BCAS OBSERVING HIGHLIGHTS for March 10 to 25, 2026, a "dark Moon period"
Black Canyon Astronomical Society (BCAS), southwest-central Colorado, USA

DATES & TIMES (MDT) FOR REGIONAL EVENTS & EYE-CATCHING HAPPENINGS IN THE SKY:

March 10, 7:00 PM: BCAS meeting, Montrose & Online
March 10 & 11: 7:55 to 8:00 PM: Brilliant Venus is 3° to 4° above fainter Saturn, low in west
March 10-19, 9 PM to 3 AM: Enjoy our winter & early spring stars under a dark, moonless sky
March 10-20, at end of evening twilight: Look for zodiacal light in the west
March 13, 10:00 AM: Western Slope Skies on KVNF radio
March 16-25, 2 AM to 6 AM: Enjoy our spring & summer stars under a dark, moonless sky
March 18, 1:22-3:53 AM: Callisto's shadow crosses Jupiter (a somewhat rare event)
March 18, 6:00 PM: Western Slope Skies on KVNF radio
March 19, 8:00 PM: Thin crescent Moon 5° below & to the right of Venus
March 20, 8:46 AM: March equinox
March 24 & 25, 6:15 to 6:30 AM: Mercury very low in the east southeast
March 24 & 25, 8 to 8:30 PM: Brilliant Venus getting higher in western, evening twilight

SUMMARY. Moonless evenings in March are great times to enjoy our winter stars before they disappear into lengthening evening twilight. The Milky Way spans the sky from Cassiopeia in the north northwest, through Auriga west of the zenith, to Constellation Puppis in the south. As darkness falls, the bright planet, Jupiter, is high in the south in Constellation Gemini, and Sirius, the night sky's brightest star, is more than 30 degrees above the southern horizon. And the bright stars in Orion are high in the south southwest, as spring Constellations Leo and Virgo rise in the east. As twilight ends, look for zodiacal light extending upward from the western horizon.

Brilliant Venus is now getting more prominent in western evening twilight, and with binoculars on March 10 and 11 at 7:55 to 8:00 PM MDT, you might get a parting glance at fainter Saturn 3 to 4 degrees below Venus. As the sky darkens, Jupiter shines brightly south of the zenith. With a telescope on March 18 from 1:22 to 3:53 AM MDT, you can watch the shadow of Jupiter's large moon, Callisto, cross the Giant Planet. While transits of Jupiter's other three large moons are common, a transit by Callisto's shadow is a rarer event. Uranus, moving slowly through Constellation Taurus, is well placed for early evening viewing with binoculars or telescopes.

The Moon reaches last quarter on March 11, and from March 12 to 17, the crescent Moon wanes. The Moon is new on March 18. Between March 19 and 24, watch the crescent Moon wax in the evening sky. The Moon reaches first quarter on March 25. Enjoy seeing earthshine delicately illuminate the nightside of the crescent Moon, especially on mornings from March 13 to 16, and on evenings from March 19 to 22 (binoculars can provide eye-catching views).

As of March 10, there are several active regions on the Earth-facing side of the Sun. So, we may experience more M-class (moderate) and possibly X-class (extreme) flares and powerful CMEs. There's a possibility that coronal mass ejections from the Sun could trigger auroras that are visible from the Western Slope.

Numerous Earth satellites are visible every clear evening and morning. Find times for local passes of bright satellites, including the International Space Station and Tiangong, the Chinese Space Station, at these links...
https://www.heavens-above.com/
https://www.n2yo.com/passes/?s=25544

Note: The apparent brightness of sky objects is measured in "magnitude" units. Many bright stars are magnitude +1, while the faintest stars easily visible to unaided eyes under dark skies are magnitude +6. Some of the brightest stars are 0 magnitude (e.g., Vega, Arcturus), while the brightest sky objects have negative magnitudes (e.g., Sirius at -1.5, Jupiter at -2 to -3, Venus at -4 to -5, the full Moon at -12 to -13, and the Sun at -26.7 magnitude). Angular distances on the sky are usually cited in degrees of arc (often abbreviated as "°"). Helpful ways to estimate 1, 5, 10, 15, and 25 degrees of arc can be found here: https://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/measuring-the-sky-by-hand.html

