



WESTMINSTER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY, INC. (WASI)

★
Membership News



Volume 40 – Number 3

Summer 2024

Message from our Society's President, Wayne (Skip) Bird

Howdy People and Welcome to Wayne's World,

The nice thing about having the newsletter come out once every few months is that you don't have to listen to my rants and ravings very often. I warned you!

As I set on my oval throne wondering what to write about, I thought what the heck lets talk about outreach and WASI. We are celebrating our 40th anniversary, (yes, Curt was only 15 when he started this club, wink, wink) this year and believe it or not we have been doing outreach of some type every year.

Those of you who were at the May meeting got the "Early Years", now get ready for the "Golden Years, and NO Curt and I are not going to start robbing banks to supplement our retirement, or grow mysteriously younger, as if anyone remembers either of these two references.

I actually attended an outreach event that was held at Piney Run Park in 1991, I was moving in that day and my wife and mother-in-law walked down to the park to check it out. They came home and reported that a bunch of people were setting up telescopes for a star party later that night. Cool, my very own park comes with telescopes. I wandered down and ran into Matt Orsie (future club president and the first person to show me Pluto) and Bruce Wrinkle (who owned a new 6" Astro-Physics refractor which eventually became my first scope, that's like your first car was a Porsche) and others who shared their scopes and the wonders of the night sky, and that is how I was seduced to the Dark Side. So now you know who to blame.

I originally joined this club (1993) to meet other amateurs, share my love of astronomy with others and because it was a lot closer than the Hartford County club. I hadn't had my new scope 2 weeks when a Park Ranger (from Soldiers Delight) asked me if he could bring some people over to the scope to look at the sunspots, I had just showed him. 30+ years later we are still doing programs for Soldiers Delight (Thanks everyone who has helped and for Mikey and Marissa for doing it now). Someone thought meeting at a darker spot (with no parking police) than the college would be better for astronomy and lo and behold we have a planetarium, an observatory and monthly meetings at a little place called Bear Branch Nature Center. Our club joined the Night Sky Network (some little thing that NASA was putting together) in 2003 because Brian Eney and I needed something to do when it was cloudy and we had 20 people wanting to see something. Best decision the club ever made, except possibly electing me to be president a SECOND time.

Went back and looked at some highlights of the 40 years we have been sharing our love of Astronomy and found a few gems (and several Jim's). We have done astronomy programs for every kind of group there is, from the National Federation of the Blind, Boy/Girl Scouts, Schools, Church groups, Dept of Energy Science Bowls, to other Astronomy clubs. Largest single event was the National Air and Space Museum Girl Scout Day (2013) with over 6,338 visitors. Largest yearly total was 2009 with 18,873, followed by 2011 with 18,862. We have also averaged almost 100 events a year since 2006, (information was translated from Egyptian Hieroglyphics found on the walls of my garage and talking with a couple of fossil members). We have shared our love of Astronomy with 155, 538 people at 1,949 events (but who's counting), over those years (even during covid we had events). We have done outreach around the world, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Australia, Oklahoma (Yes, it's a foreign country, have you ever been there). We have done outreach in all 50 states, including the White House, thanks Vanessa, (not sure where to include this as a country or what). Still trying to get someone on the ISS and maybe a cameo with the Curiosity rover on Mars. One of our more modest members (Skip Bird) even won the prestigious "The Las Cumbras" award for exceptional outreach in 2010.

None of this would have been possible without the help of everyone who took the time to say "Hey come look at this". We cannot express our gratitude enough for all the people (we diffidently don't have enough room to thank them all, so I won't even start) over the years that have volunteered, been coerced, or otherwise been dragged into doing outreach for WASI. Just know that there are people all over this world that are still talking about the time that you shared a look at

AGAIN, Thank you, and KEEP LOOKING UP.

Skip

WASI News

Please note two important things in this newsletter. It's time for most of us to renew our memberships (see next page for more info). And, after that, there's a section about using our groups.io page. Please do log onto that. Only 80% of us are part of it; unless you have an account there you'll miss the group emails.

