

The Newsletter for Keene Amateur Astronomers

Vol. 2026 No. 3

March 2026

Total Lunar Eclipse and Milky Way arching over Mayall



Next to the [Nicholas U. Mayall 4-meter Telescope](#) at [Kitt Peak National Observatory](#), a Program of NSF NOIRLab, a [total lunar eclipse](#) crawls across the desert sky in 2022. The Milky Way, dotted by star-forming regions, arches over the telescope (explore in the [zoomable image](#)). Credit: KPNO/NOIRLab/NSF/AURA/P. Horálek (Institute of Physics in Opava)

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Editor's Message

The days are slowly getting longer and sunset later, but it is still a great time to get outside to get in some viewing if the weather cooperates. February ended with seven of the eight planets visible in the sky, although you needed a telescope to see some of them. Most of these planets will remain visible in March with Mercury low in the west just after sunset at the start of the month. Mercury will reappear in the morning sky on the 17th. Uranus can still be found in the Pleiades and Jupiter in Gemini.

There is a lunar eclipse on March 3rd but it will be low on the horizon and will begin to set a minute or two before its maximum at 6:20 am. If you are traveling or want to know more, you can use www.timeanddate.com to find out when and where the lunar eclipse will occur.

On the 7th and 8th, Venus and Saturn will be low in the Western sky at sunset, appearing a degree apart.

Great objects to view this month:

- **M65, M66 & NGC 3628 - The Leo Triplet** is a small group of galaxies. M66 is the brightest of the group with M65 a little fainter. This group is located in Leo and all three can be seen in the same field of view.
- **Messier 108** This edge on galaxy can be seen in Ursa Major using a small telescope. Greater magnification will show more details including its halo and an offset core split in two.
- **Melotte 111 - The Coma Star Cluster** A nearby open star cluster in the constellation Coma Berenices. It can be viewed with a pair of binoculars and the brighter stars make a distinctive V formation.
- **NGC 3242 - The Ghost of Jupiter** is a planetary nebula in the constellation Hydra. It appears the same size as Jupiter. At lower power it appears a blue disk. At higher magnification it resolves into a central star encircled by a ring giving it the appearance of an eye. A large scope with a long focal length is best to capture the detail of this object.

This month instead of writing an article, I have selected several items focused on space exploration and our return to the Moon. I am sure you have caught some of the headlines about the upcoming Artemis launch. In this month's Night Sky Network article, I have provided an article that was originally written to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission. For those of you who were not aware, new NSN articles are no longer being written as part of the 2025 government funding cuts. We can continue to use the articles available in their database.

Enjoy the night sky and stay warm.

- Susan Rolke

Monthly Business Meeting

Club meetings will resume in April.

Club Happenings

Keene High School will be hosting a STEM night on March 12th from 6 - 8 pm. Many local businesses and organizations will be there with demonstrations. There is also a high school science fair. Susan Rolke will once again be representing Keene Amateur Astronomers with her Gravity/Space table. If you are interested in helping run the KAA table and talking to the public about astronomy, please let Susan know. This event is open to the public.

Lunar Eclipses and NASA's Artemis Missions

By Susan Rolke

I decided to change up our format this month given all of the talk about the Moon. The lunar eclipse is the morning of the 3rd and there has been a bit of a buzz over the Artemis Mission. It has been exciting to see the recent images of the rocket and hearing about NASA preparing a manned mission to the Moon.

Below you will find several links to information about the lunar eclipse and the latest information about Artemis. Additionally, in this month's Night Sky Notes, you will find an article originally written at the time of the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11. There are some great links in the article to learn more about each mission including how to find the landing sites on the Moon.

[Lunar Eclipse Basics](#)

[Artemis II](#) the first crewed flight to orbit the Moon since 1972

[NASA Moonbound video](#) explores the physical and mental challenges to prepare to orbit the Moon

[NASA Artemis Mission Updates](#)

[NASA Adds Mission to Artemis Lunar Program](#)

[NASA Changes Artemis Plan - Moon Landing Moves to Artemis IV](#), video of this week in Spaceflight

Night Sky Network Online Webinar

Join the NASA [Night Sky Network](#) on March 25th at 9 PM EST for ‘Surprise from the Sidewalk’ with Dave Doody to learn about sidewalk outreach. Doody will focus his talk on the Europa, the Jovian system, and Europa Mission.

