**Matariki: The Māori New Year**

# What is Matariki?

Matariki is a traditional Māori constellation that forms part of the canoe called Te Waka o Rangi. The captain of this celestial waka is captained by Taramainuku. As these stars traverse the sky, Taramainuku is said to cast his net amongst the heavens to capture those that have departed and he then sets them amongst the heavens to guard over us. Known in the western world as Pleaides of Messier 45 (M45), this constellation features in the constellation Taurus.

The rising of Matariki in the traditional month of Te Tahi o Pipiri and lunar phase of Tangaroa, signals the beginning of the Māori New Year. Matariki serves an important feature in the Māori Maramataka (calendar) to help define the coming year.

# Origins of Matariki

The story of Matariki can be found in the genesis stories of Māori and the separation of the primal parents of the Ranginui (sky) and Papatuanuku (earth). Upon Tāne successfully separating the parents, Tawhirimatea (god of winds) lashed out and caused his brothers and sisters to scatter. Only Tumatauenga (god of war and humanity) stood defiantly against Tawhirimatea.

Tawhirimatea became so enraged at his siblings that he tore out his eyes and threw them into the sky and hence the full name, Ngā mata o te Ariki o Tawhirimatea (The eyes of the high born wind god), came to rest upon the chest of Ranginui. Tawhirimatea is said to be a blind god who uses his winds to feel his way about the world. The storms we experience are his continued rage against his siblings.

Hence Ngā Mata o Te Ariki o Tawhirimatea and Mata Ariki are now more commonly known as Matariki.

# Across the Pacific

Matariki is well known across Te Moana Nui a Kiwa (Pacific Ocean) and features in many stories.

In Hawaii it is known as Makali’i and it’s appearance in November prompts a festival to honour Lono, a god of fertility, agriculture and peace.

In Samoa it is called Li’i or Mataali’ meaning the eyes of the chiefs.

In Tonga, Matali’i helps divide the seasons between Matali’i i nia and Matali’i i raro.

In Rapanui (Easter Island), it is called Matariki and it is associated with the fishing seasons.

# How to find Matariki?

In the night sky, a common feature known to most would be Orion’s Belt or Tautoru to Māori. If you move from right to left you will come to a triangle known Hyades which forms the face of Taurus. This group of stars are known by two names to Māori, Te Kokota and Mata Kaheru. If you then carry on to the left you see a small cluster of stars grouped closely together, this is Matariki.

During May, Matariki sets in the west in the early evening, as such it is missing from the night sky for nearly a month. As June approaches we then see Matariki transition to the east. When it rises in the month of June or July just before the rising sun, this is the period of Matariki and the associated traditions.

# The union of Rehua and Matariki

As with most Māori traditions, there are male and female forms attributed to phenomena to help denote the relationships which confirm the Māori world view. Matariki is known as a female star and her partner is Rehua or Rehua Ariki. Rehua was a Whatukura or guardian of the higher known heavens. Some traditions acknowledge him as an expert in battle but also in healing of the sick and blind.

From this union we then see the following offspring; Pōhutukawa, Tupuānuku, Tupuārangi, Waitī, Waitā, Waipunarangi, Ururangi and Hiwa i te rangi. Most Māori traditions maintain there are seven, some nine; for the most part the following denote their realm of significance in reading the coming year.

**Pōhutukawa** Is associated with the dead that have passed since the last cycle of Matariki. Pōhutukawa are significant with stories of Te Reinga, the gateway to the underworld.

**Tupuānuku** Is associated with food harvested from the earth.

**Tupuārangi** Are the birds harvested from the forests.

**Waitī** Denotes fresh water and all the foods gathered from rivers, streams and lakes.

**Waitā** Is the sea and bountiful harvest found in the oceans, estuary and tides. Waita and it’s association with the sea give Matariki influence over the tides in some months.

**Waipunarangi** Refers to the water that gathers in the heavens and the rains that pool on the ground during this time of year.

**Ururangi** Is associated with winds and weather – these are the children of Tawhirimatea the wind god. Ururangi tells of the coming storms for the year.

**Hiwa te rangi** Is associated with the prosperity and growth of the coming year. Hiwa te rangi is the wife of Ioio Whenua and they are elders to Maui the demi-god, who performs fantastic feats in other traditions.

# Matariki traditions

In older times, Māori would gather to watch Matariki rise from prominent vantage points across Aotearoa. Elders would perform certain rites and then interpret the year to come based on the presentation of Matariki.

