

Variable Star of the Year V Canum Venaticorum

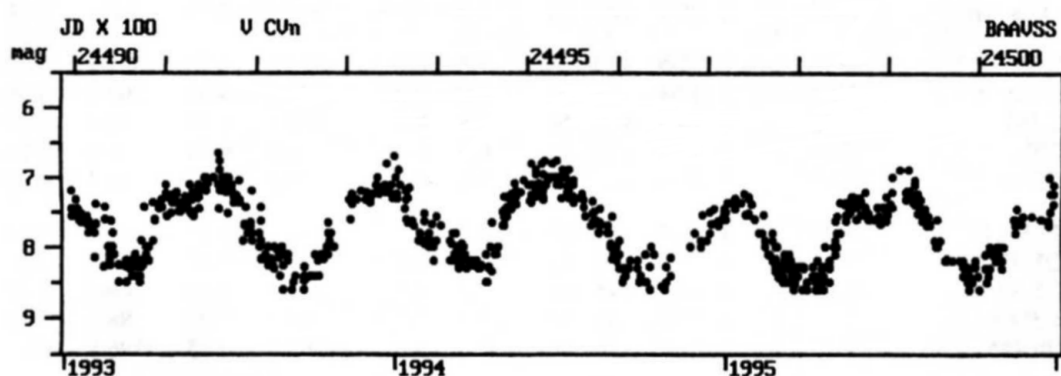
Just over 2° south preceding the Whirlpool galaxy M51 lies one of the best objects for newcomers to variable star observing who are equipped with only a small pair of binoculars.

V CVn is a red semi-regular (Sra) variable star of spectral class M4e-M6e. The classification Sra applies to giant stars of late spectral class whose light curves are similar to those of the long period variables (Mira), but with smaller amplitude.

The magnitude range for V CVn is normally between approximately 7.1 and 8.4 (as exhibited in the light curve below) but it can fluctuate between the recorded extremes of 6.5 and 8.7, with the maxima tending to vary more widely than the minima.

The period is 192 days, which usually means that two maxima and minima can be seen in just over a year's monitoring.

From the UK V CVn is circumpolar, although too low in the evening sky to be observed usefully during the months of November and December. The observer should try to observe the star four times a month (equally spaced, weather permitting) and will be rewarded with a light curve similar to that shown below.



SA044590, $1^\circ 5'$ to the north and slightly following V CVn, is a red irregular variable star recently confirmed as such by photoelectric and visual work by members of the BAAVSS. For many years it was actually used as a comparison star for V CVn, which adversely affected the accuracy of several observations made when V CVn was magnitude 7.0 or brighter. SA044590 is spectral class M4 and varied approximately between magnitudes 6.5-7.3 with a mean value of 6.9.