

Re: constellation question

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From: Paul Schlyter (*pausch_at_sAAF.se*)

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In article <Kkmy6WS5RW1AFwQ+@merseia.fsnet.co.uk>, Jonathan Silverlight <jsilverlight@spam.merseia.fsnet.co.uk.invalid> wrote:

> In message <cb3lna\$k78\$I@merope.sAAF.se>, Paul Schlyter <pausch@sAAF.se>
> writes

>> In article <jht9d0hd71oampqsfu7d4jovran1celmdk@4ax.com>,

>> Tim923 <tws0923@verizon.net> wrote:

>>

>>> I assumed that stars in a constellation weren't actually close to each

>>> other in space, that they only appeared close in our 2D viewing of

>>> them, but I have a galaxy picture that would suggest otherwise.

>>> Clarification?

>>

>> Your first assumption is correct: stars in the same constellation

>> merely happen to be positioned in approximately the same direction

>> from us. They can be at any distance from us. And their distances

>> do vary widely -- consider for instance the Summer Triangle, where

>> Deneb is approx. 100 times farther away than Vega or Altair. OK

>> the Summer Triangle is not a constellation, it is a large asterism,

>> but we use it frequently to orient ourselves in the sky, so the

>> same principle applies.

>

> There are exceptions, of course. For instance, all but two of the stars

> in the Plough are part of a cluster (it's not a modern constellation,

> but it used to be.

That's not an exception of "the rule", which merely says that stars within one constellation CAN be at widely different distances. But that's not a requirement — stars within the same constellation can be at more or less the same distance to us as well, and can even be physically related, such as the Ursa Major stream you refer to here. Other examples are the Pleiades, the Hyades, the Coma cluster, and the Alfa Persei association. But the Ursa Major stream is the cluster which is closest to us — and some stars belonging to it are even situated in other constellations, such as Sirius and also Alfa Coronae Borealis. It has about 100 members, and our Sun is situated in the outer parts of this "cluster", but it's not a member of it.

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The Ursa Major stream even has a catalog number: Collinder 285.

<http://www.seds.org/messier/xtra/ngc/uma-cl.html>

<http://observers.org/tac.mailing.list/2000/January/0358.html>

> *I was amused to read that the Arabs originally described the region as
> a bier but later adopted the bear interpretation of many other cultures !)*

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