Mark your calendars: August 3 will be a Grillin' and Gazin' event at BBNC with Tri-State Astronomers. This is a combination of our yearly picnic and a star party. The new moon is the next day so it should be dark!

The WASI 130 is a set of 130 nice objects that are viewable from our latitude. Some are pretty easy objects; others a bit more challenging. There's more information here: <https://westminsterastro.groups.io/g/main/files/Observing%20&%20Challenges>.

Want to know more about our outreach events? Here's the calendar: https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club-view.cfm?Club_ID=152

This news letter goes out quarterly. Please send your astrophotos and astronomy news to jack@ganssse.com.

Important Info About Renewing Your Membership

Check your membership card for your membership expiration date as **it is renewal time for most folks.**
You have options!

- 1-year membership remains \$25 for individuals or families
- 2-year membership for individuals or families @ \$45
- 4-year membership for individuals or families @ \$80

Individual youth (under 18) remains \$5/year

The new structure offers cost breaks and fewer payments for more observing time!

It's easy to renew BY JUNE 24 with these options:

Choose your renewal term (see above). *Then choose your method:*

- **Credit card.** Go to <https://www.westminsterastro.org/join-wasi/> and select “Debit or Credit Card”.
Then fill out the form that pops up.
- **Your bank's online bill pay.** Information for bank bill payment:
 - Account # is on your membership card (or just use your last name)
 - Pay to order of: WASI
 - Mailing address for payment: 918 Leafy Hollow Circle; Mt. Airy, MD 21771
 - Phone: 443-732-0020
- **Checks or cash** gladly accepted at meetings/events, or into secured mailbox at address above
- **PayPal or Venmo** on the WASI website: <https://www.westminsterastro.org/join-wasi/>
- Or, **Paypal** from the Paypal site: <https://www.paypal.me/WAstroSInc>. Please consider the PayPal fee (\$.99 per \$25)

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we gladly accept donations for the upkeep of resources and supplies for outreach: <https://www.westminsterastro.org/donate/>



Important Info About Groups.io

WASI 2nd Vice President Jeff Silver wrote up this information about our groups.io web site.

What is groups.io? It's a communication tool including Email, Photo sharing, File storage, and Database features, a few other things, kind of a digital Swiss army knife, some features we use, others not so much. The following is an overview to signing up, features, and navigation items you can expect to see.

The initial groups.io webpage depends if you go to:

- GroupIO.com (Fig.1) <https://www.groups.io> or:
- Search for the WASI page (Fig. 1a) <https://westminsterastro.groups.io/g/main>