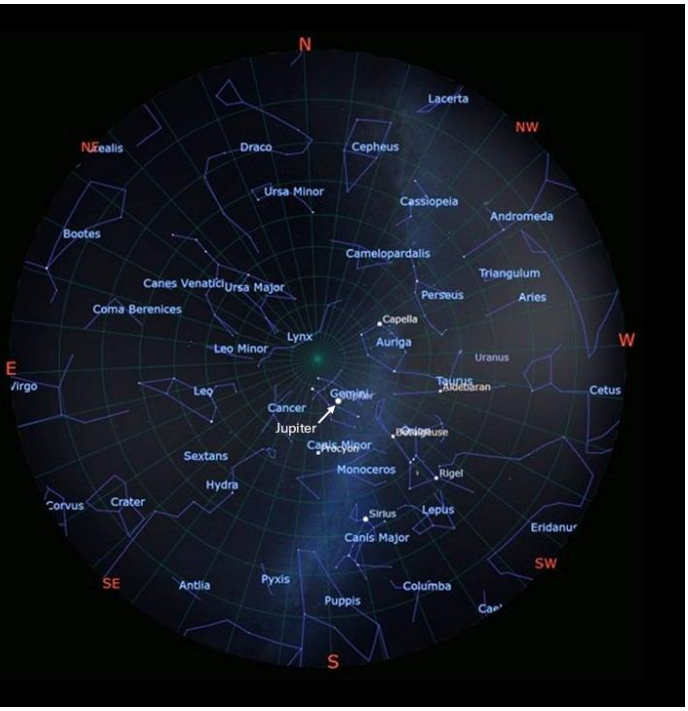
MARCH EQUINOX. On March 20 at 8:46 AM MDT, the Sun shines directly on Earth's equator. This is the March equinox, the beginning of astronomical spring in the northern hemisphere and the beginning of fall in the southern hemisphere. In Colorado, our daylight hours are rapidly lengthening, as our nighttime hours diminish.

ENJOY A DARK MARCH SKY! It's a great time to explore the winter and early spring sky on these dark March evenings, when temperatures may be warmer than they were during early winter. Use a planetarium app or the chart below to navigate. The Milky Way spans the sky from Cassiopeia in the north northwest, through Auriga west of the zenith, to Constellation Puppis in the south. As darkness falls, bright Jupiter is high in the south in Constellation Gemini, and Sirius, the night sky's brightest star, is more than 30 degrees above the southern horizon. The bright stars of Orion are high in the south southwest, as spring Constellations Leo and Virgo rise in the east. Look for faint Zodiacal light above the western horizon (see item below).

