

One Good Target

With Some Other Sights Worth Seeing
While You're in the Neighborhood

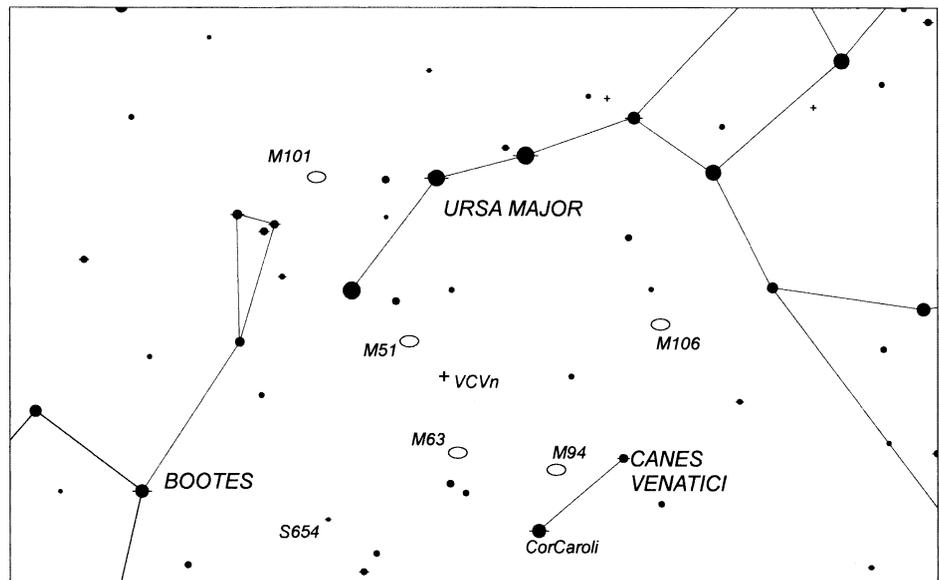
April

The Sunflower Galaxy (M63)

with side trips to a couple easy double stars
and a bright carbon star

This month's targets are clustered in the constellation **Canes Venatici** (The Hunting Dogs), which sits under the arch of The Big Dipper's handle as if it were a sheltering umbrella. Although it's a fairly small constellation, occupying just over 1% of the sky, Canes Venatici contains five Messier objects – a globular cluster and four galaxies. We covered the cluster (M3) and three of the galaxies (M51, M94, and M106) in earlier issues of OGT. This month we'll look at the fourth galaxy, **M63**, sometimes called **The Sunflower Galaxy**.

This month's targets,
showing stars to mag 5.5
(North at top)



To find M63, start at **Cor Caroli** (Alpha [α] Canum Venaticorum), a justly famous color contrast pair featured in the May 2022 issue of OGT: its mag 2.9 blue-white primary is paired with an ambiguously-colored mag 5.5 secondary star 19 arcseconds away. Nearby, as shown in the finder view on the next page, you'll find a wide binocular pair of yellow-white stars, **17 and 15 CVn**, mag 6.0 and 6.3, separated by $4\frac{1}{2}$ arcminutes. From there, pan 5° NE until you see a distinctive T-shaped group of mag 5-6 stars. Due to its low surface brightness, M63 will be just a faint haze in finders or binoculars, but if you use the "T" to position your

finder, M63 will be centered in the field. Its integrated magnitude is 8.6, but that light is spread over an area covering 9x4 arcminutes. Small scopes will reveal its bright oval core, while a starlike nucleus emerges in 4"-6" instruments. You'll need at least a 10" scope to discern the mottling that gave The Sunflower its name.

