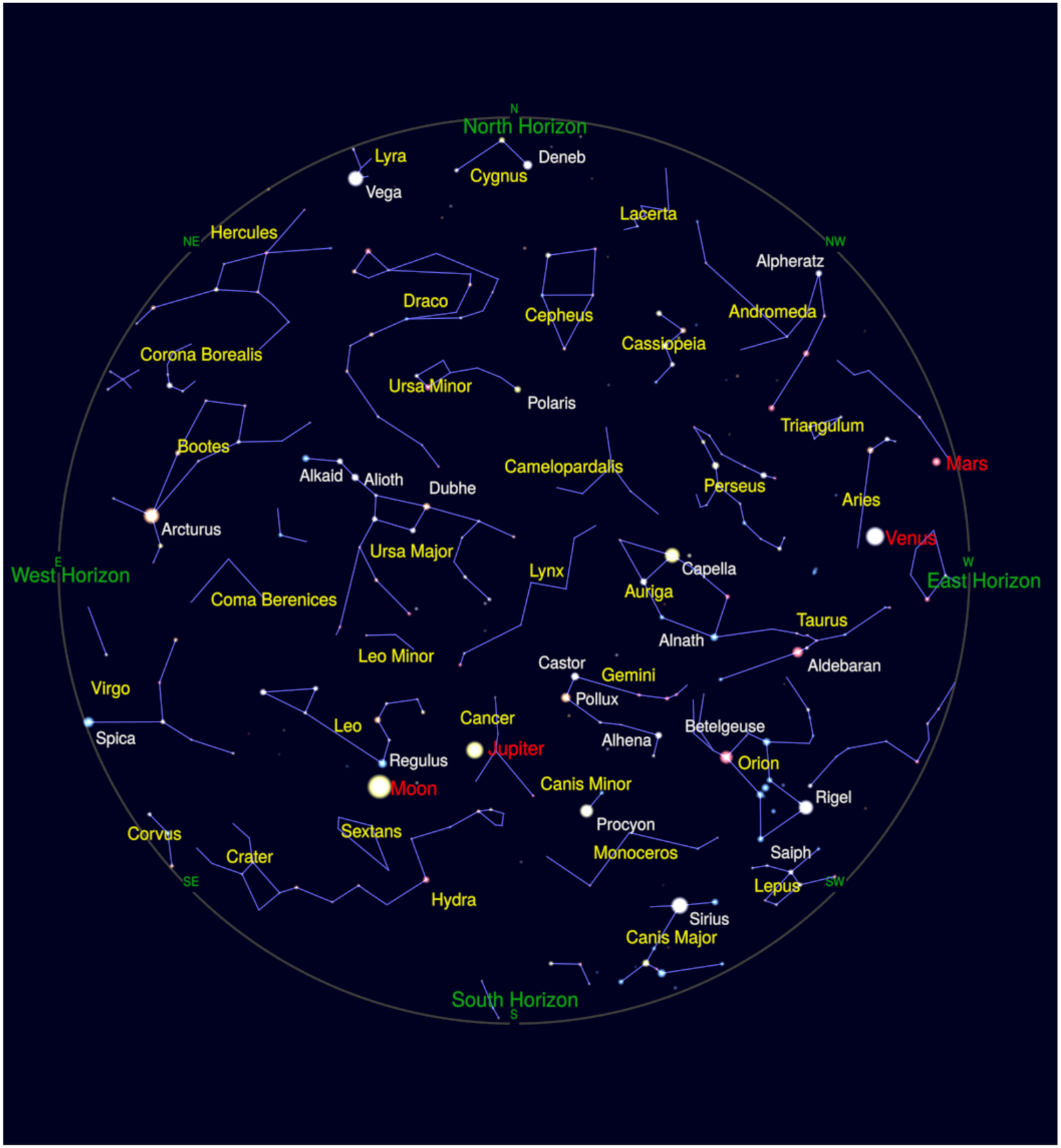


# THE NIGHT SKY ABOVE YORK
## FOR MARCH & APRIL 2015

This chart is orientated for 10pm 17th March, 9pm 31st March and 8pm 14th April but can be used at any time.

To use the chart, hold it up to the sky. Turn the chart so that the direction you are looking is at the bottom of the chart. If you are looking to the south then have the 'South Horizon' at the bottom edge. As the Earth turns the stars appear to rotate anti-clockwise around the North Celestial Pole, marked by the star Polaris. Stars rise in the east and set in the west just like the Sun. The sky makes a small westward shift every night as we orbit the Sun.

## PLANET WATCH

Is it a plane? Is it a comet? Is it a UFO? Venus has been called all of these things. Even though it is the brightest planet, it can appear quite unfamiliar in the sky.

Venus is so bright because not only is it the closest planet to Earth, it also reflects lots of sunlight from its thick cloudy atmosphere. Known as the greenhouse planet, Venus has the densest atmosphere of the four innermost planets, mostly made up of carbon dioxide. The atmosphere traps heat on the surface of the planet making it a sweltering 460 °C. This makes Venus much hotter than Mercury even though the latter is much closer to the Sun.

No liquid water can exist now on Venus though it may have in the past. Now it only rains sulfuric acid in the upper atmosphere and nearly constant lightning and thunder stream through the clouds. Volcanoes may erupt on the surface of Venus regularly.

All of the above make Venus a hostile place not only for people but for spacecraft too. Despite many attempts, only 10 probes have made it safely to the surface and the longest serving lasted for just under 2 hours.

## CONSTELLATION WATCH

Why do we arrange the stars in the sky into constellations? Almost every culture on Earth has gazed at the night sky and told stories about the shapes they can see. The numbers of constellations vary from culture to culture but many helped people to remember tales and histories before they had writing.

The constellations we refer to today are a set of 88 officially recognised segments together covering the whole sky. Many of the names and shapes are informed by Greek and Babylonian records.

So why do many stars not have Greek names? The Greek system of naming stars was rather tedious and during the dark ages many names were changed to Arabic by the astronomers of the time. Planets in our solar system still retain their original Roman names.

The constellation of Cancer is one of the 12 zodiac constellations. These are the constellations that the Sun passes through in the sky. The stars in Cancer are relatively faint, meaning you need a nice dark sky to pick them out. You also need a good imagination to see a crab in the Y-shaped configuration!