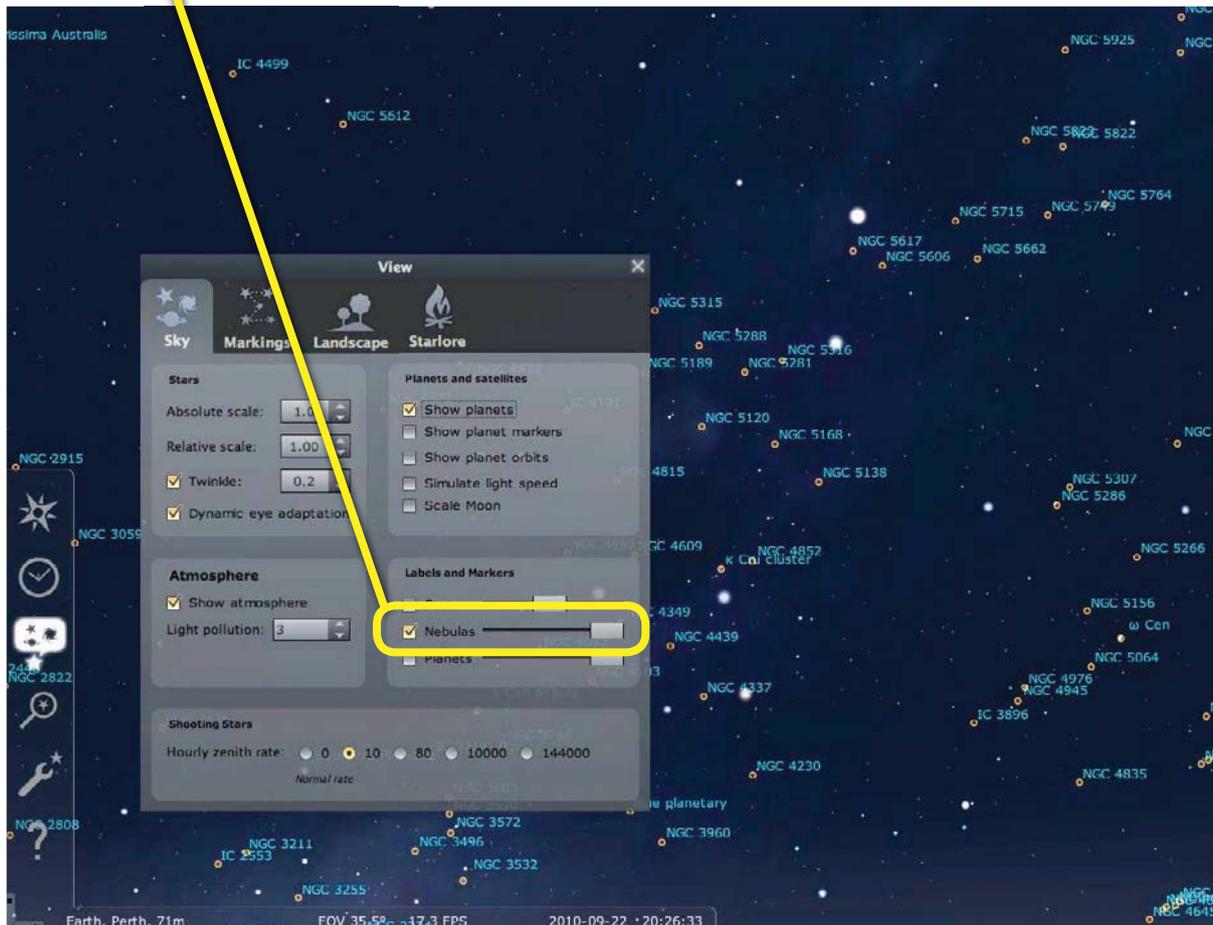
The density of object labels is adjusted using the sliders.



Deep Sky Objects

Deep sky objects, including galaxies and nebulae can be toggled on and off by using the “n” key.