All-Sky View
from Colorado's Western Slope
for March 18, 2026, 9:00 PM MDT

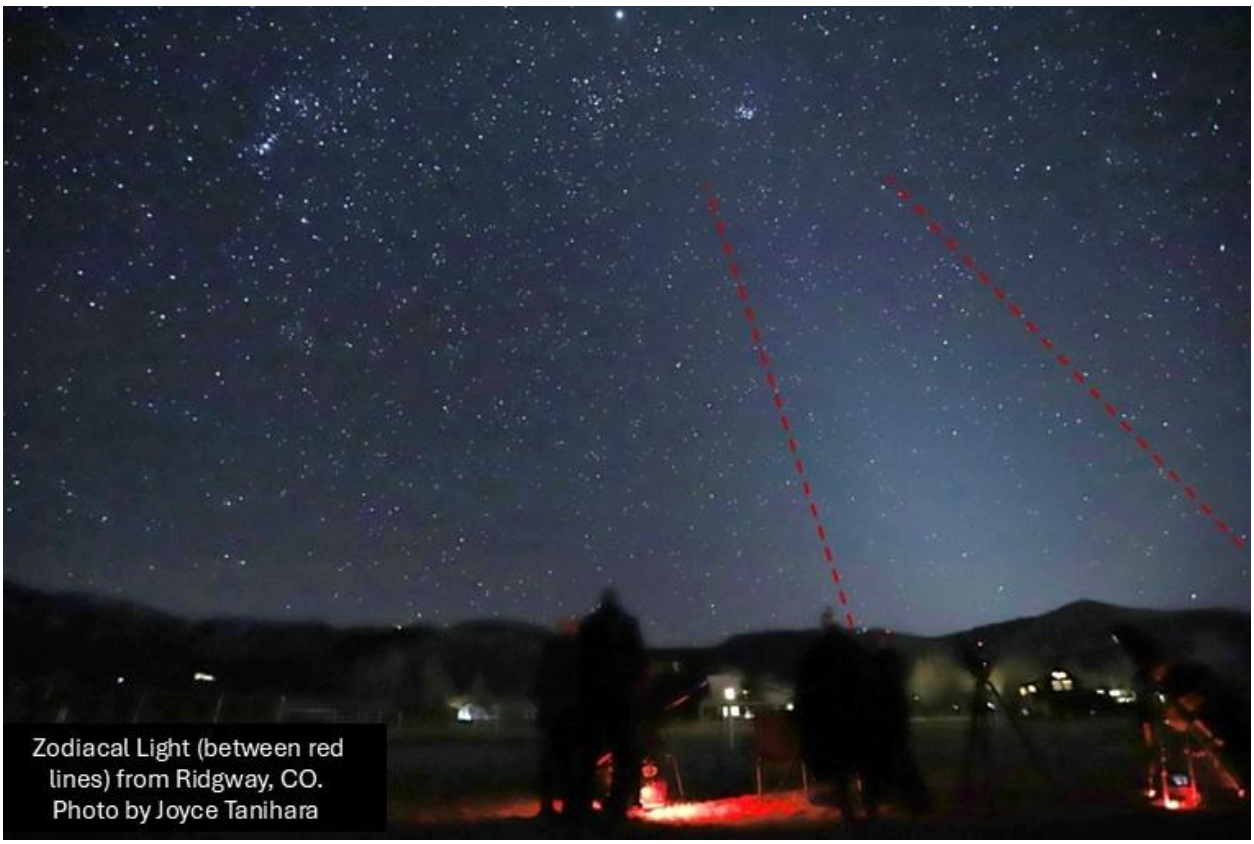
The Milky Way spans the sky from Constellation Cassiopeia in the north northwest, through Auriga west of the zenith, to Gemini and Monoceros high in the south, into Puppis near the southern horizon. Constellation Leo is high in the east, and the Big Dipper is rising high in northeast. The brightest sky objects are the Planet Jupiter, passing through Gemini (high in the south), followed by the night sky's brightest star, Sirius, about 33 degrees above the southern horizon, and Capella, just west of the zenith. The bright stars in Constellation Orion are still prominent in the south southwest. Note zodiacal light above the western horizon.

Simulated using Stellarium
for western Colorado



EVENING ZODIACAL LIGHT. With moonlight not interfering in the evenings from March 10 to 20, look toward the west as twilight ends. You may see the zodiacal light, a faint, triangular-shaped glow extending broadly from the horizon and narrowing greatly between 30 and 45 degrees above the western horizon (see photo below). Zodiacal light is forward-scattered sunlight from dust particles that orbit the Sun in the plane of the Solar System. Possible sources of this dust are debris from Jupiter-

family comets, asteroid collisions, or, less likely, material from the surface of Mars. The evening zodiacal light is faint, and it's easiest to spot it on moonless nights from dark locations that have no urban light domes toward the west. Regionally, Ridgway (an International Dark Sky Community) is a good choice for spotting the zodiacal light during dark March evenings, as are many other dark sky locations in western Colorado and eastern Utah. From the northern hemisphere, we can see evening zodiacal light most easily on moonless nights around the March equinox by looking west at the end of twilight. You can also see zodiacal light before dawn around the September equinox by looking east on moonless mornings, just before twilight begins.



Zodiacal Light (between red lines) from Ridgway, CO. Photo by Joyce Tanihara

THE MOON. The Moon reaches **last quarter on March 11** (exactly at 3:38 MDT), and from March 12 to 17, the crescent Moon wanes. The **Moon is new on March 18** (exactly new at 7:23 PM MDT). Between March 19 and 24, watch the crescent Moon wax in the evening sky. **The Moon reaches first quarter on March 25** (exactly at 1:18 PM MDT).