Observing

To find out skywatching tips for this month, click on the following link to learn more.

Video: [What’s Up March 2026 Sky Watching Tips from NASA](#)

You can find past pdfs of the Astronomical League charts [here](#). Turn to the end of the Newsletter to see what is up this month.

NASA Night Sky Notes



This article is distributed by NASA's Night Sky Network (NSN).

The NSN program supports astronomy clubs across the USA dedicated to astronomy outreach. Visit nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov to find local clubs, events, and more!

Observe the Moon and Beyond: Apollo 11 at 50+

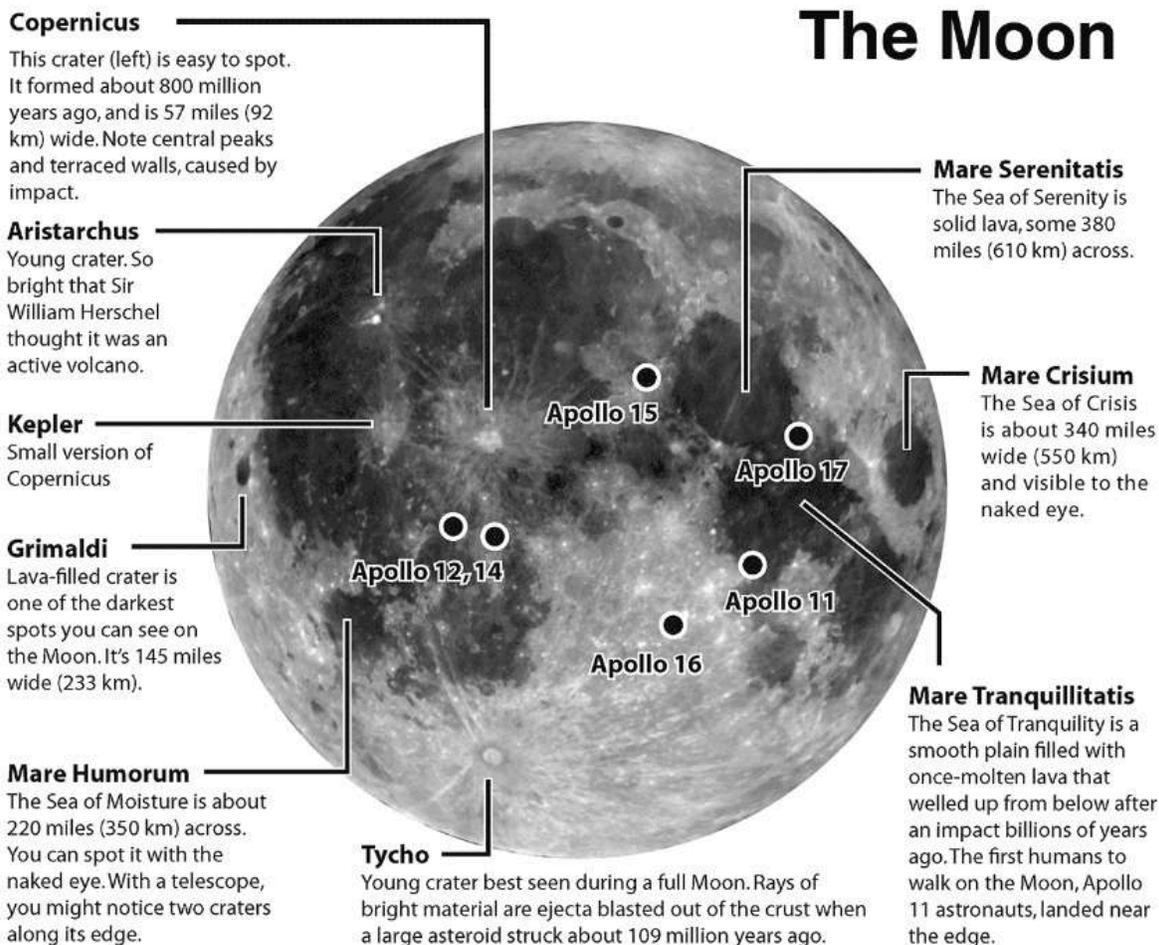
Originally written by Dave Prosper, revised by Susan Rolke