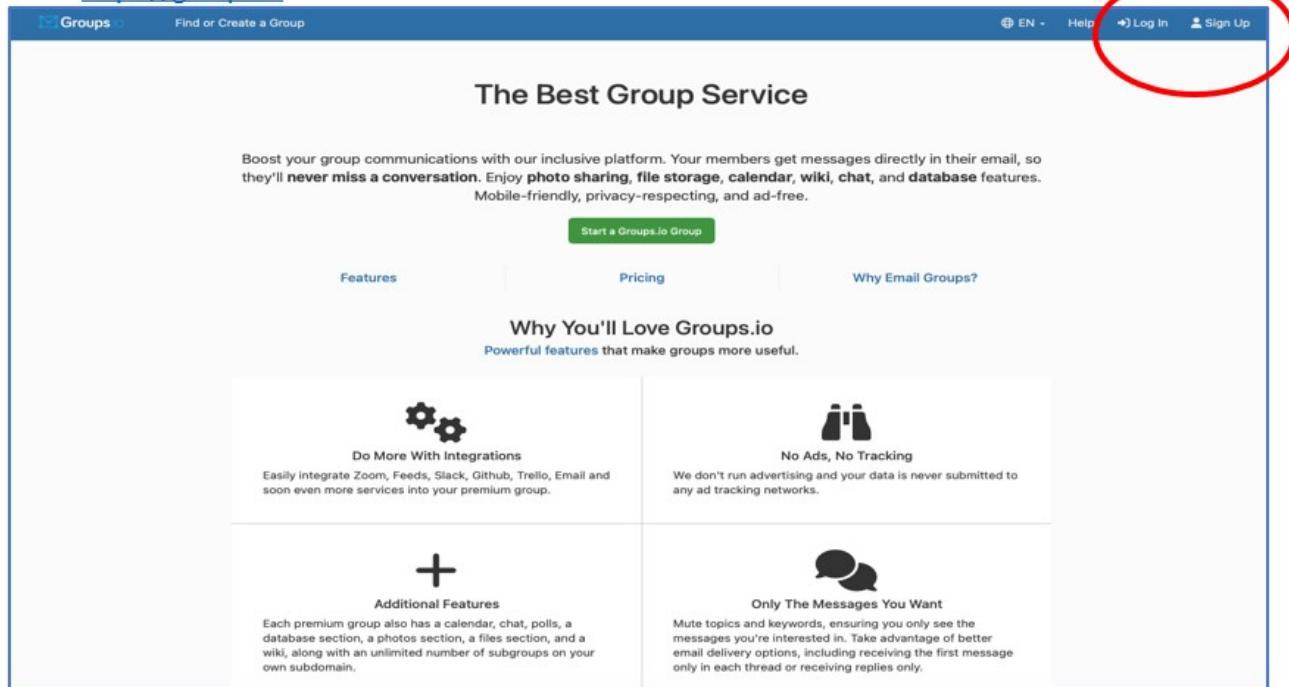
Either way, Sign Up and Log On options are located next to each other – so just do it!

First use the Sign Up and once you set yourself up use the Log in and password.

After you can access your Groups IO:

- Set your Accounts settings to ensure your email is correct for club members can contact you - see Fig. 2a
- Check the “files” and “wiki” sections for member content – see Fig. 3a

FIG. 1 <https://groups.io>



Groups.io, Continued

Fig. 1a - the WASI page - Sign Up and Log In on right side at the top

<https://westminsterastro.groups.io/g/main>

The screenshot shows the main page of the Westminster Astronomical Society group. The left sidebar contains links for Home, Messages, Hashtags, Subgroups, and various group settings. The main content area displays group information, including a URL (<http://www.westminsterastro.org/>), member count (95 Members), topics (621 Topics, Last Post: May 4), and other details like RSS feed. Below this is a section for Group Email Addresses with a link to the mailing list. A 'Top Hashtags' section lists several hashtags with counts: #mail-reminder (18), #invited (Monthly WASI meeting information and agenda) (12), #wasi-notice (9), #resources (Resources, information, questions and about observational astronomy) (8), #admin (Administrative questions and help about how to use this site) (5), #outreach (Information and questions about WASI outreach activities) (3), #observations (2), #astrophotos (2), and #wasi-outreach (1). At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Apply For Membership in This Group' and 'Log In If You Are Already A Member'.

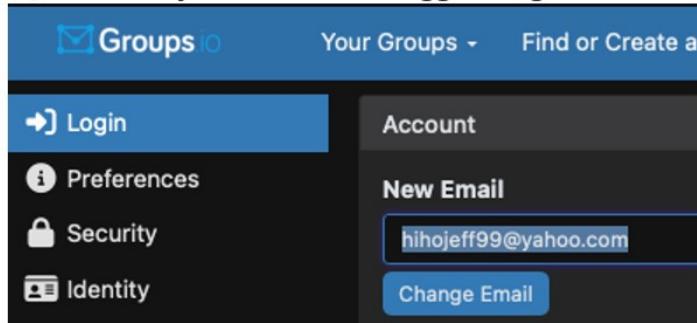
FIG. 2

Click 'Create Account' and it is also same screen to Log In ~ see areas for Username and Password.

