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Science for Society

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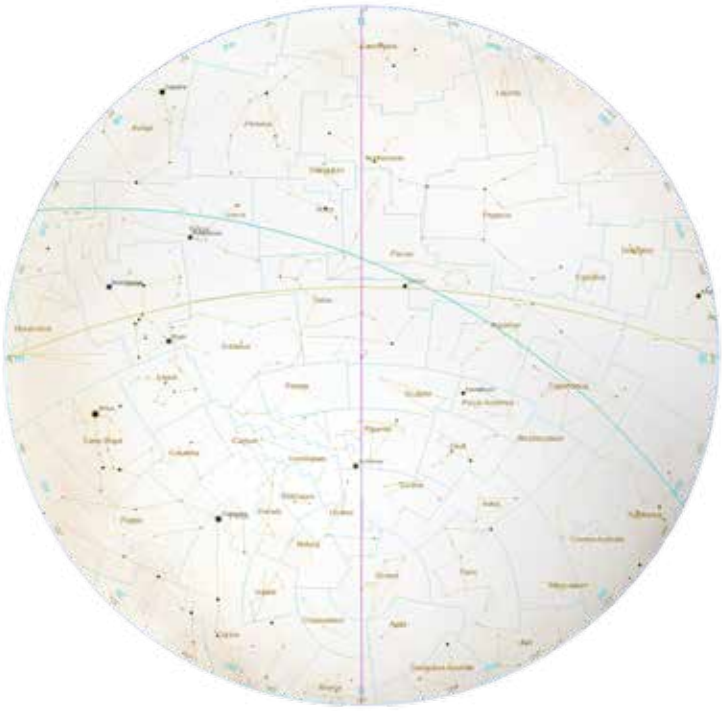
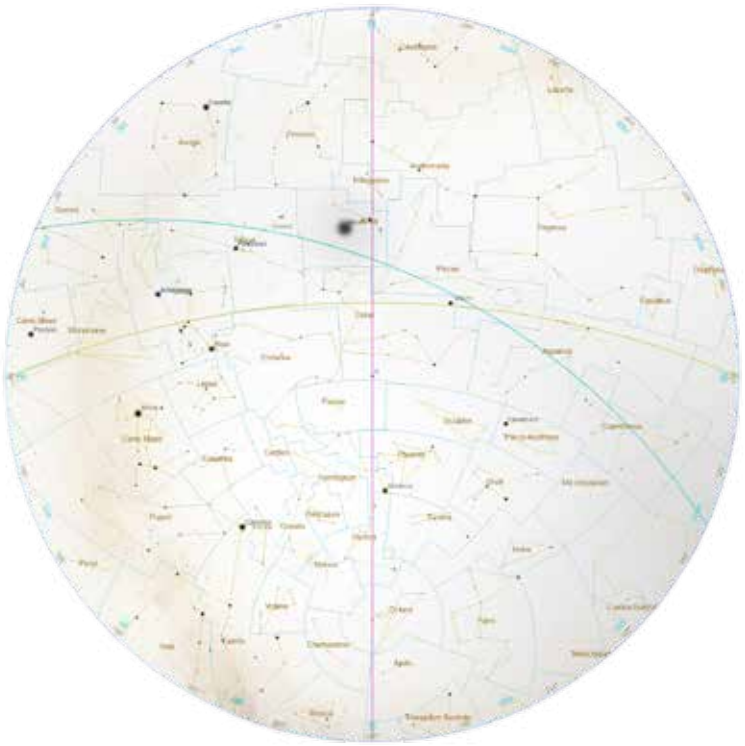
Astro News December 2026