On March 19 around 8:00 PM MDT, use binoculars to spot a very skinny (1%-illuminated) crescent Moon 5 degrees above an unobstructed western horizon and about 5 degrees below and to the right of brilliant Venus.

Enjoy seeing earthshine delicately illuminate the nightside of the crescent Moon, especially on mornings from March 13 to 16, and on evenings from March 19 to 22 (binoculars can provide eye-catching views!). NASA has published a stunning visualization of lunar phases for year 2026. Another fun site is NASA's daily Moon guide. **Please do your crescent Moon spotting before sunrise and after sunset. NEVER chance looking at the Sun directly; serious eye damage can result.**

VENUS IN THE EVENING. By late February, brilliant Venus had reappeared in the evening sky, but it wasn't easy to spot, lying low to the horizon in glaring twilight. But now, Earth's "Sister Planet" is getting higher in the twilight. On March 10 and 11 between 7:55 to 8:00 PM MDT (with the Sun about 9 degrees below the horizon), look for Venus (at magnitude -3.9) about 6 to 5 degrees above the western horizon. Before March 12, it also may be possible spot fainter Saturn 3 to 4 degrees below Venus. By March 25 between 8:00 and 8:30 PM MDT Saturn is long gone, but Venus shines brightly above the western horizon in a darker sky. On March 19 around 8:00 PM MDT, use binoculars to spot Venus about 5 degrees above and to the left of a very skinny (1%-illuminated) crescent Moon. Our "Sister Planet" is 152 million miles distant on March 10 and 148 million miles distant on March 25. Through telescopes, Venus' nearly full, gibbous phase wanes slightly from 97% illuminated on March 10, to 95% illuminated on March 25, as its distance from Earth decreases, and its apparent diameter increases from 10.2 to 10.5 arc seconds. Venus will become a dazzling "evening star" through the late spring and summer months of 2026. **Please do your Venus spotting after sunset. NEVER chance looking at the Sun without taking proper precautions. Serious eye damage can result.**

FAREWELL TO SATURN IN THE EVENINGS. The evenings of March 10 and 11 between 7:55 and 8:00 PM MDT may be our last chances to spot Saturn in the evening sky before its solar conjunction on March 25. To spot the Ringed Planet about 3 to 4 degrees below brilliant Venus, use binoculars from a place with an unobstructed western horizon. Saturn will reappear in the predawn sky by late April and become visible again in the evenings by late summer. **Please do your Saturn spotting after sunset. NEVER chance looking at the Sun without taking proper precautions. Serious eye damage can result.**

URANUS. As the sky darkens, Uranus is still more than 50 degrees high in the west southwest and well placed for viewing with binoculars or telescopes. The 7th Planet sets in the west northwest at 12:52 AM MDT on March 10 and 11:52 PM MDT on March 25. Uranus is moving slowly against the stars of Constellation Taurus, about 5 degrees south of the Pleiades Star Cluster. You can use this link to find Uranus: https://theskylive.com/uranus-info
At magnitude +5.8, you can see the 7th Planet easily with binoculars, and perhaps even with eyes unaided when the Moon is below the horizon. But you'll need a telescope to resolve Uranus' 3.6 arc second-wide disk and to detect color easily. Most people perceive Uranus as either blue or green. How does it appear to you? The best time to view the 7th Planet is soon after the sky darkens between 8:30 and 9 PM MDT, when the 7th Planet is still relatively high in the sky. Uranus is 1.85 billion miles from Earth during this period.

JUPITER AND ITS LARGE MOONS. Bright Jupiter, moving against the stars of Gemini, is more than 65 degrees high in the south as darkness falls. Jupiter sets in the west northwest at around 4:27 AM MDT on March 10 and 3:30 AM MDT on March 25. Between March 10 and 25, the Giant Planet fades from magnitude -2.36 to -2.25, as its distance from Earth increases from 441 million to 461 million miles, and its apparent diameter decreases from 41.5 to 39.7 arc seconds. That's still large enough for resolving Jupiter's disk with binoculars!