While observing the lunar eclipse the early morning of the 3rd, you can also contemplate the 50th anniversary of the launch of the Apollo 11 mission! On June 16, 1969, Apollo 11 blasted off from Cape Canaveral in Florida on a journey of almost a quarter million miles to our nearest celestial neighbor, a mission made possible by the tremendous power of the Saturn V rocket – still the most powerful rocket ever launched. Just a few days later, on July 20, 1969 at 10:56 pm EDT, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin set foot on the lunar surface and became the first people in history to walk on another world. The astronauts set up equipment including a solar wind sampler, laser ranging retroreflector, and seismometer, and gathered up almost 22 kilograms (48 pounds) of precious lunar rocks and soil samples. After spending less than a day on the Moon's surface, the duo blasted off and returned to the orbiting Columbia Command Module, piloted by Michael Collins. Just a few days later, on July 24, all three astronauts splashed down safely in the Pacific Ocean. You can follow the timeline of the Apollo missions in greater detail at [Apollo by the Numbers](#) and dig deep into mission history and science on [NASA's Apollo History Site](#).

Have you ever wanted to see the flag on the Moon left behind by the Apollo astronauts? While no telescope on Earth is powerful enough to see any items left behind the landing sites, you can discover how much you can observe with the [Flag on the Moon handout](#).

