

# THE SPRING SKY

Even though the spring sky doesn't have many really bright stars, there is still plenty to see!

Of the seven main constellations in the spring sky, Leo is the one you will see first. Leo is a huge cat, so I love this constellation especially. It is named after a lion in Greek mythology that the hero Hercules fought and killed. Hydra and Cancer were also Hercules's unhappy victims. The constellation Virgo is associated with the Greek goddess of the harvest, and the smaller constellations of Corvus, Libra and Crater were also named by the Greeks after things they thought they resembled. And these are not the only things to see in the spring sky!

## spring sky extras

- ★ There are lots of galaxies to see - especially inside Leo itself and just below Virgo. But they are very far away and you will need binoculars or a small telescope to see them properly.
- ★ Look out for these bright stars: Regulus in Leo and Spica in Virgo.



Turn over to meet the constellations of the spring sky.





## Leo: the Lion

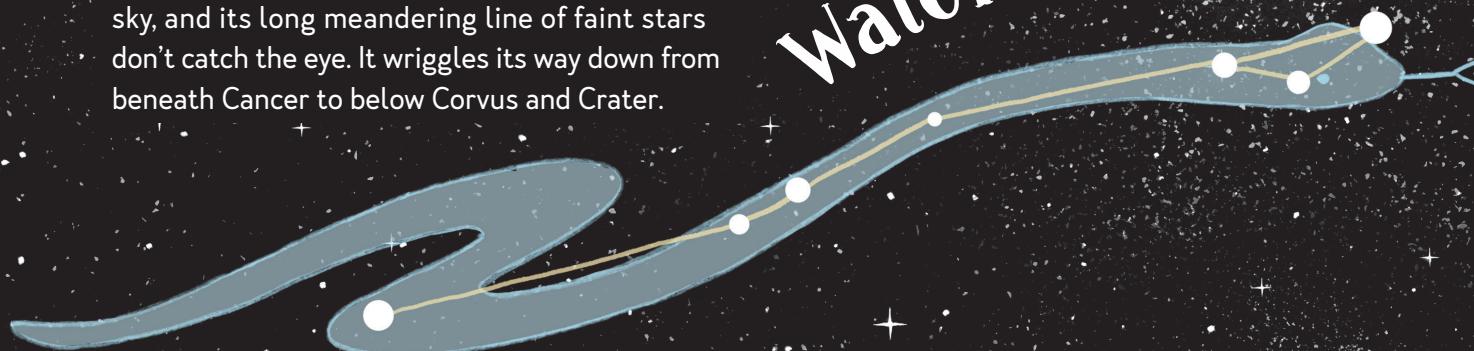
Leo is the easiest constellation to find because it sits in the middle of the Moon's passage across the spring sky. So if you can trace that you will be able to find Leo.

Leo is actually made out of two shapes: a triangle and a back-to-front question mark. Joined together, they do actually resemble a cat lying down. The question mark is better known as the Sickle, because it looks like the tool farmers used to cut their crops.

The brightest star in Leo is Regulus, at the end of the Sickle's handle.

In Greek mythology, the Hydra was a terrifying serpent and pet of the Greek goddess Hera that she sent to kill Hercules. But Hercules killed Hydra instead. Hydra is the largest constellation in the sky, and its long meandering line of faint stars don't catch the eye. It wriggles its way down from beneath Cancer to below Corvus and Crater.

## Hydra: the Water Snake



## Cancer: the Crab

Cancer is named after a great crab and another pet of Hera's that she sent to help Hydra. But Hercules made short work of the poor crab, kicking it right up into the sky!

The best way to find Cancer is to look for a smudge of light beyond Leo. This is M44, the Beehive Cluster, and it sits right in the middle of the constellation. Through binoculars you'll see that the Beehive is made of dozens of stars, like a swarm of bees. The rest of Cancer is an upside-down 'Y' of relatively faint stars.

## Virgo: the Maiden



Virgo is the second largest constellation in the sky. It is supposed to resemble a beautiful woman, the Goddess of the Harvest, but as we saw on the page before it looks more like a stick figure lying on its side. Virgo has one bright star, Spica, and it's an obvious blue-white colour. It is actually two stars spinning around each other, but you'd need the world's most powerful telescope to see that. A normal telescope should reveal, however, lots of tiny smudges of light along the lower part of Virgo. These are incredibly far away galaxies.

## Libra: the Scales



Much smaller than nearby Virgo, Libra is supposed to look like a set of old-fashioned measuring scales. I've always thought it looks more like a rocket, or a house!

Crater is a small constellation meant to represent the drinking cup [or *crater*] of the Greek god Apollo. It is hard to see because its stars are very faint. But it's always low in the sky in the northern hemisphere, visible just above trees or buildings. It is a little like a tipped-over, old-fashioned goblet, but I think it looks a lot like Corvus with a few extra stars.



## Crater: the Cup



## Corvus: the Crow

The night sky is full of bird constellations. There's an eagle, a swan, and then, below and to the right of Spica in Virgo, there's Corvus the Crow. They all make me feel hungry. Corvus is a weird-looking crow, however. It actually looks more like a squashed box...or maybe a crow with the head bitten off. Yum!