by Lutz von Dewitz for the Namibia Scientific Society

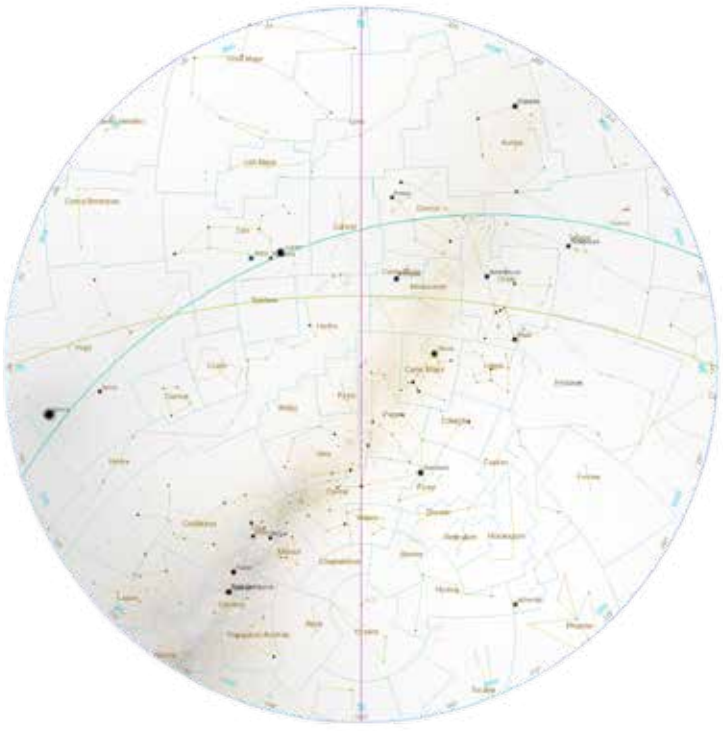


Skychart at Windhoek on 10 December 2026
at 21h00 (GMT + 2hH Central African Time)

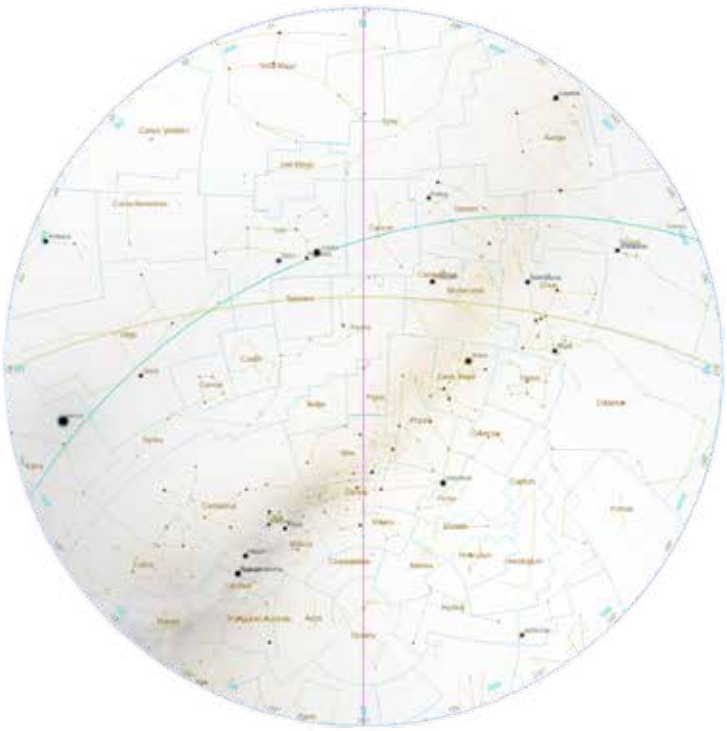


Skychart at Windhoek on 20 December 2026
at 21h00 (GMT + 2hH Central African Time)

Ecliptic Line – Celestial Equator – Meridian – Constellation Borders / SCP = Southern Celestial Pole – Z = Zenith



Skychart at Windhoek on 10 December 2026
at 04h00 (GMT + 2hH Central African Time)



Skychart at Windhoek on 20 December 2026
at 04h00 (GMT + 2hH Central African Time)

Ecliptic Line – Celestial Equator – Meridian – Constellation Borders / SCP = Southern Celestial Pole – Z = Zenith

Moon Phases

01 Dec 2026 – Last Quarter
09 Dec 2026 – New Moon
17 Dec 2026 – First Quarter
24 Dec 2026 – Full Moon

Solar System

Planet Visibility	Rise	Culm.	Set
Mercury	05:18	12:00	18:42
Venus	03:18	09:39	16:01
Mars	00:09	05:51	11:34
Jupiter	23:33	05:13	10:52
Saturn	13:44	19:45	01:47

Planets in gray are not visible

Above Times accurate for 15 December 2026 and CAT

Mercury recently passed behind the Sun at superior solar conjunction. In Namibia, it is not observable – it will reach its highest point in the sky during daytime and is no higher than 3° above the horizon at dawn.