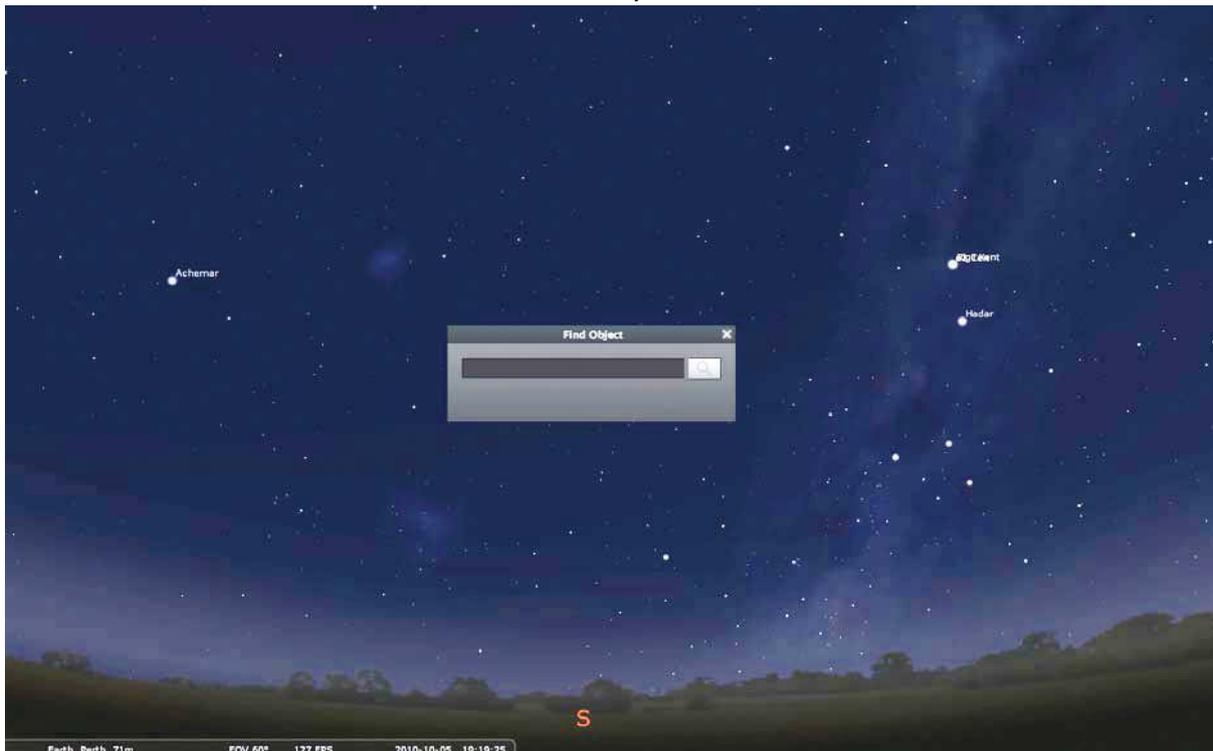
The density of displayed deep sky objects at the default 60° view is controlled using the *Nebula* slider available in the *Sky and Viewing Options* menu.



Under normal use, object density will increase as you “zoom in” and decrease as you “zoom out”.

Finding Objects

Press *Command + F* to activate the *Find Object* window.



The search functions are extremely powerful in the latest version of Stellarium, and a variety of syntaxes can be used including:

- Planet names, e.g. Jupiter
- Star names, e.g. Achernar
- NGC objects, e.g. NGC 5128
- Messier objects, e.g. "M8"
- Common names, e.g. "Lagoon Nebula"
- Constellation names, e.g. Sagittarius



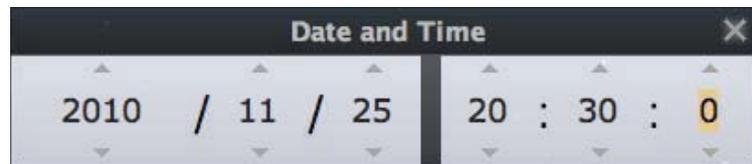
Press enter to immediately centre the 'found' object.

Press the *forward slash* key *" / "* to quickly zoom in on the object.

