

5 Procyon in the constellation Canis Minor

Distance

11.4 light years

Luminosity

7 times that of the sun

Colour

White-yellow

Surface temperature

6,500 K

Diameter

2.1 times the diameter of the sun

(To Planet Trail scale: 2.9 m)

Mass

1.5 solar masses

Evening visibility

December to April

Procyon is the brightest star in the constellation Canis Minor and the sixth brightest fixed star we can see in the sky. Procyon is a binary star system. The main sequence star and a white dwarf orbit their common centre of gravity in around 41 years. The above data refer to the main star. It falls into the subgiant phase of the star life cycle, meaning that it doesn't fuse hydrogen into helium in its core but in a shell around the core. The companion star is a white dwarf. It is significantly smaller and fainter. The star has stopped generating energy through nuclear fusion. It is in the process of cooling down and is therefore becoming gradually fainter.

Procyon forms the Winter Hexagon together with the stars Sirius in Canis Major, Rigel in Orion, Aldebaran in Taurus, Capella in Auriga and Pollux in Gemini.

Procyon translates as "before the dog". The idea is that it rises before Sirius, the Dog Star.

Other bright stars in the constellation Canis Minor:

Gomeisa Distance: 160 light years

5 The constellation Canis Minor

Canis Minor is a small, unassuming constellation. Its main star, Procyon, can be found next to Orion and below the constellation Gemini in the winter months. The Milky Way appears to the east of the constellation. Besides Procyon, there is only one relatively bright star (Gomeisa) in Canis Minor. It is therefore difficult to see a figure in these two stars. Nevertheless, the constellation is depicted as a dog. Like Canis Major, it seems to accompany Orion on his hunt.

A myth about Canis Minor involves the constellations Bootes and Virgo. The constellation Canis Minor is therefore reminiscent of Maira, the hound of Erigone. Her father offered some herdsmen wine to taste. In a drunken stupor, they killed him and buried him under a tree. Erigone would not have found her missing father if her dog Maira hadn't pulled her to the grave. Out of grief, Erigone hanged herself from the tree under which her father was buried. The faithful dog stayed under the tree until she too died. Erigone's dog was transferred to the sky as Canis Minor, her father as Bootes and she herself as Virgo.