You can catch up on all of NASA's current and future missions at nasa.gov

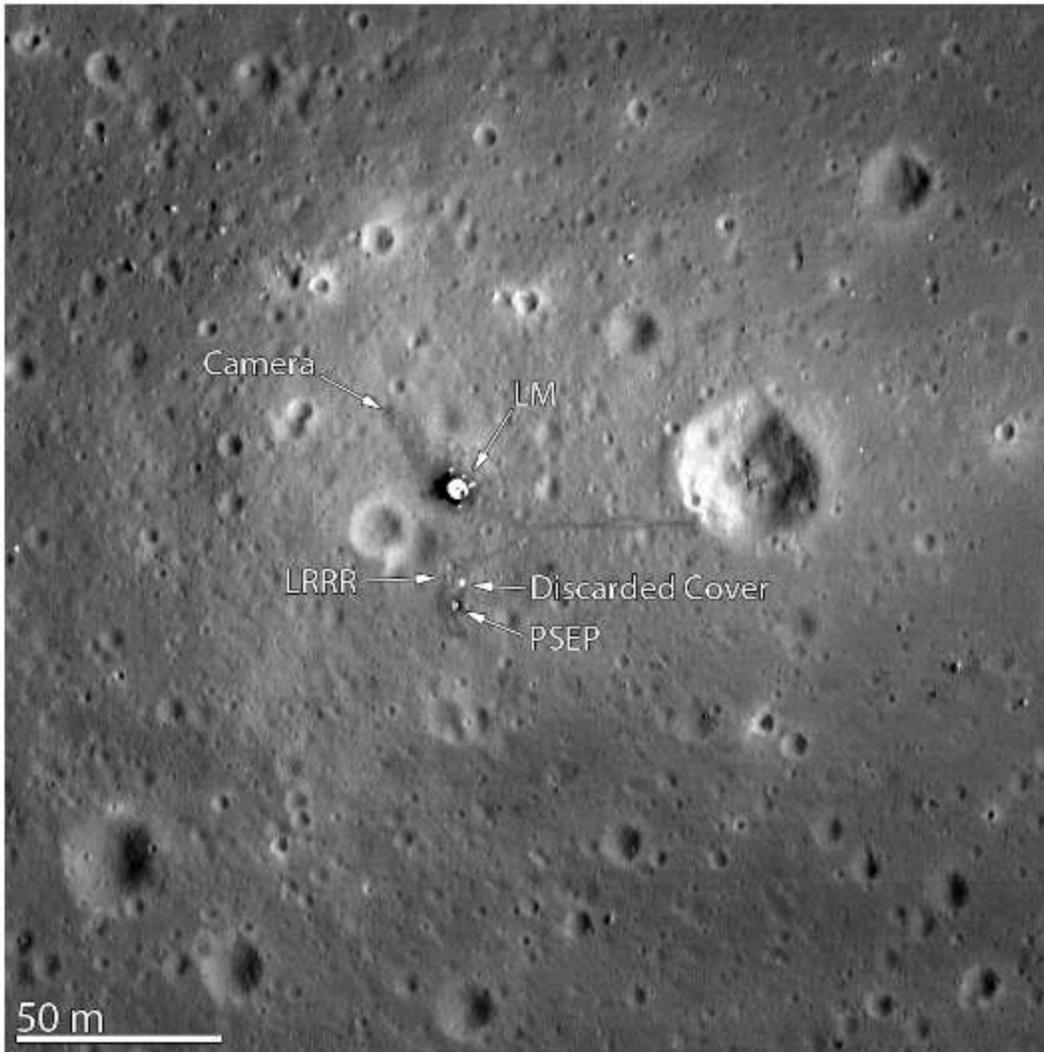
The Moon



SOURCES: NASA; ADVANCED SKYWATCHING; CAMBRIDGE ATLAS OF ASTRONOMY; DK VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Photos: James Scala. Layout and text for Moon map used with permission: Robert Roy Britt/SPACE.com.

Caption: Observe the larger details on the Moon with help from this map, which also pinpoints the Apollo landing site.



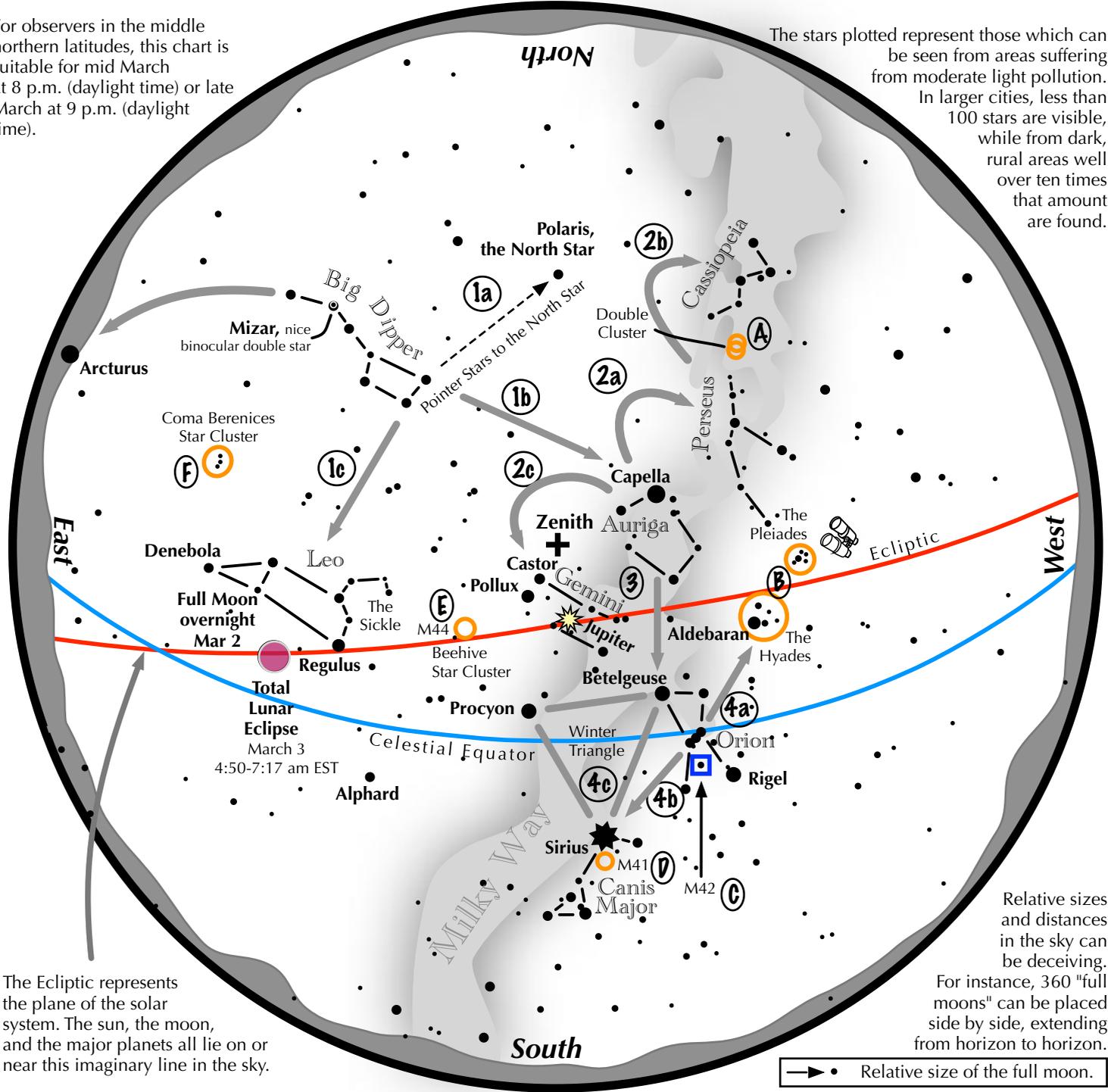
Caption: Earth-based telescopes can't see any equipment left behind at the Apollo 11 landing site, but the cameras onboard NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) can. This is Tranquility Base as seen from the LRO, just 24 kilometers (15 miles) above the Moon's surface, with helpful labels added by the imaging team. Image Credit: NASA Goddard/Arizona State University. See more landing sites at <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/4731> and <https://skyandtelescope.org/observing/how-to-see-all-six-apollo-moon-landing-sites/>