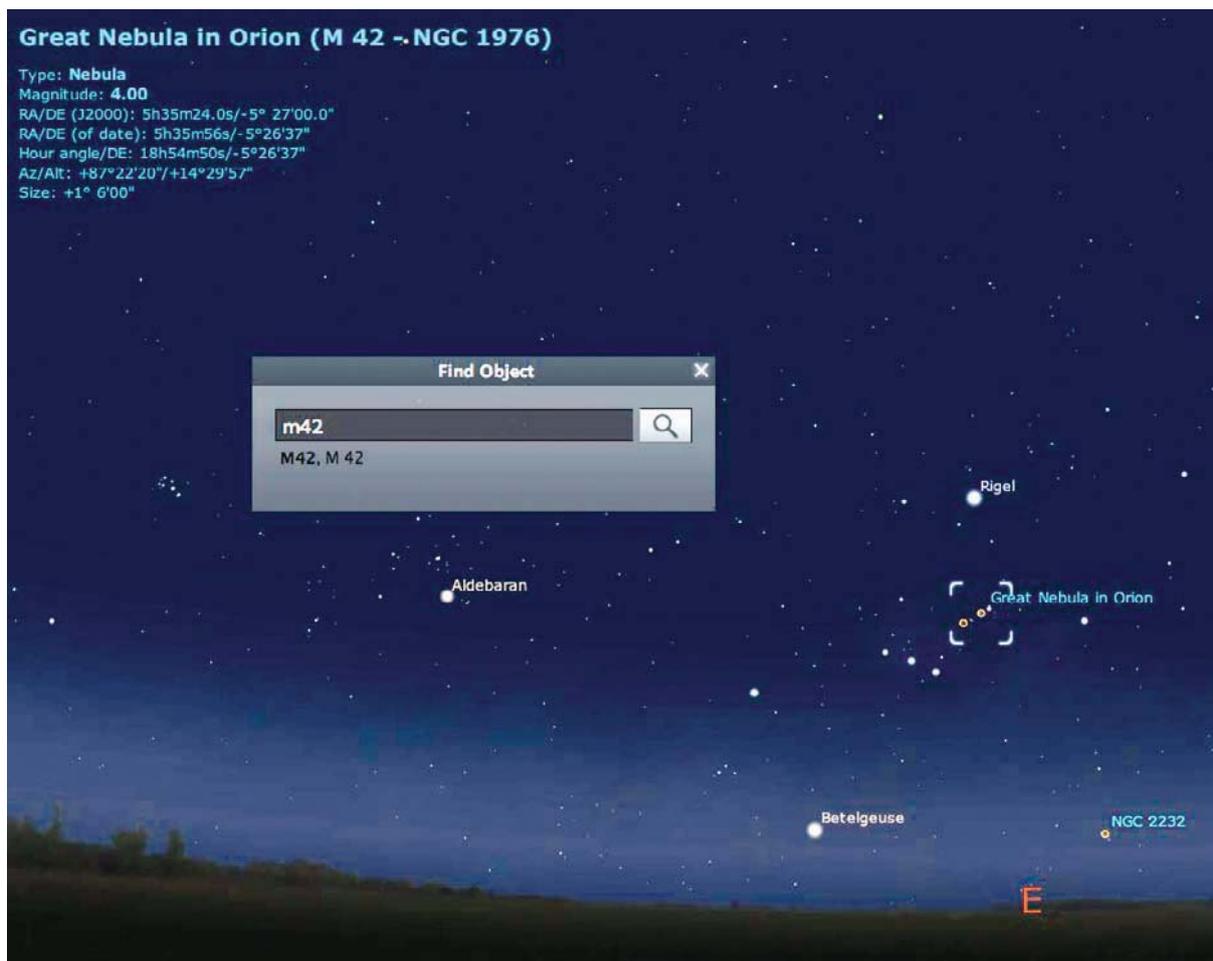
Target Planning Exercise - 1

Stellarium can help find the best time to observe particular objects for any time of the year. For this exercise we want to find the best time to image M42 on November 25th.