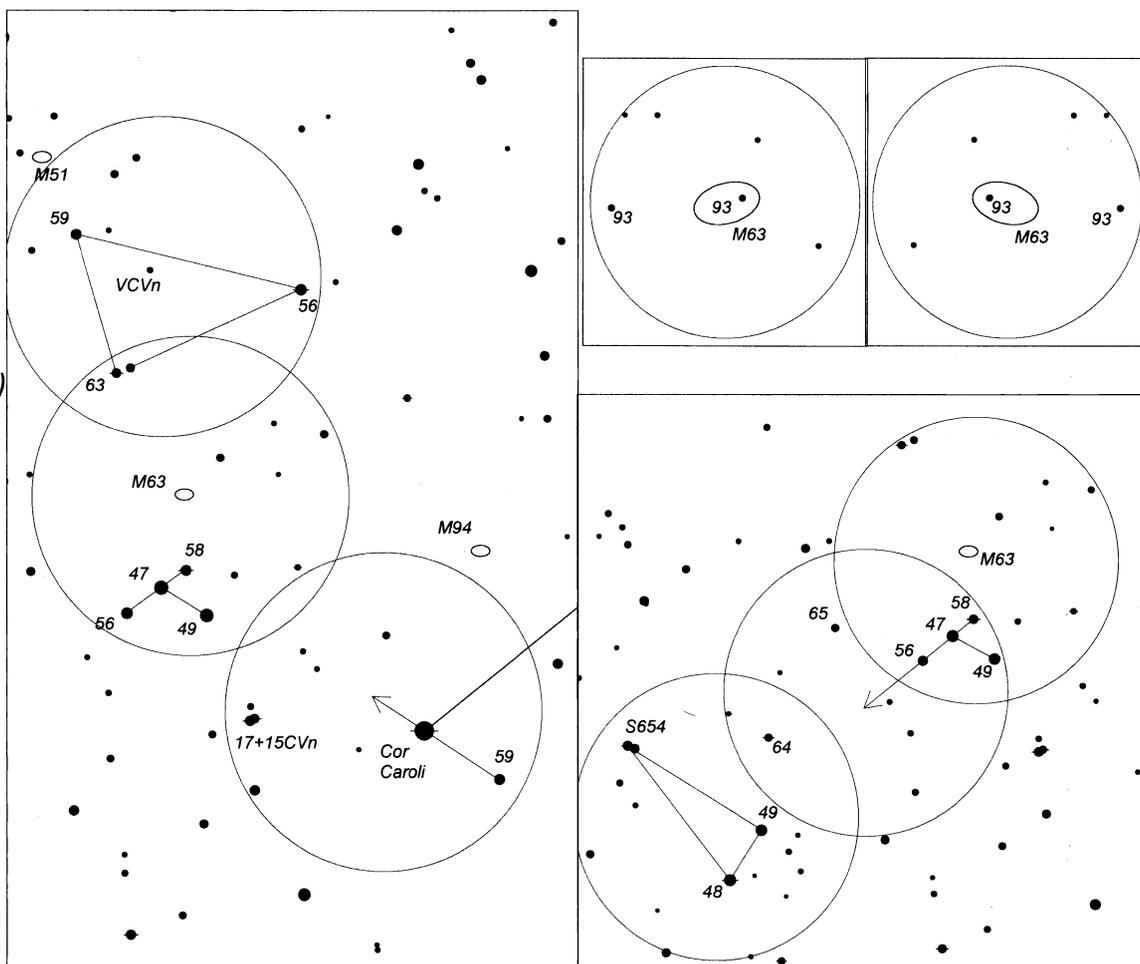
Finding charts:

(L) 5° fields, stars to mag 8

(R top) 1° fields, stars to mag 10.5: erect image (L), mirror-reversed (R)

(R btm) 5° fields, stars to mag 8

(all) selected magnitudes noted, decimals omitted, North at top



While you're in the neighborhood, go back to your finderscope view and use the top bar of that "T" shaped group to point the way as you scan 1½ fields to the SE to find a fairly large, narrow mag 5 triangle. The narrow tip of the triangle is a wide pair, **S654** from the catalog compiled by James South in 1826. It comprises a yellow-white mag 5.6 primary and a light blue mag 8.9 companion with 71 arcseconds of separation between them. (Don't confuse it with a yellow mag 5.9 single star 2½ arcminutes SW of the pair).

Before packing up for the night, go back to the finder field where you found M63, but this time scan 3½° north to find a large triangle of mag 6 stars. Inside the triangle you'll find a carbon star, **V Canum Venaticorum**, whose brightness ranges from mag 6.5 to 8.5. Like all carbon stars, it's a red giant made redder by the presence of carbon soot in its outer atmosphere, which scatters the blue parts of its light while letting the red parts shine through. It's a pretty sight, and a fitting spot to wrap up our evening chasing astronomical prey with The Hunting Dogs.

Rick Gering / April 2026