Article originally published 2019

Navigating the mid March Night Sky

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid March at 8 p.m. (daylight time) or late March at 9 p.m. (daylight time).

The stars plotted represent those which can be seen from areas suffering from moderate light pollution. In larger cities, less than 100 stars are visible, while from dark, rural areas well over ten times that amount are found.



Relative sizes and distances in the sky can be deceiving. For instance, 360 "full moons" can be placed side by side, extending from horizon to horizon.

→ • Relative size of the full moon.

Navigating the March night sky: Simply start with what you know or with what you can easily find.

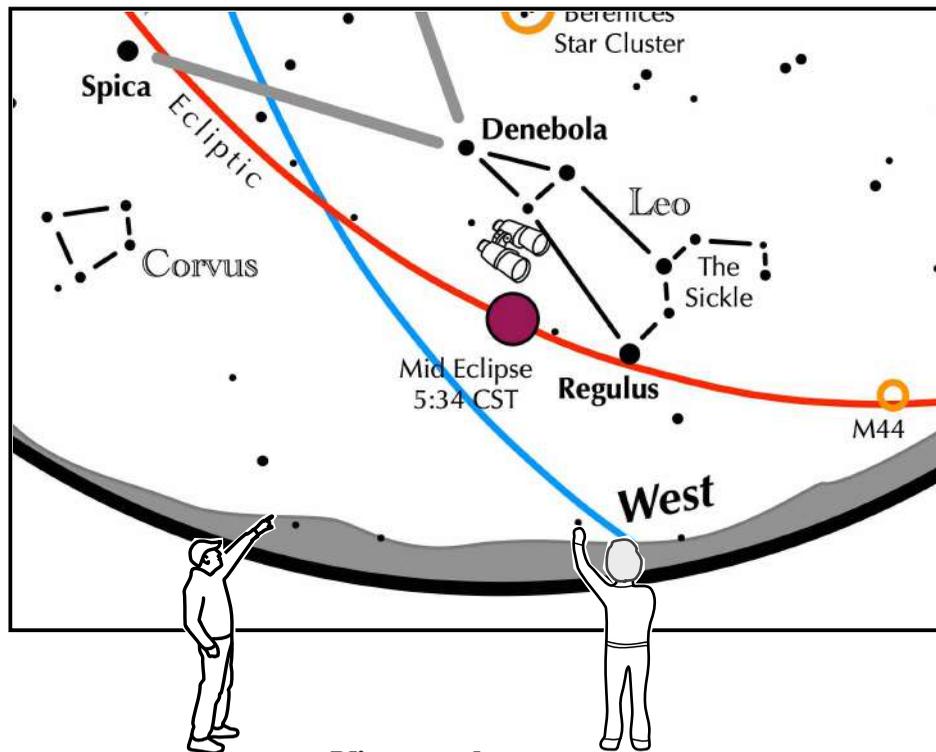
- 1 Above the northeast horizon rises the Big Dipper. Draw a line from its two end bowl stars upwards to the North Star. Its top bowl stars point west to Capella in Auriga, nearly overhead. Leo reclines below the Dipper's bowl.
- 2 From Capella jump northwestward along the Milky Way to Perseus, then to the "W" of Cassiopeia. Next jump southeastward from Capella to the twin stars of Castor and Pollux in Gemini.
- 3 Directly south of Capella stands the constellation of Orion with its three Belt Stars, its bright red star Betelgeuse, and its bright blue-white star Rigel.
- 4 Use Orion's three Belt stars to point northwest to the red star Aldebaran and the Hyades star cluster, then to the Pleiades star cluster. Travel southeast from the Belt stars to the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius. It is a member of the Winter Triangle.