Venus is emerging into the morning sky as it approaches greatest elongation west. In Namibia, it is visible in the dawn sky, rising at 03:18 and reaching an altitude of 32° above the eastern horizon before fading from view as dawn breaks at around 05:45.

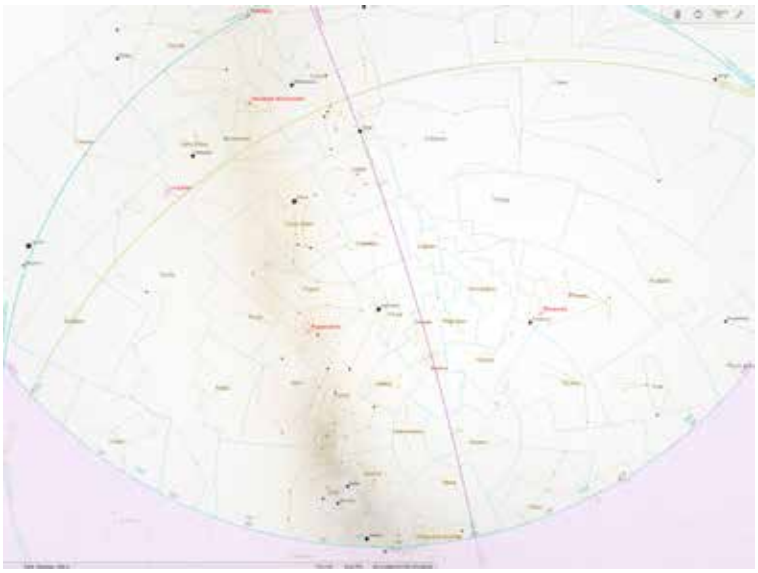
Mars is currently visible as a morning object. In Namibia, it is visible in the dawn sky, rising at 00:15 and reaching an altitude of 55° above the northern horizon before fading from view as dawn breaks at around 05:30.

Jupiter graces the morning sky. It rises into view around 00:15 at 7° above the eastern horizon, culminates at 05:15 some 54° up in the north, and fades into dawn twilight around 05:46 at 53°. On 13 December it begins retrograde motion, reversing its usual eastward drift among the constellations to move westwards.

Saturn is currently an early evening object, now receding into evening twilight. From Windhoek, it will become visible at around 20:00, 66° above your northern horizon, as dusk fades to darkness. It will then sink towards the horizon, setting at 01:45.

Other Occurrences:

The Puppid-Velid meteor shower is active from 1 to 15 December and peaks on 7 December 2026. The best displays should come before dawn that day and again after the radiant rises that evening.



Meteors can appear whenever the shower's radiant, in the constellation Vela, is above the horizon; the higher the radiant, the more meteors you can expect. In Namibia, the radiant rises above the eastern horizon at about 20:30 each night, so the shower is not visible before then. It stays active until dawn breaks around 05:34, with the best displays likely in the hours around 04:00 CAT, when the radiant is highest in the sky.
At that time, Earth's rotation turns Namibia squarely into the path of the incoming meteors. More of them strike steeply, leaving short trails near the radiant. At other times they arrive at a shallow angle, producing long-lived meteors that can streak across a wide stretch of sky before burning out.
Meteor showers occur when Earth passes through streams of debris shed by comets and asteroids, which spread out over time along the parent object's orbit around the Sun. Some streams are especially dense because the parent object released large amounts of solid material. Each shooting star is a piece of this debris striking Earth's atmosphere, typically burning up at an altitude of about 70 to 100 km.
Because Earth returns to the same point in its orbit every year, the shower recurs annually.

Is it true that it rains diamonds deep inside Neptune and Uranus, and possibly Saturn? Some scientists believe so, although the idea is often dismissed as an urban myth.
Intense heat and pressure break down methane in the upper atmosphere, freeing carbon atoms. High-pressure experiments and planetary models show that extreme pressures, millions of times Earth's atmospheric pressure, squeeze this carbon into diamond crystals. Being denser than the
surrounding fluid, the diamonds then sink toward the interior, where they eventually melt into liquid carbon in the hotter, deeper regions.

The Planets Uranus and Neptune, the ice giants, are the main focus of diamond-rain research and laboratory simulations, as covered by NASA. Earlier models suggested that diamond rain might also occur on Saturn and Jupiter.
However, Jupiter's higher internal temperatures may prevent solid diamonds from forming.

