

Constellation Discovery Series: Draco

Translation: Serpent or Dragon

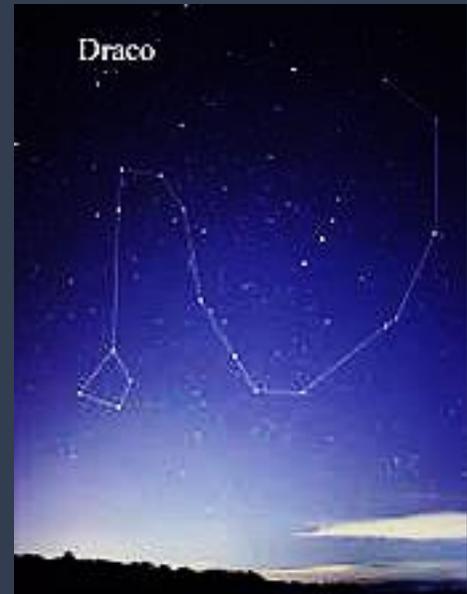
Visibility:

- **It is a very large constellation and is considered the eighth largest constellation in the night sky.**
 - **Despite its size, Draco is not especially visible or bright.**
- **The head of the dragon consists of four stars in a trapezoid and is located just north of the Hercules constellation. From there, the dragon's body winds its way through the sky, ending between the Big Dipper and Little Dipper.**
- **Draco is a northern constellation that is circumpolar – meaning that it never sets below the horizon and can be seen all year in the northern hemisphere.**

Additional Facts:

- **This constellation was considered significant because it was the guardian of the star that never moves, the celestial pole otherwise known as the North Star.**
- **Around 4000 years ago, due to the earth precessing, the location of the North Star was actually a point in the constellation Draco called Thuban or Draconis.**

Examples:



Myths:

The Pyramids on the Giza Plateau were designed to have one side facing north, with an entrance passage geometrically aligned so that Thuban or Draconis would be visible at night.

At the time the Great Pyramid was built, one of the shafts aimed toward the star that was then closest to the north celestial pole. The other aimed at the Belt of Orion, one of the brightest and most impressive constellations.

The Egyptians described these stars as "imperishable" or "undying." The pharaoh of the time expected that when he died, he would join not only with the Sun, but with Thuban as well - maintaining order in the celestial realm, just as he had on Earth.

In Roman mythology, Draco was one of the Giant Titans who warred with the Olympian gods for ten years. He was killed in battle by the goddess Minerva and thrown into the sky, where it froze around the North Pole.

In one of the most famous Greek myths, Draco represents Ladon, the hundred-eyed dragon that guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides.

The eleventh of The Twelve Labors of Heracles was to steal the golden apples. Hercules needed to complete these labors to be forgiven for past's crimes and to gain immortality.

The golden apple tree was a wedding present to Hera when she married Zeus, the king of the gods. She planted the tree in her garden on Mount Atlas and tasked Atlas' daughters, the Hesperides, with guarding it. She also placed the dragon Ladon around the tree so that the Hesperides would not pick any apples from it.

Heracles killed Ladon with a poisoned arrow, allowing him to freely take the golden apples.

According to the legend, Hera was saddened by the dragon's death and later placed the dragon in the sky as the constellation Draco. This constellation is found alongside many other constellations that represent the other labors of Hercules and when all can be seen, the whole story of Hercules can be told.