This screenshot shows the 'Join Groups.io' page. It features fields for 'Email Address' and 'Password'. A note states that passwords must be at least 6 characters long. Below the form is a terms and conditions agreement. At the bottom, there are three buttons: 'Create An Account' (highlighted with a red circle), 'Or You Can', and two social media registration options: 'Register using Facebook' and 'Register using Google'.

Groups.io, Continued

Fig. 2a - Click your name when logged in, go to Account to ensure club has correct email for members to contact you



Initial WASI Home Page also shown on left under Home, are Button or Link – see below.

- See Fig. 3a for Button or Link below under Home.

FIG. 3

The screenshot shows the Westminster Astronomical Society home page on Groups.io. The sidebar on the left includes links for Home, Subscriptions, Messages, New Topic, Drafts, New Poll, Hashtags, Chats, Subgroups, Directory, Calendar, Photos, Files, Databases, and Wiki. The 'Home' link is circled in red. The main content area displays group information, top hashtags, and an archive of messages from 2019 to 2024.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2024	18	62	38	48	6							
2023	78	36	65	44	41	29	29	37	46	32	38	14
2022	26	25	30	26	29	28	27	18	41	62	30	26
2021	12	27	41	28	12	20	9	11	4	20	16	15
2020	15	39	22	26	14	11	58	7	20	16	50	19
2019	18	15	16	13	9	2	16	20	16	14	41	28

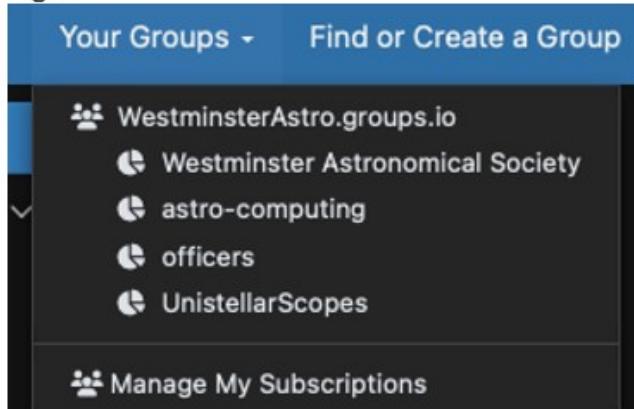
FIG 3a Button or Link below sub-menus

The screenshot shows the Groups.io sidebar with expanded sub-menus. The 'Home' menu shows 'Messages', 'New Topic', 'Drafts', 'New Poll', 'Hashtags', 'Chats', 'Subgroups', 'Directory', 'Calendar', 'Photos', 'Files', 'Databases', and 'Wiki'. The 'Subscription' menu shows 'New Topic', 'Drafts', 'New Poll', 'Hashtags', 'Chats', 'Subgroups', 'Directory', 'Calendar', 'Photos', 'Files', 'Databases', and 'Wiki'. The 'Settings' menu shows 'Messages', 'New Topic', 'Drafts', 'New Poll', 'Hashtags', 'Chats', 'Subgroups', 'Directory', 'Calendar', 'Photos', 'Files', 'Databases', and 'Wiki'.

Groups.io, Continued

Under Groups – Using the Drop Down

Fig. 4



Clicking on Groups shows below

Fig. 4a

The screenshot shows the Groups.io interface with the 'Your Groups' section highlighted. The main menu items on the left are:

- Feed
- Your Groups
- Topics
- Hashtags
- Your Calendar
- Your Chats
- Your Activity

The 'Your Groups' section on the right lists the groups:

- Group ▾
 - WestminsterAstro | main P
 - WestminsterAstro | astro-computing
 - WestminsterAstro | officers
 - WestminsterAstro | UnistarScopes

Left Side Top shows [some of the main items]

- Your Groups
- Topics
- Calendar [not sync'd with WASI webpage calendar]
- Your Activity – shows all your IO emails.

