

Let's take a dip in the star sea

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Amateur Astronomer

The Great World-wide Star Count starts in just a few days. I hope you have your star charts ready. If not, point your favorite web browser to the following:
www.windows2universe.org/citizens_science/starcount.

Now that October is here, time once again to take a dip into the celestial ocean to play with the critters there.

The celestial ocean is a place where the constellations all have something to do with water. It is located in the south to southeastern part of the sky in the early evening about an hour to an hour-and-a-half after local sunset, and contains several zodiacal constellations.

Leading off this "water parade" is the zodiacal constellation Capricornus, The Sea Goat, located slightly east of due south. It is one of the constellations that looks nothing like its name.

Although if you drive your imagination into overtime you might be able to see a half-fish, half-goat creature.

I don't, to me it looks like a giant boat.

Up and to the right is another zodiacal constellation, Aquarius, the water-bearer. If you would like to get a picture of what it looks like, I suggest you Google the name because there are many ways to look at it.

By 8:30 p.m. MDT, another fish is on the scene. This time it is our old friend, Piscis Austrinus, with the loneliest star in the sky, Fomalhaut.

If you recall from a previous column, Fomalhaut is the only bright star in the region so won't be difficult to locate.

We get a little help from the moon for our next water constellation, however, since the moon is just past full, it won't be much help. This constellation is another in the zodiac, Pisces, the Fish.

If you wait a few days, the bright moon will be out of the way then we can use the Great Square of Pegasus to find Pisces.

At this time of year, Pegasus, is standing up on one corner. Since Pisces is in a "V" shape, it follows the lines along the bottom of the upended square.

Last of all is a sea monster, but you will need to wait until after 10 p.m. MDT to find him.

It is Cetus, the Whale, another long, sprawling, constellation. There is a sort of an odd shaped rectangle on the right with a line of stars leading to a lopsided circle on the left for a head.

Again, Google could be a help.

We will look at Cetus again next week when we examine another group of constellations that are joined by a common story, the Perseus/Andromeda group. In that story Cetus has a much more sinister role to play.

SKY WATCH: Third quarter moon, Monday, Oct. 8. Tomorrow morning, Thursday, Oct. 4, early risers can catch a lovely conjunction of bright Venus and Regulus, the brightest star in Leo, the

Lion. The pair will be moving apart for the rest of the week.

Early risers on Friday, Oct. 5, will see a bright moon quite close to the giant planet Jupiter. Both will be located between the horns of Taurus, the Bull.

While you are out there, take a good look at the future. Orion, the Hunter is standing high in the south right below the moon/Jupiter pairing. The World-Wide Star Count starts on Oct. 5, and continues through Oct. 19. Get your star charts and join the fun.

NEXT WEEK: Perseus, Andromeda, the sea monster and more astronomical blathering.