Binocular Highlights

A: Between the "W" of Cassiopeia and Perseus lies the Double Cluster. **B:** Examine the stars of the Pleiades and Hyades, two naked eye star clusters. **C:** M42 in Orion is a star forming nebula. **D:** Look south of Sirius for the star cluster M41. **E:** M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies to the southeast of Pollux. **F:** Look high in the east for the loose star cluster of Coma Berenices.



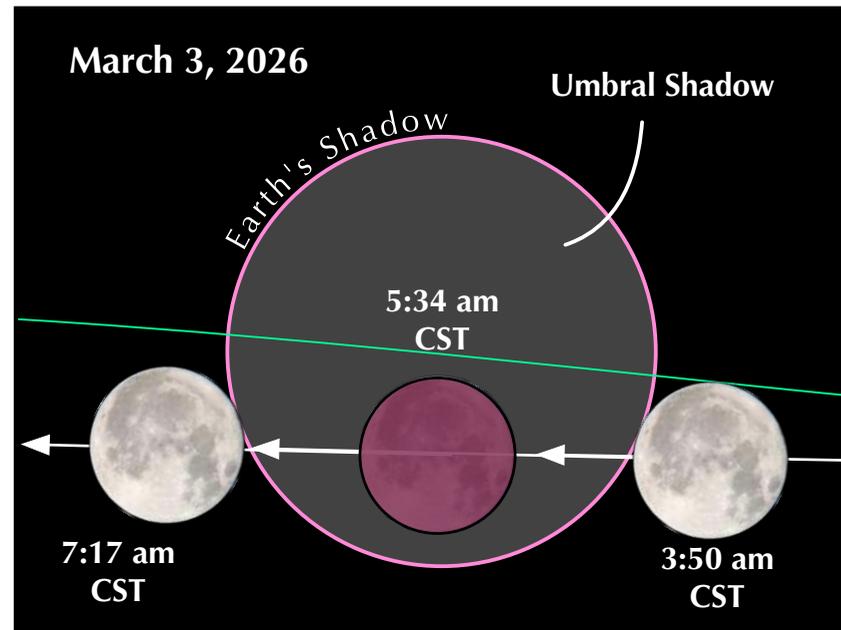
If you can observe only one celestial event in the morning this March, see this one.



**View to the west
on March 3
at 5 am CST**

Eclipse times

Partial eclipse begins: 3:50 a.m. CST
 Total eclipse begins: 5:04
 Mid eclipse: 5:34
 Total eclipse ends: 6:03
 Partial eclipse ends: 7:17



The Moon slides through a total eclipse

In the hours before dawn on March 3, the brilliant full moon slides into Earth's shadow.

- Even though the partial umbral eclipse begins at 3:50 a.m. CDT, darkening might not be noticed for another 5 minutes.
- When totality is reached, the full moon's brilliance is gone, allowing the stars to appear. Can you see that the moon lies east of Regulus and below Leo?
- At mid eclipse, what color is the moon? How red is it?
- During the partial phases, can you notice that the shadow's edge is not straight, but curved?