1. Set the date and time to November 25th, 8:30pm



2. Search for M42 using the *Find Object* dialog (Command + F) and press Enter.

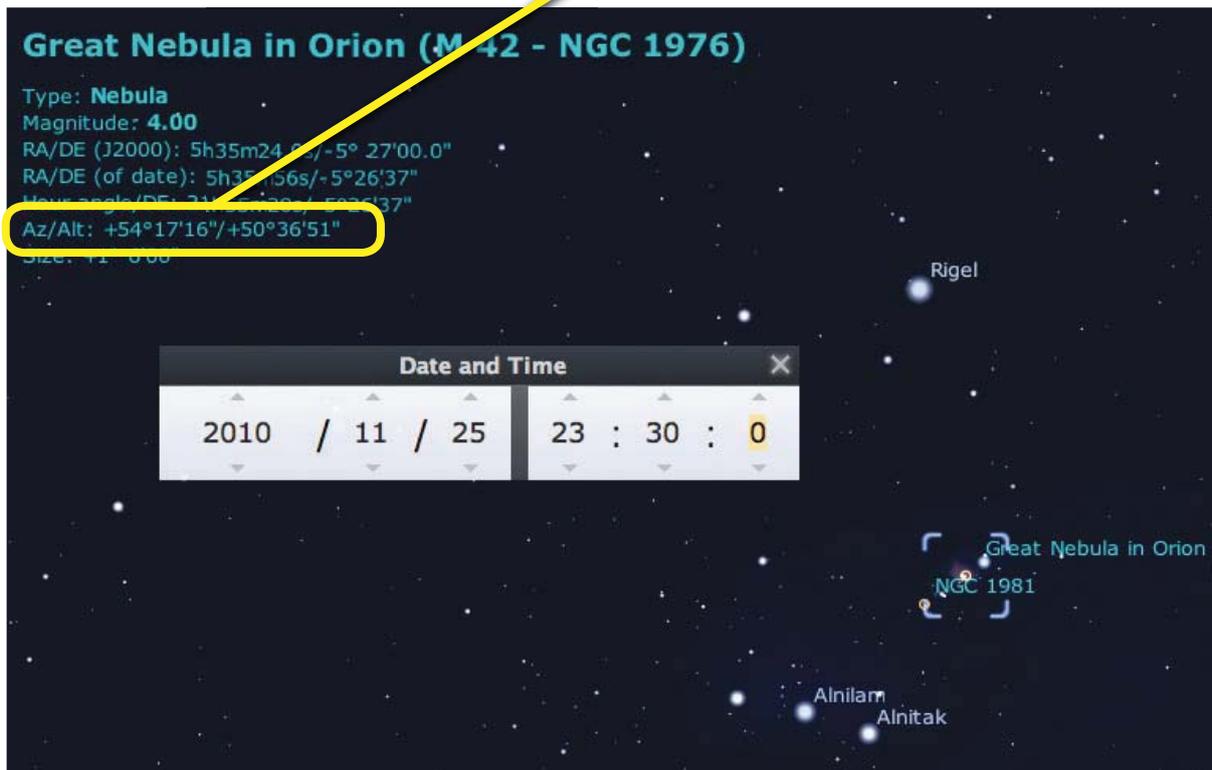


Great Nebula in Orion (M 42 -.NGC 1976)

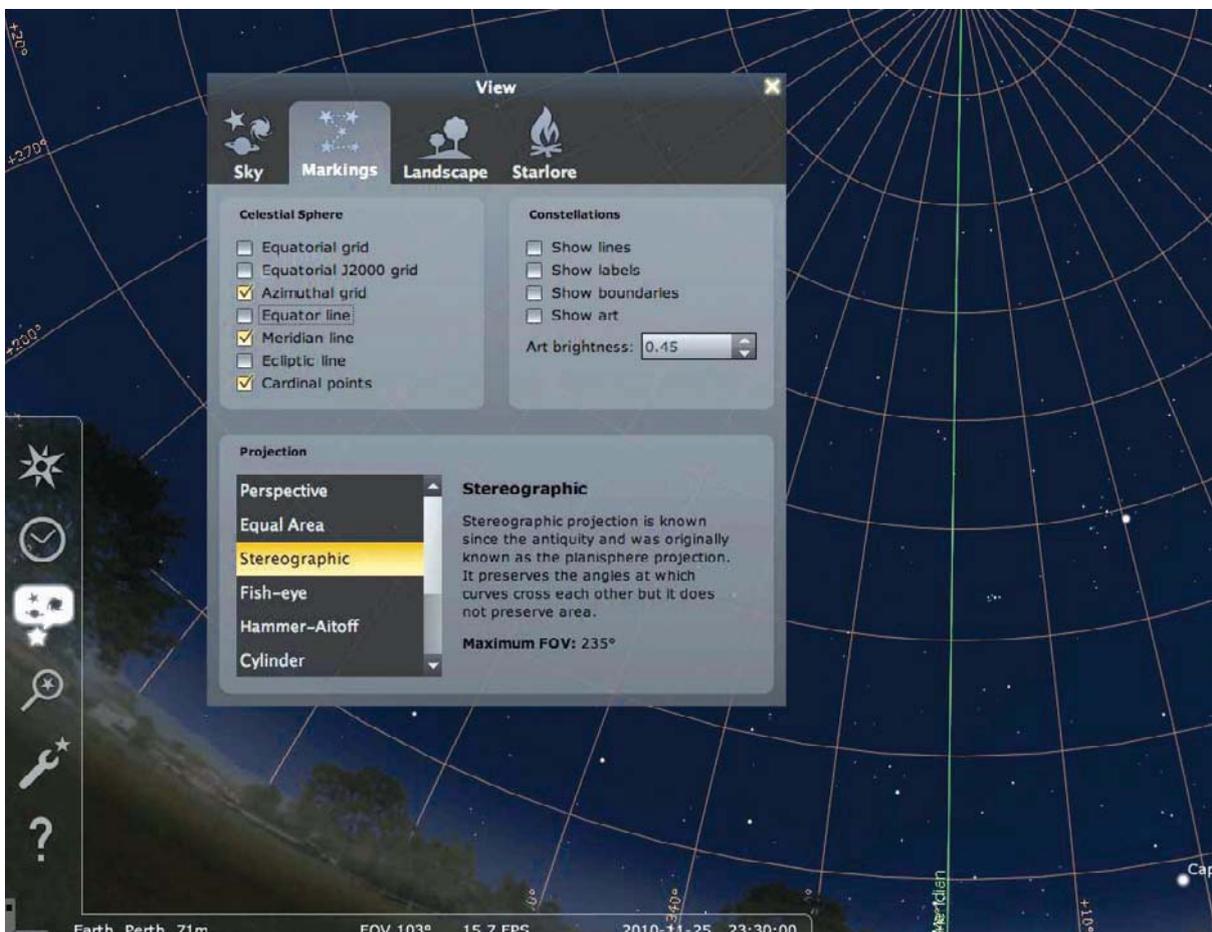
Type: **Nebula**
Magnitude: **4.00**
RA/DE (J2000): 5h35m24.0s/-5° 27'00.0"
RA/DE (of date): 5h35m56s/-5°26'37"
Hour angle/DE: 18h54m50s/-5°26'37"
Az/Alt: +87°22'20"/+14°29'57"
Size: +1° 6'00"