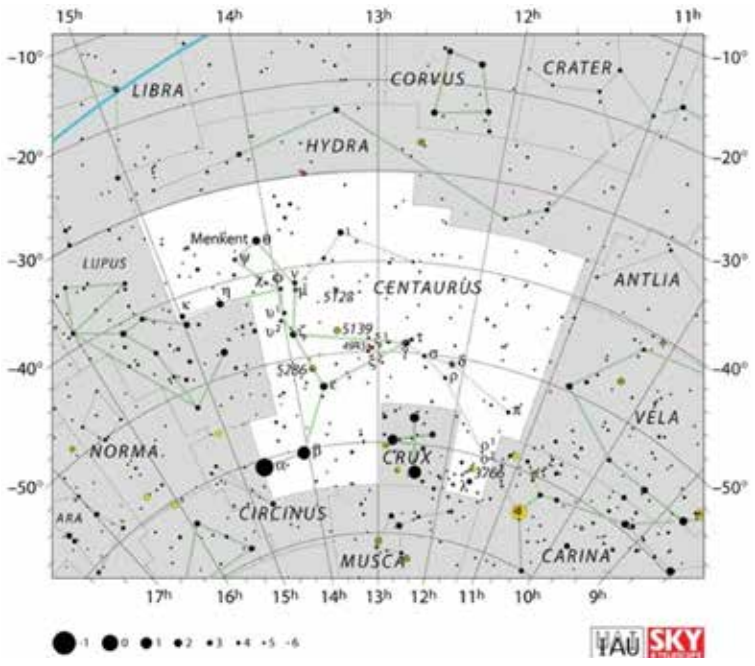
Constellation of the Month

Centaurus

Compiled by Lutz von Dewitz

Centaurus lies in the southern sky. Ptolemy catalogued it in the 2nd century, but it appears in even earlier Greek texts by the astronomer Eudoxus and the poet Aratus.

One of the largest constellations in the sky, Centaurus represents the half-man, half-horse creature of Greek mythology. Sources disagree on which centaur it depicts, but it is usually taken to be Chiron, mentor of the heroes Hercules, Peleus, Achilles, Theseus and Perseus.



Centaurus holds two of the ten brightest stars in the sky, Alpha Centauri and Beta Centauri, as well as the white dwarf BPM 37093, popularly known as Lucy or the Diamond Star.

Its notable deep sky objects include Centaurus A, one of the

brightest galaxies in the night sky; the globular cluster Omega Centauri; and the emission nebula known as the Running Chicken Nebula (IC 2944). The Blue Planetary Nebula (the Southerner), the protoplanetary Boomerang Nebula and the symbiotic Southern Crab Nebula also lie within it.

