

MESSIER 18 OR M18 OPEN CLUSTER

M18 (also designated NGC 6613) is an open cluster of stars in the constellation Sagittarius. It was discovered by **Charles Messier** in 1764 and included in his list of comet-like objects. From the perspective of Earth, M18 is situated between the Omega Nebula (M17) and the Sagittarius Star Cloud (M24). Its age is estimated at 32 million years. It is 4,900 light-years away.

OBSERVATION DATA (J2000.0 EPOCH)

Right ascension 18h 19.9m

Declination $-17^{\circ} 08'$

Distance 4.9 kly (1.5 kPc)

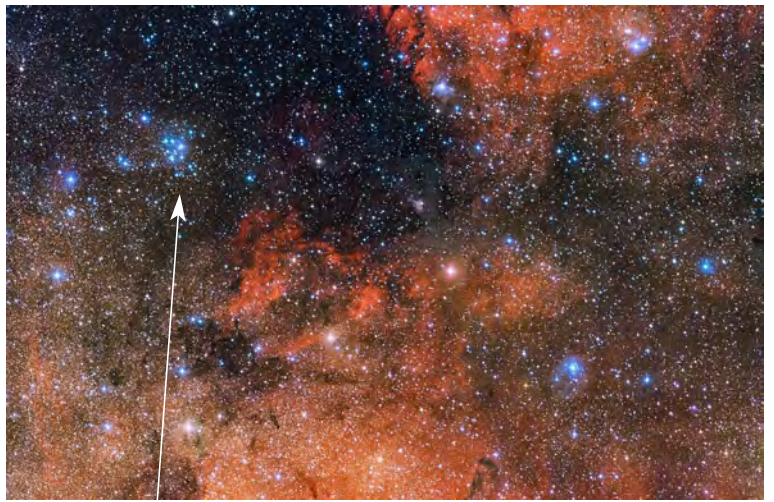
Apparent magnitude (V) 7.5

Apparent dimensions (V) 9.0'

Radius 9 ly

Estimated age 32 million years

Other designations NGC 6613



The small smattering of bright blue stars upper left of centre in this huge 615 megapixel ESO image is the perfect cosmic laboratory in which to study the life and death of stars. Known as Messier 18 this open star cluster contains stars that formed together from the same massive cloud of gas and dust. This image was captured by the OmegaCAM camera attached to the VLT Survey Telescope (VST) located at ESO's Paranal Observatory in Chile

LOCATING MESSIER 18:

Because Messier 18 is nothing more than a small collection of stars which are slightly brighter than the background Milky Way stars, it isn't easy to distinguish it using binoculars or a finder-scope if you've never seen it before. One of the most sure ways of locating it is to become familiar with Messier 17 and simply aim a couple of degrees (about a field of view) south.

While it won't strike you as a grand object, you will notice that the stars are compressed in this area and that there are several dozen of them which appear brighter than the rest. In a telescope, use your lowest magnification. Since this is a very well spread cluster, it is easily resolved in even modest instruments.

HISTORY OF OBSERVATION:

M18 was one of Charles Messier's original discoveries, which took place in 1764. As he wrote in his notes upon observing the cluster:

"In the same night [June 3 to 4, 1764], I have discovered a bit below the nebula reported here above, a cluster of small stars, envired in a thin nebulosity; its extension may be 5 minutes of arc: its appearances are less sensible in an ordinary refractor of 3 feet and a half than that of the two preceding [M16 and M17]: with a modest refractor, this star cluster appears in the form of a nebula; but when employing a good instrument, as I have done, one sees well many of the small stars: after my observations I have determined its position: its right ascension is 271d 34' 3", and its declination 17d 13' 14" South."

In this circumstance, we must give Messier great credit considering his observations were performed long before the nature of open clusters and stellar movement were understood.