From our view of the sky and from the information at the top of the screen we see that M42 is in the east at an altitude of approximately 14° at 8:30pm on November 25th

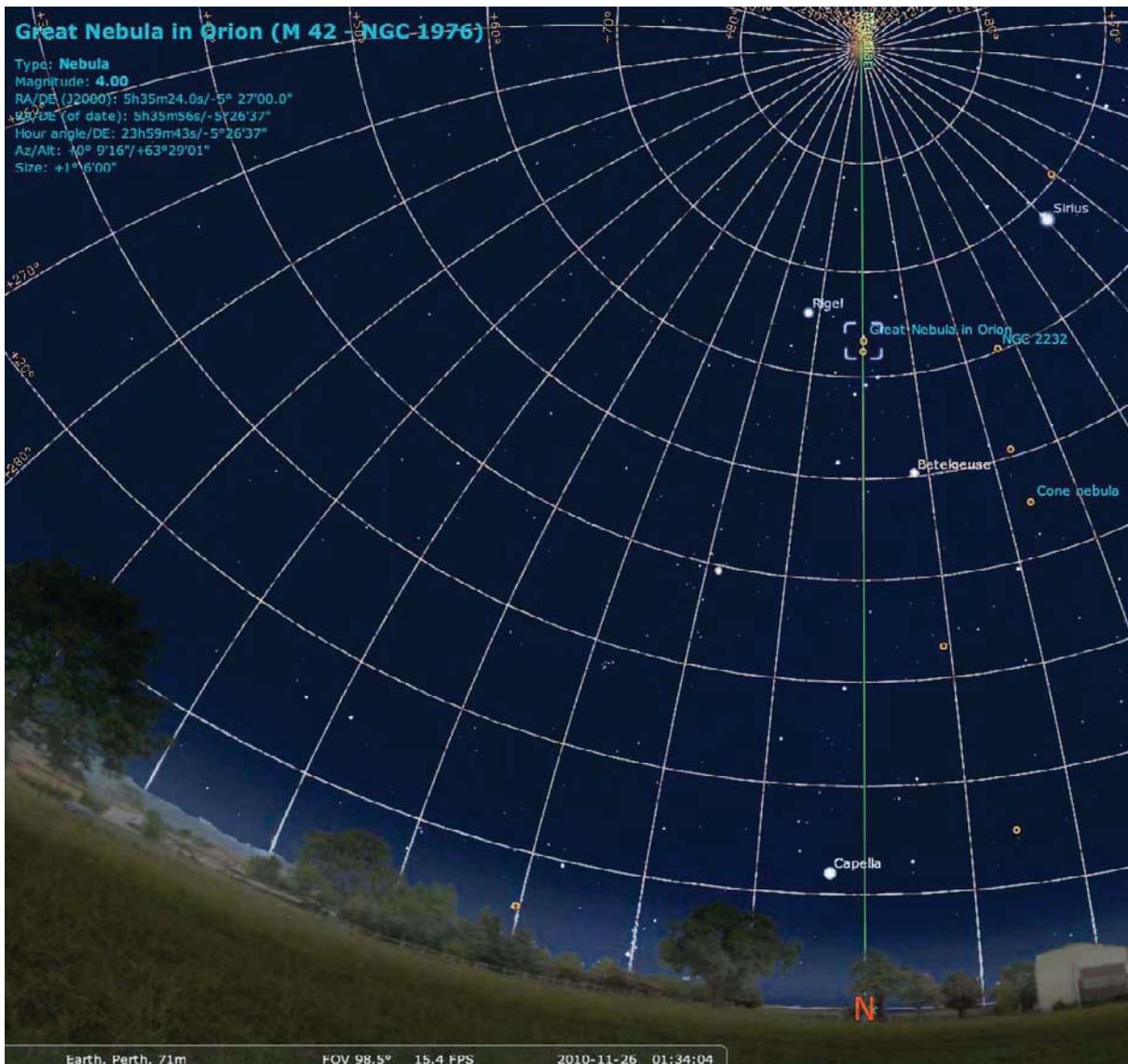
- Advancing time by 3 hours we see that M42 is in a much better position in the sky for viewing and imaging, having risen to 50° above the horizon in the north east.