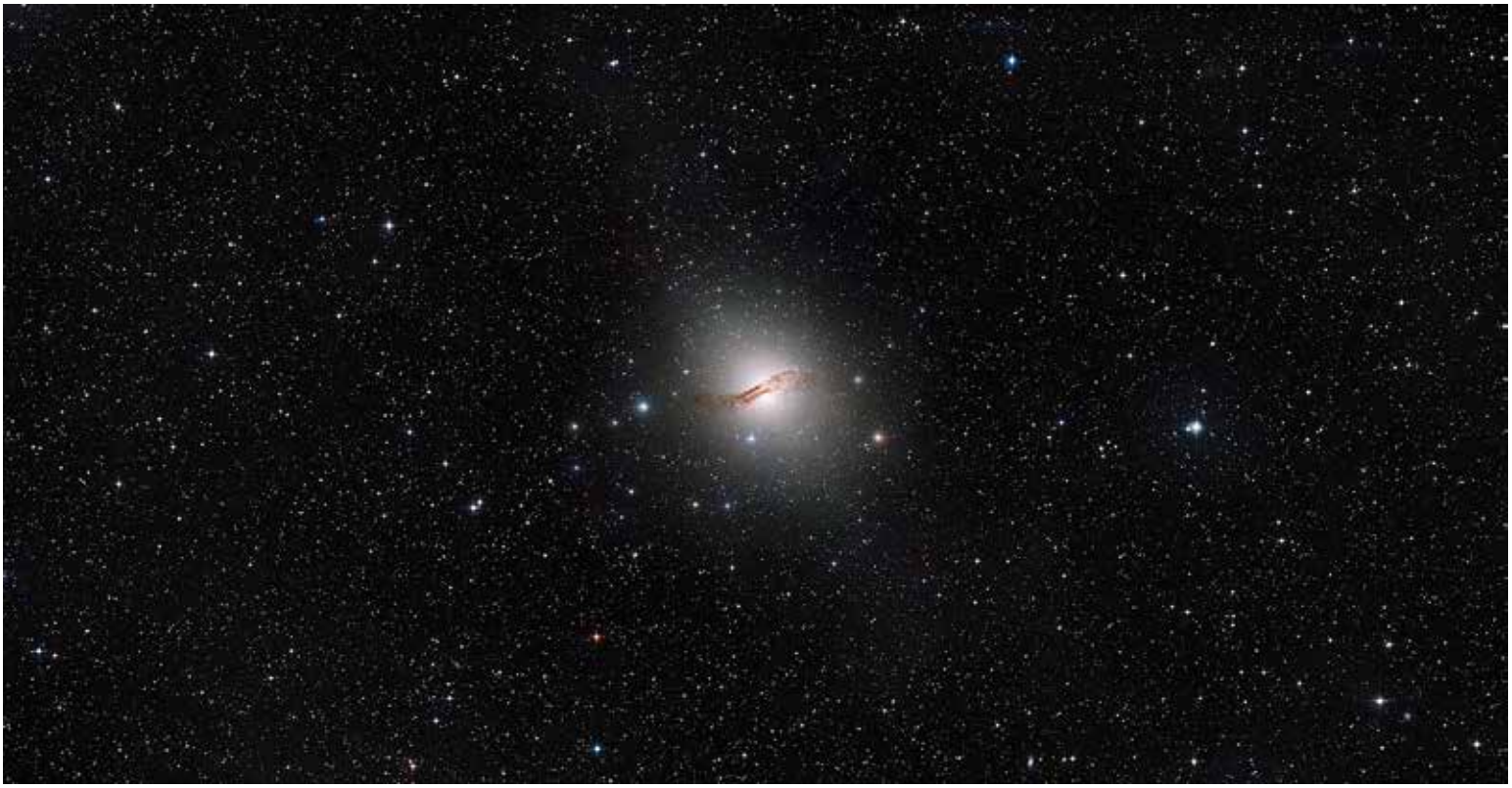
In English, the constellation is called the Centaur. Its genitive form, used in star names, is Centauri (pronounced /sɛn'tɔːraɪ/), and its three-letter abbreviation, adopted by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) in 1922, is Cen. Centaurus traces back to the Babylonian Bison-man (MUL. GUD.ALIM), depicted either as a four-legged bison with a man's head or as a human head and torso joined to the hind legs of a bison or bull. The Babylonians linked this creature to the Sun god Utu (Shamash).

In Greek and Roman times, the constellation was associated with a centaur, though which one is not entirely clear. The Roman poet Ovid, who lived at the turn of the first millennium, identified it as Chiron, the wise centaur who mentored Achilles, Jason, Theseus, Heracles and Apollo's son Asclepius (represented by the constellation Ophiuchus). Most other sources, however, link Chiron with Sagittarius and Centaurus with one of the less civilized centaurs.

Chiron was the son of the Titan king Cronus and the sea nymph Philyra. When Cronus' wife Rhea surprised the couple, Cronus turned himself into a horse to avoid being caught, and Philyra gave birth to a hybrid son.

Chiron lived in a cave on Mount Pelion, where he was a respected teacher of medicine, music and hunting to many young princes and future heroes. He met a tragic end when one of Heracles' arrows, dipped in the poisonous blood of the Hydra, accidentally struck him. The poison had no cure, but as the son of the immortal Cronus, Chiron could not die and suffered terrible pain. Zeus eventually released him from immortality, allowing him to die, and placed him among the stars.

Centaurus is usually shown sacrificing an animal, the constellation Lupus, to the gods on an altar, the constellation Ara. Two of the brightest stars in the sky, Alpha and Beta Centauri (also called Rigil Kentaurus and Hadar), mark the centaur's front legs. These two stars also point to the Southern Cross, which lies beneath the centaur's rear legs.



Centaurus A

Compiled by Lutz von Dewitz

Credits
SkyChart: Cartes du Ciel / Stellarium / Wikipedia
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