Use a telescope or binoculars to spot Jupiter's four bright "Galilean" moons. You can identify them by their changing positions and referring to various planetarium apps. Use a telescope to view shadows of the Galilean moons crossing the Giant Planet. These are total solar eclipses on Jupiter! Ganymede, the largest moon in the Solar System, casts the largest shadow of Jupiter's moons, and its shadow is usually the easiest to spot. Unfortunately, there are no locally visible transits of Ganymede's shadow during this period. Due to their smaller diameters, the shadows of Callisto, Io, and Europa are smaller than Ganymede's shadow. But shadows of all 4 Galilean moons can be observed transiting Jupiter with telescopes having apertures as small as 3 inches. Shadow transits of Io and Europa occur frequently,

because Io orbits Jupiter every 1.8 Earth days, and Europa every 3.6 days. Ganymede and Callisto have longer orbital periods (around Jupiter), 7.2 and 16.7 Earth days, respectively, so their shadows cross Jupiter less frequently. We can watch the somewhat rare event of Callisto's shadow crossing Jupiter on March 18 from 1:22 AM MDT until Jupiter sets at about 3:53 AM MDT.

March 12 to 13, 2026, 10:02 PM to 12:54 AM MDT, Europa's shadow crosses Jupiter (Locally this event begins with Jupiter 68 degrees high in the southwest and ends with Jupiter 37 degrees high in the west).

March 14, 2026, 2:02 AM to 4:22 AM MDT, Io's shadow crosses Jupiter (Locally, this event begins with Jupiter 23 degrees high in the west northwest and ends 10 minutes after Jupiter sets).

March 15, 2026, 8:32 PM to 10:52 PM MDT, Io's shadow crosses Jupiter (Locally, this event begins with Jupiter 74 degrees high in the south and ends with Jupiter 58 degrees high in the southwest).

March 18, 2026, 1:22 AM to 5:26 AM MDT, Callisto's shadow crosses Jupiter (Locally this event begins with Jupiter 28 degrees high in the west and ends at 5:26 AM MDT, long after Jupiter sets at around 3:53 AM MDT).

March 20, 2026, 12:38 AM to 3:30 AM MDT, Europa's shadow crosses Jupiter (Locally, this event begins with Jupiter 31 degrees high in the west and ends with Jupiter only 3 degrees above the west-northwestern horizon).

March 22 to 23, 2026, 10:28 PM to 12:48 AM MDT, Io's shadow crosses Jupiter (Locally, this event begins with Jupiter 58 degrees high in the west and ends with Jupiter 30 degrees above the western horizon).

March 24, 2026, 4:56 PM to 7:16 PM MDT, Io's shadow crosses Jupiter (Locally, this event begins in bright daylight with Jupiter 46 degrees high in the east and ends about 10 minutes before sunset with Jupiter 70 degrees high in the south).

MERCURY IN THE PREDAWN – MARCH 24 and 25. For much of February, Mercury made its second-best (or perhaps best?) evening appearance of 2026. By late February, Mercury had disappeared, as it moved rapidly toward inferior solar conjunction on March 7, passing invisibly just north of the Sun in our daytime sky. But on March 24 and 25 between 6:15 and 6:30 AM MDT, it may be possible to spot the "Speedster Planet" in morning twilight, as it rises 1 to 4 degrees above an unobstructed east-southeastern horizon. When at inferior solar conjunction on March 7, Mercury was 58 million miles from Earth, and it's 70 million miles distant on March 25, when the Innermost Planet shines at magnitude +0.7. Through telescopes on March 25, Mercury's 33%-illuminated crescent appears 9.0 arc seconds wide. Mercury will get easier to spot in the pre-dawn by the end of March and in early April, as it continues to brighten and its angular distance from the Sun increases. **Please do your Mercury spotting before sunrise. NEVER chance looking at the Sun without taking proper precautions. Serious eye damage can result.**

WILL A BRIGHT NOVA ("NEW" STAR) APPEAR SOON? Will there be a bright "new" star in Constellation Corona Borealis sometime soon, if only briefly? Corona Borealis rises above the east-northeastern horizon by 11 PM MDT, and the Constellation is more than 70 degrees high in the south at 6:00 AM MDT. T Coronae Borealis (T CrB) is a recurrent nova that (based on past behavior) may rapidly increase in brightness 1500-fold (to second magnitude) to become the brightest star (or 2nd brightest star) in