Some would prepare an early morning hangi comprised of two ovens. One would be prepared for the whānau that gathered and the other would be offered to the heavens for those that had departed. Exposing the hangi in the early morning cold as Matariki rose over the horizon would result in a huge cloud of steam rising to the heavens illuminated by the light of the rising sun. This in turn gave the elders an opportunity to read the signs and provide guidance to the tribe.

Due to the time of year, Matariki prompted a definite change in the year. The ground became hard, the cold set in and the rains would pool on the ground. Tribes who had a bad harvest would then endure a bleak time as the conditions made life harder. It was not a time for labour, so much of the activity of the period required whānau around Matariki gave hope and promise that if they endured they would have another opportunity to plan, plant and harvest.

During this time of remembrance, those that had passed in the year would be remembered. During these ceremonies their names would be said aloud and personal items would be brought out to acknowledge their passing. As they were scooped up by the net of Taramainuku and set amongst the stars, whānau then were able to search them out in the night sky.

# Matariki in modern times

Many whānau around Aotearoa are trying to revive the old traditions up and down the country, but we also see new practices developing. Immersion language programmes in early childhood (kohanga reo), kura kaupapa (primary school) and wharekura (secondary school) all incorporate Matariki into their teaching syllabus. As they attempt to bridge into STEM(Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) based learning, Matariki activity is providing a pathway that is Māori led to explore astronomy.

The recent award to Dr Rangi Mataamua of the Prime Ministers Science Award further validates the momentum that is being driven by Māori. Dr Mataamua is the first Māori recipient of the award and with his establishment of a Whare Kōkōrangi (traditional astronomy institution) he hopes there are more to follow in his path.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/420267/maori-astronomer-professor-rangi-matamua-wins-top-science-award>

Māori programmes within mainstream Universities are beginning to allow for alignment to Matariki, so that they begin in the Matariki period instead of the normal start of the calendar year. The significance of this timing is not lost on Māori students.

# Matariki and its relationship to wellbeing

Matariki has a strong relationship with the wellbeing of the population. So it has significance to the body of work for us here at ProCare. There are strong themes within the Matariki construct to theme and promote nutrition (Tupuānuku, Tupuārangi Waiti and Waita), environment (Ururangi), water quality (Waipunarangi), well-being (Rehua Ariki) and growth (Hiwa te rangi) amongst our practices and enrolled population. A well thought out health promotion programme might someday be modelled off of Matariki.

How would whānau respond to a Matariki based assessment?

Although Matariki is well grounded in Māori traditions from deep in the pacific, there is nothing restricting how it may be applied for the ongoing needs of Māori and the population.

# Matariki based proverbs

**Hauhake tū, ka tō Matariki.**

*The harvest ends when Matariki sets.*

The ground is about to become cold and hard; the time being in the garden has finished.

**Matariki huarahi ki te oranga tangata.**

*Matariki is the pathway for wellbeing.*

Matariki has a strong association with the welbeing of the tribe due to its influence over the harvest and bounty of the forest, rivers, lakes and ocean.

**Ka rere a Matariki, ka wera te hinu.**

*When Matariki rises, the fat is heated.*

With gardening being ill fated, now is a good time to snare birds and prepare them for preservation.

**Ka rere ngā purapura o Matariki.**

*The seeds of Matariki are falling.*

Said of the falling snow and frost at this time of year.

**Ka puta Matariki, ka rere Whānui, ko te tohu o te tau.**

*Matariki appears as Whānui flees; this is the sign of the New Year.*

Whānui setting in the west would announce Matariki in the east and the New Year.

**Ko Matariki te kaitō o te hunga pakeke ki te pō.**

*Matariki draws the frail into the endless night.*

Matariki is associated with those who pass during these months.

**Matariki ahunga nui.**

*The great mounds of Matariki.*

Said of the many mounds of kumara stored for winter.

**Matariki hunga nui.**

*Matariki of many people*

Said for the many people that gather for to watch Matariki rise.

**Matariki tāpuapua.**

*The pools of Matariki.*

This acknowledges heavy rain fall in this period that pools on the ground.

**Te opu o te rua Matariki.**

The company of the cavern of Matariki.

Matariki’s association with the many who pass over the winter months.

For more information contact [equity@procare.co.nz](mailto:equity@procare.co.nz)