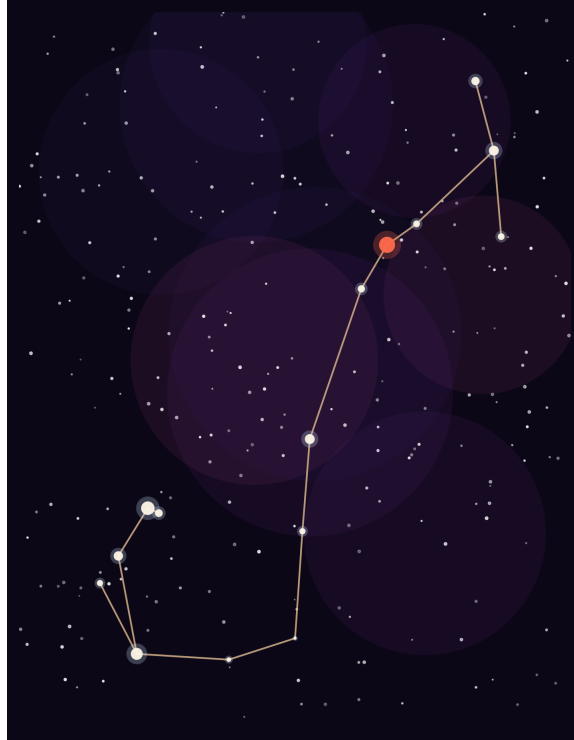


Scorpius - the scorpion.



Scorpius is one of the most instantly recognisable constellations in the sky, its long, curving tail tracing a genuine 'fish-hook' shape that few other star patterns can match. It is home to Antares, a red supergiant roughly 550 light years away and one of the largest and most luminous stars visible to the naked eye, along with the twin 'stinger' stars Shaula and Lesath at the tip of its tail.

From the dark skies of the Flinders Ranges, look toward the west-southwest at around 8:30pm this October and you'll find Scorpius arcing from roughly a third to two-thirds of the way up the sky — comfortably placed for naked-eye and binocular viewing all evening. It sinks a little lower each week through the month as it heads toward the horizon, so the earlier in October you look, the higher it will sit.

In Greek mythology, Scorpius is the scorpion sent to kill Orion the Hunter. After Orion boasted that he could slay every beast on Earth, Gaia, the goddess of the Earth, grew angry and sent a giant scorpion to stop him. The two fought, and the scorpion's sting proved fatal. Zeus placed them both among the stars as a reminder of the encounter — but on opposite sides of the sky, so that as Scorpius rises in the east, Orion sets in the west. As we noted back in March, the two are never visible in the sky together.

Antares marks the scorpion's fiery red heart — its name comes from the Greek 'Ant-Ares', meaning 'rival of Ares (Mars)', for how easily it can be mistaken for the red planet. Just behind Scorpius lies one of the richest, most colourful stretches of the Milky Way in the entire sky, including the open clusters M6 (the Butterfly Cluster) and M7 (Ptolemy's Cluster), both visible to

the naked eye from a dark site and spectacular through binoculars or a small telescope. It's one of our favourite regions to photograph on stargazing nights here in the Flinders Ranges.

Also worth a look: Fomalhaut, the Kurna 'Parna'

While Scorpius takes centre stage this month, look toward the east and you'll also find Fomalhaut, the brightest star in Piscis Austrinus (the Southern Fish), sitting at a similar height in the sky. Fomalhaut holds real significance in Kurna astronomical tradition, where it is known as Parna. Traditionally, its rising before dawn in early autumn was read as a seasonal marker — a sign that the rains were on their way.¹ It's a great reminder that the night sky above the Flinders Ranges has been read, named and used for practical knowledge by Aboriginal people for tens of thousands of years.

1. Hamacher, D.W. (2015). Identifying seasonal stars in Kurna astronomical traditions.