

Conjunction of the Moon with Mars

During the nights of **February 8-10**, the waxing gibbous Moon glides through zodiac constellation Gemini, as it appears to overtake the planet Mars. This occurs because of the Moon's eastward orbit along the "ecliptic" (the approximate celestial path of the Sun, Moon, and planets through our skies). That orbit creates a lunar movement in our skies of about 13° each day. The Moon and Mars will appear closest during this conjunction on the night of Feb. 9th.

Just past its opposition with Earth in January, orange Mars is relatively close on these nights at a distance of 68 million miles – some 6 light minutes away.

By comparison, the heavenly "twin" beacons of Gemini, Castor and Pollux, are located some 51 and 34 light years, respectively, behind the Moon! Go out and observe this juxtaposition, and you should notice the color difference in the two stars. Hotter Castor shines a brilliant white, while Pollux glows yellow-orange.

