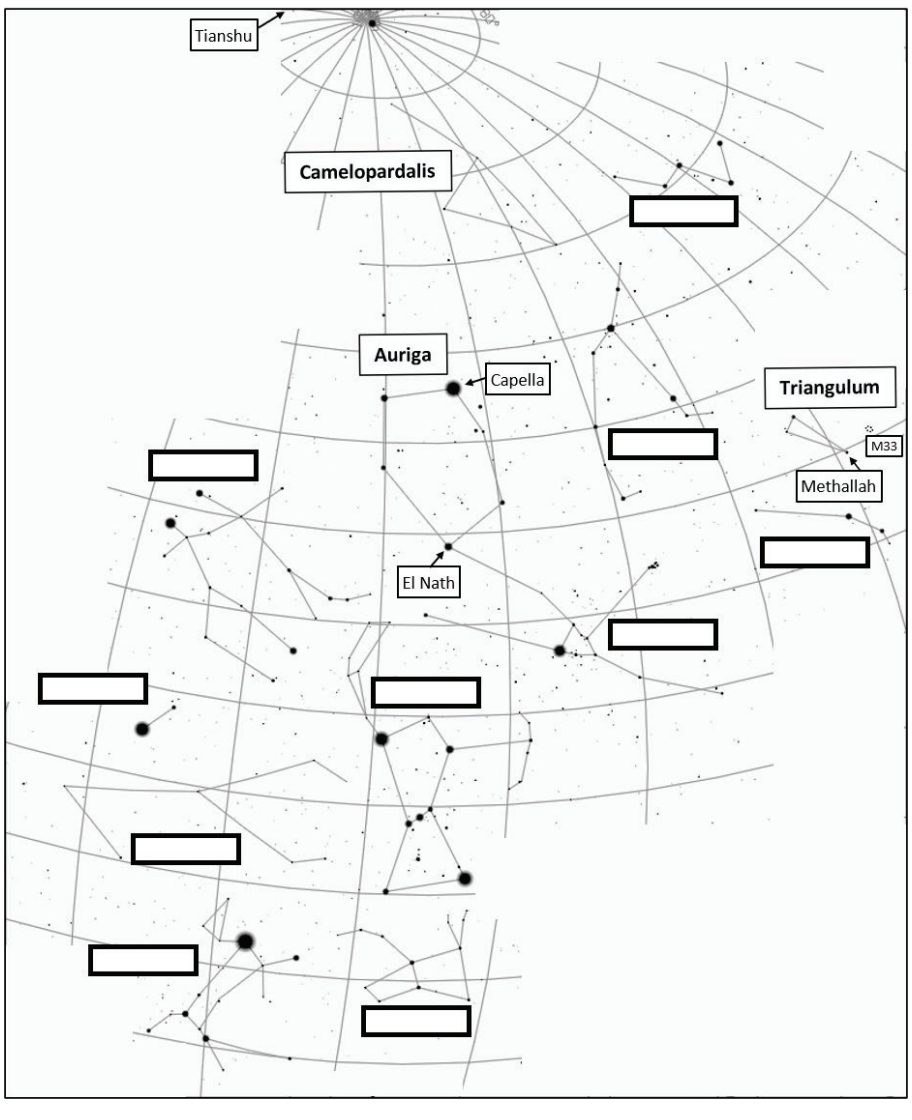
# WHAT'S UP?

Anybody thinking of trying backyard radio astronomy after reading the last *What's Up?* I hope so! I haven't tried listening for meteors on FM radio for years, but I'm going to try during the Lyrid meteor shower next month. The Moon will be about two-thirds full, so we won't see a lot of meteors visually. The peak occurs on the night of April 21st. I'll remind you of it when the time gets closer. Let's turn our attention back to the constellations again. In *What's Up?* Installments #37, 38, and 39, we walked through the constellations visible to us, covering about ¼ of the sky. Before the western-most of these constellations literally sink into the sunset, how about a quick memory test? In the boxes of this diagram, fill in the names of the constellations we've talked about. This drawing shows three other constellations that we haven't covered yet. They are *Camelopardalis*, *Auriga*, and *Triangulum*.

*Camelopardalis* (the Giraffe) is one of 12 constellations named by the Dutch astronomer Petrus Plancius based on observations by Dutch navigators. The name comes from the Greek word for a giraffe – camel (an tan-colored animal with a longish neck) and leopard (an animal with spots). Being named only in the 17th century, Camelopardalis has no ancient mythology associated with it. Not shown as part of the line drawing in the sketch are many stars stretching along the neck of the giraffe that wind their way up towards the pole. Around 1600 years ago, the celestial pole star was not Polaris (for a reason that I'll explain in an upcoming article). At that time the closest star to the pole was a star near the very top of what is now Camelopardalis. The Chinese astronomers called it *Tianshu*, the Celestial Pivot[1].




*Auriga* (the Charioteer) has long been shown as a shepherd, cradling either a goat or a goat and her kids, as he rides through the heavens in his chariot. One variation suggests that the goat in question is Amaltheia, famous for nursing the infant Zeus. (In fact, Capella, one of the brightest stars in this constellation, was previously called Amaltheia.) The main shape of Auriga forms a pentagon with one point sharing a star with the constellation, Taurus. The star, *El Nath*, marks the tip of the Bull's northern horn.

The last of the three, *Triangulum* (the Triangle), though known back in ancient times by this name, also like Camelopardalis, has no mythology associated with it. It is, well, just a triangle. Its brightest star is named *Mothallah*, from the Arabic, meaning "the triangle". This tiny constellation is host to M33, the beautiful *Pinwheel Galaxy*.

We'll take a constellation break for now. When we pick them up again, we'll be looking at our Spring evening sky. We will get re-acquainted with some familiar faces and talk about some constellations we skipped over in previous articles. Speaking of Spring, we passed the Vernal Equinox in the early morning hours of March 20th. And since Daylight Savings Time began on March 14th, we need to wait a bit longer in the evenings before we can begin our night sky explorations. Oh well, on the up side of that, it'll be warmer when we get out there! When we do, we'll see that…

The Moon is a waxing gibbous and the Full Moon occurs on the 28th. Mars is still in the southwestern evening sky at sunset, about one fist-width above Aldebaran (in Taurus). But with the Earth-Mars distance now 4 times larger than it was last October, it is also almost 10 times dimmer than it was in October. It's just a smidge dimmer than Aldebaran. As for the other bare-eye-visible planets, Venus is in neither the evening sky nor the morning sky today! On March 26th, Venus is in *superior conjunction.* That is, Venus is exactly in line with the Sun and the Earth on the far side of the Sun from us. From here on, we will see Venus in the evening sky but it will take a few weeks for it to be far enough away from the Sun to be out of the Sun's glare. In the mornings, Saturn rises around 5:00, Jupiter rises about a half-hour later, and tiny Mercury pops up at about 6:30, just before the Sun.

Thanks again goes to Brendan Smith for help with these constellation's backgrounds. You can reach me at astroblog@comcast.net with any questions and comments you have. This is What's Up? Installment #42.

[1] Ridpath, I. (2018). Star tales. Cambridge, The Lutterworth Press.; [2] Smith, B. (2021). SSAstros Winter Constellations, [3]-Constellation stick outlines from *Stellarium* software, stellarium.org.

Until next time, Keep looking up!

*Barry*