Corona Borealis between now and perhaps later this year. Then this "new star" may fade rapidly below naked-eye visibility in about a week. As of 5 AM (MST) on March 10, T CrB had not yet erupted. Astronomer Jean Schneider predicted that an eruption is mostly likely on or about June 25, 2026. But an eruption could happen at any time! You can find additional info at these sites…
https://blogs.nasa.gov/Watch_the_Skies/2024/02/27/view-nova-explosion-new-star-in-northern-crown/
https://www.aanda.org/articles/aa/full_html/2023/12/aa48372-23/aa48372-23.html

THE SUN. The Sun is still active, and as of March 10, there are several sunspot groups on the Earth-facing side of the Sun. There have been M-class (moderate) solar flares during recent weeks, and there were five X-class (extreme) flares in early February. Also, coronal mass ejections (CMEs) have triggered geomagnetic storms that caused auroras, including an aurora on the evening of January 19, which was observed and photographed from the Western Slope. The best way to monitor sunspots, solar flares, CMEs, and other solar activity safely (and in "real time") is by using the internet. To safely monitor the Sun, check out the following sites…
https://sohowww.nascom.nasa.gov/data/realtime-images.html
https://sdo.gsfc.nasa.gov/data/
https://stereo.gsfc.nasa.gov/beacon/
http://halpha.nso.edu/
https://www.swpc.noaa.gov/
http://www.sidc.be/silso/ssngraphics
Do not look at the Sun directly without safe, specialized solar filters. Looking at the Sun can be very dangerous unless you take adequate precautions. Severe eye damage and even blindness can result.

AURORAS (aka "polar lights" or "northern lights"). We are still in an active part of the solar cycle, and there may be more geomagnetic storms that trigger auroras that could become visible from the Western Slope. Get predictions and updates for auroras, their intensity, and geographic extent from NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center:
https://www.swpc.noaa.gov/products/aurora-viewline-tonight-and-tomorrow-night-experimental
Auroras are most frequently seen from high latitudes, e.g., from Canada, Alaska, Iceland, northernmost Europe, southern New Zealand, and Antarctica. But many people have viewed and photographed auroras from the Western Slope in the past two years, including a spectacular aurora on November 11, 2025 and another aurora on the evening of January 19 and early morning of January 20, 2026. Also, we can watch auroras in real-time from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories on an all-sky camera at the Canadian Space Agency's AuroraMax website. Like Colorado, Yellowknife is in the Mountain Time Zone. An aurora webcam at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks is two hours behind the Mountain Time Zone…
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O52zDyxg5QI
Airglow and SAR arcs also result from high solar activity, and these phenomena have been photographed and/or observed from Colorado.

EARTH SATELLITES. Numerous Earth satellites are visible every clear night. Satellites are visible only when they reflect sunlight during twilight or nighttime hours. We see satellites most often during late evening twilight and for an hour or so afterwards, and before and during early morning twilight. The brightest satellites are the International Space Station (ISS) and Tiangong, the Chinese Space Station. Both space stations can appear brighter than any star in the sky, and at times even brighter than the Planet Jupiter. Predictions for space station passes can change quickly, and it's best to get predictions for passes within 24 hours of when you want to see the satellites. In low Earth orbit, both the ISS and Tiangong are subject to atmospheric drag, and they undergo frequent re-boosting. Re-boosting slightly

slows orbital speed, resulting in later passes. Also, both space stations frequently alter their orbits to avoid collisions with other satellites and space debris. Some popular sites for predicting local passes of the space stations (and other satellites) are the following (be sure to set applications to your location and time zone):
https://www.heavens-above.com/
https://www.n2yo.com/passes/?s=25544
For ISS passes, you can use NASA's "Spot the Station" app for mobile devices …
https://www.nasa.gov/spot-the-station/
Starlink satellite "trains" can be striking sights for a few days after their launch. For predictions of SpaceX's Starlink satellites, try using this site:
https://findstarlink.com/#5431710;3

HAPPY OBSERVING!