- Activate the Meridian line in *Sky and Viewing Options*.



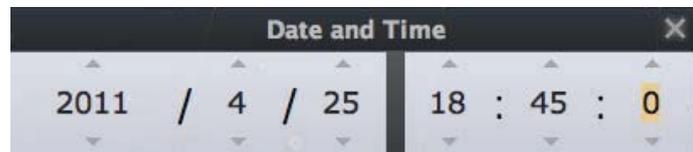
5. Advance time slowly using the "L" key. Note the time that M42 crosses the meridian. At just over 63°, this is the highest that M42 reaches when observed from this location.



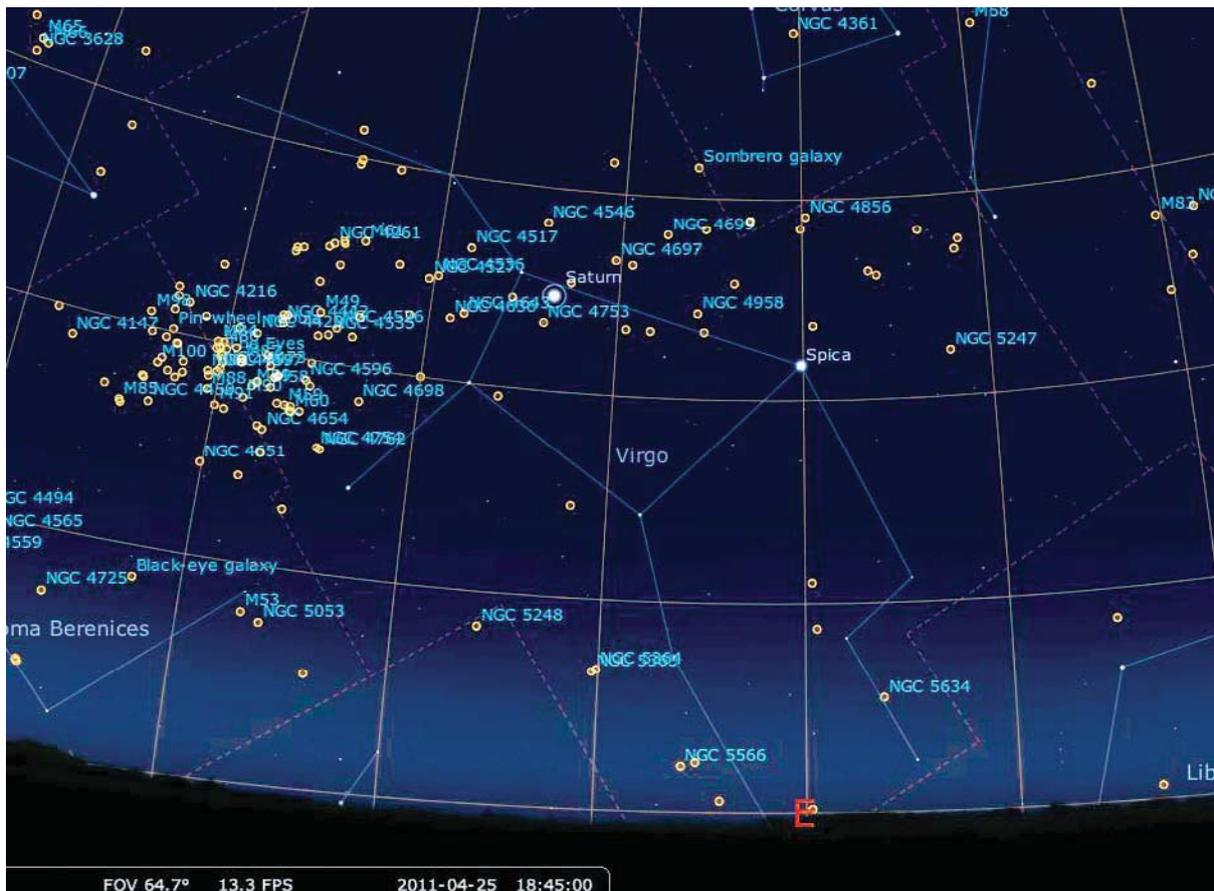
Target Planning Exercise - 2

Stellarium can help you choose the brightest objects to observe and provide object coordinates for telescope use.

