



## M51 - The Whirlpool Galaxy

Type: Galaxy

Constellation: Canes Venatici

Distance: 31 million light-years

Magnitude: 8.7

Apparent Diameter: 13.8' x 11.7'

A favorite with astrophotographers, images of the Whirlpool Galaxy are simply stunning - but be warned, you'll most likely need a larger scope to find a view to rival them. This face-on spiral galaxy lies within the same binocular field of view as Alkaid, in neighboring Ursa Major, and can be seen in 10x50 binoculars as a faint, fuzzy star.

A small telescope will show a small, hazy patch, a little elongated to the north. This elongation is caused by NGC 5195, a satellite galaxy that passed the Whirlpool several hundred million years ago. Under good skies and using averted vision, you may be able to discern the spiral arms through a medium-sized scope, but realistically, you'll need a 250mm or larger to see the galaxy at its best.

Source: NASA

## OUR NEAREST NEIGHBORS

**Mercury, Venus** and **Neptune** are all too close to the Sun to be easily seen this month, and **Uranus** is challenging too, as it sets just two hours after the Sun on the first. Meanwhile, **Mars** is leaving Taurus and appears between the horns of the Bull on the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>. It crosses into Gemini on the 24<sup>th</sup>, with the waxing crescent Moon hanging below it on the 16<sup>th</sup> and above it the next night. **Jupiter** and **Saturn** are now easily seen in the predawn twilight, with both planets starting the month in Capricornus. Like Mars, Jupiter also switches constellations on the 24<sup>th</sup>, when it moves into neighboring Aquarius. You'll find a crescent Moon below Saturn on the 6<sup>th</sup> and then below Jupiter the following morning. **The Moon** itself turns new on the 11<sup>th</sup> and then full late in the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**The Lyrids:** This year's Lyrid meteor shower peaks in the early hours of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. With the Moon just past first quarter, wait until after midnight for your best chance of spotting a meteor or two - and look out for fireballs!

**The Coma Star Cluster:** Look about halfway between Denebola in Leo and Cor Caroli in Canes Venatici, and you might see a hazy patch of stars. This cluster, however, is a fine target for binoculars or through a very low-powered eyepiece.

**M104 - The Sombrero Galaxy:** A small telescope at medium power will show a reasonably bright, elongated patch with pointed ends. The dark dust lane, which helps to give the galaxy its name, may also be seen with averted vision.

**Cor Caroli:** A beautiful double, easily split at low magnification. The primary appears white, while the fainter secondary has a creamy color.

## The Sombrero Galaxy



Source: Hubble Space Telescope