

The Night Sky

May

Equipment you will need

Because of the darkness of our forest locations, you can see many wonders of the night skies with your naked eye, although your eyes will need a good 20 minutes to adjust to the darkness. Any bright lights, such as that from your torch, will set them back again. You can reduce this effect by putting a red filter on your torch. Equipment worth investing in includes:

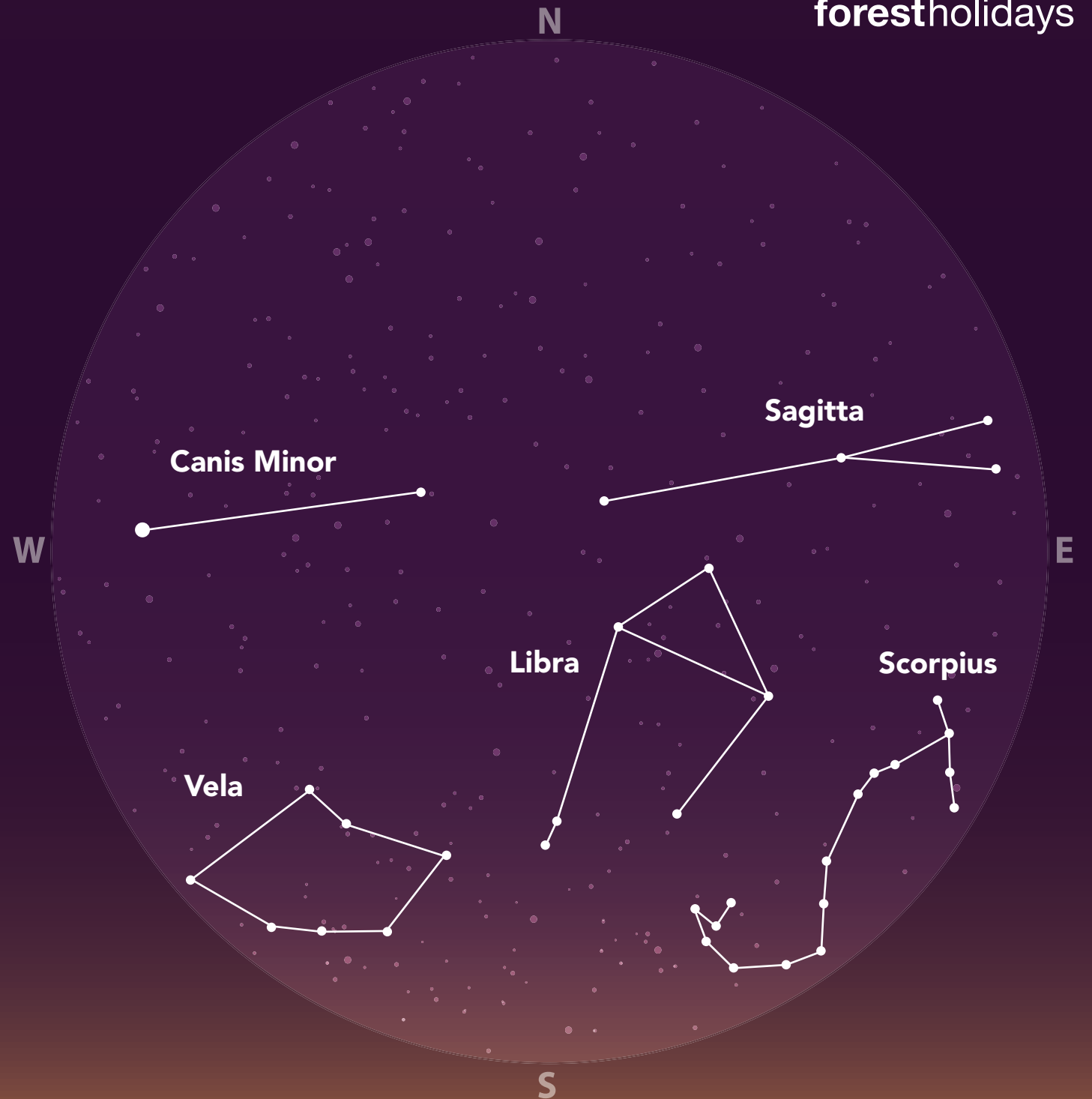
- **Binoculars** – cheaper and easier to carry than a telescope. Look for ones with glass lenses.
- **Camera** – to capture that fantastic star scene forever
- **Tripod** – essential for use with your camera
- **Telescope** – worth investing in for the really committed stargazer
- **Google Skymaps** – a superb free app, available for Android and iPhone. You point your phone towards the sky and it shows you the constellations and identifies the stars using inbuilt GPS

Getting started – your first 5 constellations to spot

- **Ursa Major** (the Big Dipper) has been used by sailors since ancient times to locate the fixed-point Pole Star and navigate home
- **Leo** (the lion) is it a lion, as the Greeks decided? Or is it K9 from Doctor Who?
- **Cassiopeia** (the queen of Aethiopia) is one of the easiest constellations to locate and looks like a huge W, almost directly overhead
- **Cepheus** (the king of Aethiopia) is one of 48 constellations identified by 2nd century astronomer Ptolemy. Imagine a child's drawing of a house, complete with roof
- **Orion** (the hunter), with belt and sword, is perhaps the most famous constellation – and one of the few that actually bears some slight resemblance to its namesake

Stargazing facts for kids

- You can see the International Space Station without using binoculars, and you can track it moving across the sky
- The sun is 300,000 times bigger than earth and 93 million miles away. If you could catch a plane to the sun, the journey would take 20 years
- We're more connected than you might think. The gravity of the sun and moon bring about the tides in our seas
- Footprints and tyre marks on the moon from the Apollo 11 mission will stay there forever – there is no wind to blow them away
- How much do you weigh? If you weigh 50kg here on earth you would only weigh 19kg on Mars because of lower gravity



Sagitta

Not to be confused with the larger constellation Sagittarius (meaning the archer), this is the third smallest constellation and it is shaped like an arrow. Sagitta can be seen from every location on Earth except within the Antarctic circle.

Canis Minor

Its name is Latin for 'lesser dog' in contrast to Canis Major, the 'greater dog'. Both of these constellations are represented as following the constellation of Orion the hunter.

Scorpius

Scorpius contains a number of very bright stars making it fairly easy to spot. Its stars form a pattern like a hook or scorpion tail, which is where it got its name.

Libra

Like Scorpius, this is one of the twelve signs of the zodiac. Lying between Virgo to the west and Scorpius to the east, Libra is a fairly faint constellation but its brightest stars form a quadrangle, making it more distinguishable.

Vela

With a name meaning the 'sails of a ship' it's clear how this constellation should appear to you. It was originally part of a larger constellation, the ship 'Argo Navis'