1. Set the date and time to April 25th, 6:45 pm.

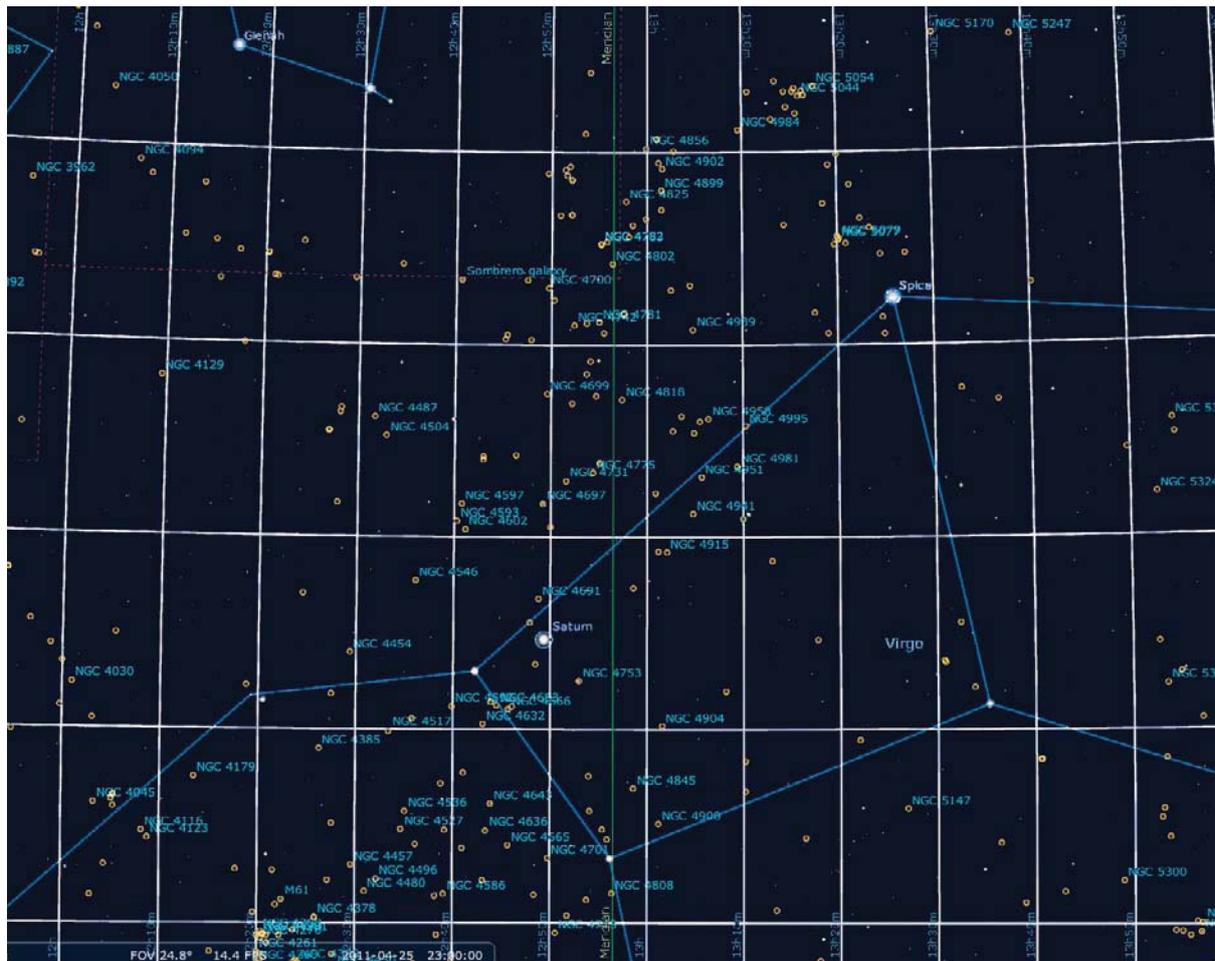


2. At this time we see that the Virgo cluster of galaxies is at about 20° above the eastern horizon.



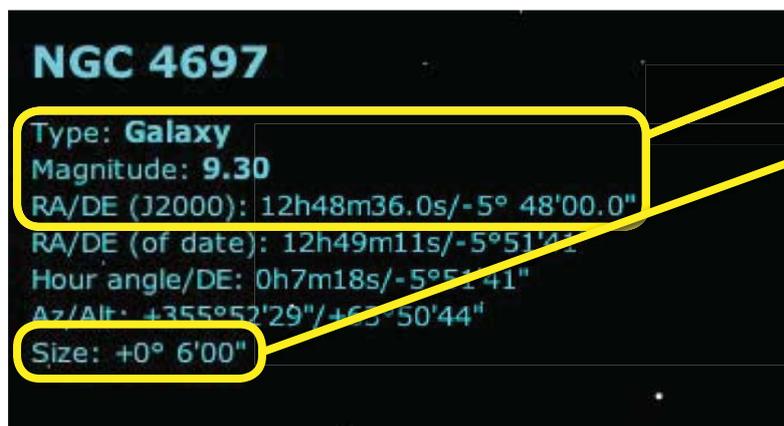
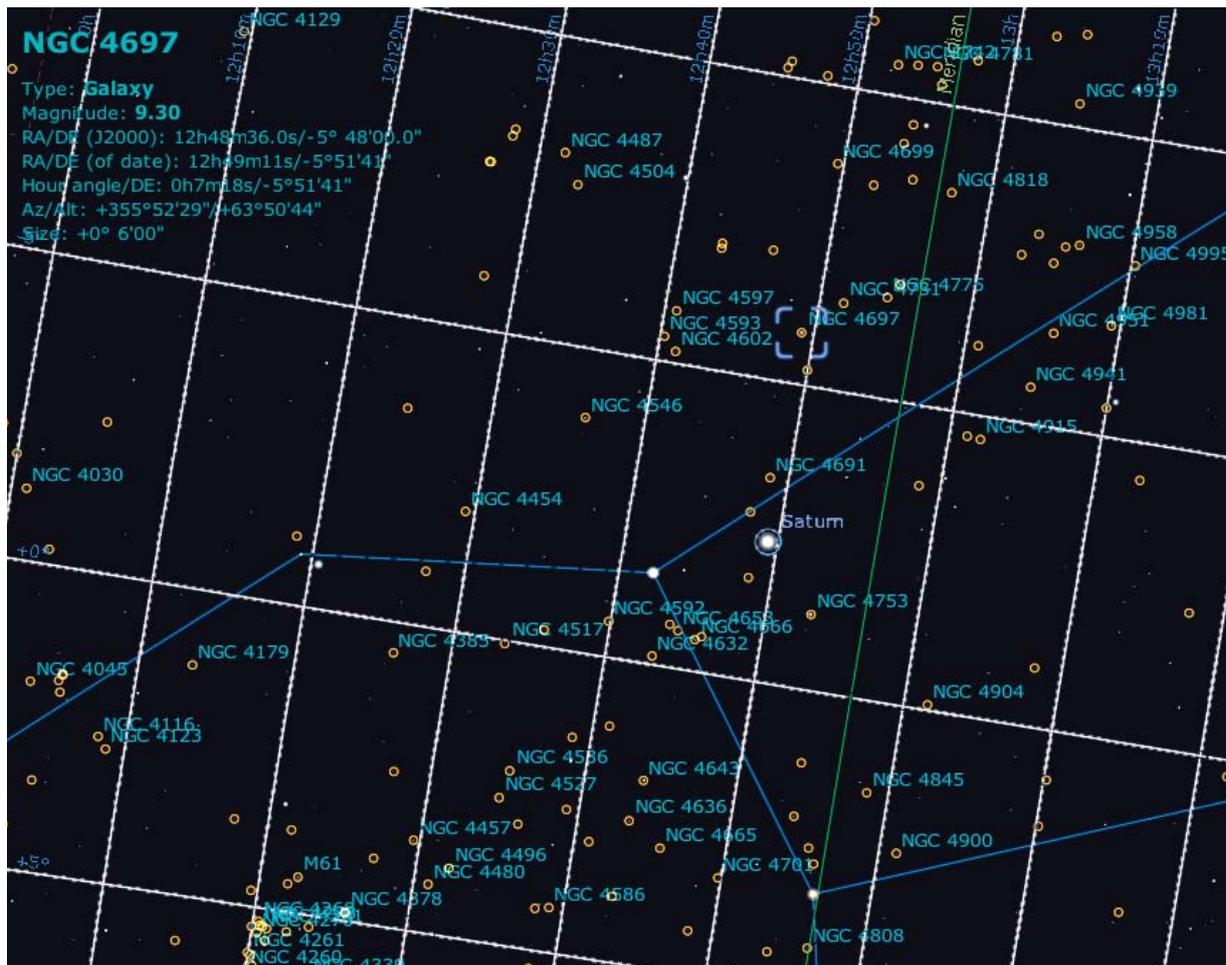
3. Advance time using the “L” key and watch the cluster rise higher in the sky.

- At 11:00pm there are dozens of galaxies in Virgo that are close to the Meridian – the optimum time for imaging.



By adjusting the time and zoom levels, it is possible to examine the motions of thousands of deep space objects moving through this altitude.

- Click on objects of interest to display the magnitude, coordinates and other useful information.



NGC 4697 is a magnitude 9.3 galaxy, about 6 arc minutes in size