

SPASH ASTRONOMY

WEEK 6

Cancer, Leo, Leo Minor, Lynx, Camelopardalis

Mythology of the constellation Cancer

Early Egyptians saw CANCER, The Crab, as a lowly scarab or dung beetle, representing the dawn Sun-god Khephri, a symbol of fertility. The Greeks, however, believed this constellation represented the giant crab which continually nipped at Hercules' feet, hampering him as he battled with the poisonous, nine-headed monstrous Hydra.

1. Acubens (alpha) 4.4 - white - means: the claws
2. Asellus Borealis (gamma) 4.6 - straw color - means: northern colt
3. Asellus Australis (delta) 4.3 - straw color - means: southern colt

Mythology of the constellation Leo

There are two strong contenders as to which mythical lion is represented by the constellation LEO.

The first is the Nemean lion which Hercules had to kill as the first of his 12 Labours. This fearsome beast terrorised the land, killing all who ventured near it. Not only was it more fierce, larger and stronger than other lions, but it also had the added advantage of possessing a skin which was impervious to metal, stone and wood. Since, for this reason, Hercules could not kill the lion with any weapon, he wrestled it with his bare hands, and finally managed to strangle the animal. Seeing at once the unique protective qualities of the pelt, he removed it with one of the lion's own claws, and thereafter wore it as a cloak.

The second contender is the lion featured in the poet Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. Both sets of parents of this young couple considered them too young to marry and stopped them seeing each other. However, the pair made arrangements to meet secretly by a mulberry tree with white berries. When Thisbe arrived at the appointed place, a lion sprang out from some bushes and she ran away in fright. Unfortunately, her veil fluttered to the ground as she ran and the lion, bloody from its latest kill, pounced on it. A short time later Pyramus arrived, saw his beloved's bloody veil and believed that she had been killed. Totally distraught, and unable to face life without her, he threw himself on his sword. As he lay dying, Thisbe returned, took his sword and killed herself. The blood of the tragic pair coloured the berries of the mulberry tree red, and so they remain to this day. Some suggest that Zeus placed Thisbe's veil in the heavens as Coma Berenices.

1. Regulus (alpha) - 1.7 - flushed white - means: Lion's heart
2. Denebola (beta) - 2.3 - blue - means: Lion's Tail
3. Algiba (gamma) - 2.2 - bright orange - means: Lion's Mane

Mythology of the constellation Leo Minor

1687 was a busy year for the Polish astronomer Johannes Hevelius. It was at this time that he first charted and named LEO MINOR, The Little Lion.

1. Alterf (alpha) - 4.8 - red - means: Glance of the Lion's Eye

Mythology of the constellation Lynx

LYNX is another constellation created by Johannes Hevelius in 1687. He gave it this name not because it resembled a lynx, but because anyone studying the stars needs the sharp eyes of such an animal.

Mythology of the constellation Camelopardalis

CAMELOPARDALIS, The Giraffe, is said to represent the Biblical camel which carried Rebecca to Isaac. However, historians are divided as to the inventor of this modern constellation. Some say that Dutchman Petrus Plancius first charted Camelopardalis in 1613, it later being included in Jakob Bartsch's book on the constellations, whilst others suggest that Bartsch, himself, invented the constellation in 1624.