Groups.io, Continued

Clicking on Your Groups > Westminster Astronomical Society

Shows your IO email Activity,

FIG 5

The screenshot shows the 'Your Activity' section of the Groups.io interface. On the left, there's a sidebar with navigation links like 'Your Groups', 'Topics', '# Hashtags', 'Your Calendar', 'Your Chats', and 'Your Activity' (which is highlighted with a red circle). Below the sidebar, there's a note about keyboard shortcuts and links to 'About', 'Features', 'Pricing', 'Updates', 'Terms', and 'Help'. The main content area is titled 'Your Activity' with filters 'Any Time' and 'All actions'. It lists numerous email messages sent by Jeffrey Silver from his yahoo account, detailing various club meetings, equipment reimbursements, and renewals. The right side of the screen shows a table of activity logs with columns for 'Group', 'Created', and 'Message Details'. The bottom of the page includes a pagination bar.

Messages show a Summary email Page- emails you have by year and by month.

FIG. 6

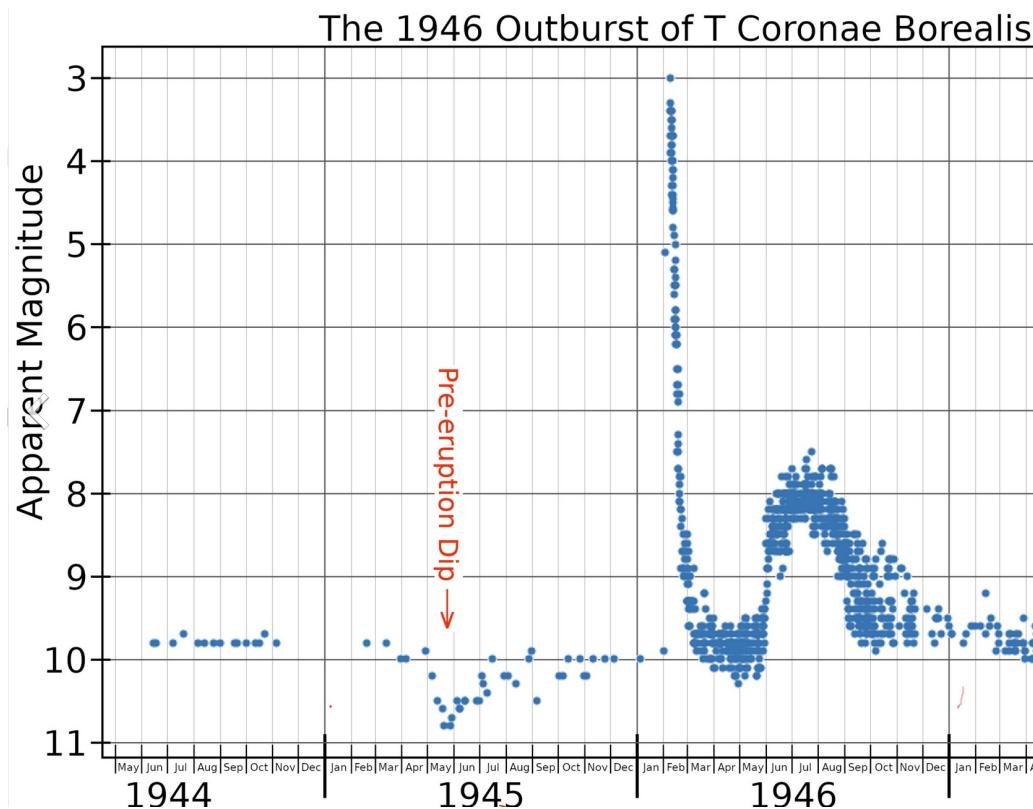
This screenshot shows the main page of the Westminster Astronomical Society group. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Groups', 'Your Groups', 'Find or Create a Group', 'Help', and a user profile for 'Jeffrey Silver'. The left sidebar contains links for 'Home', 'Subscription', 'Messages' (which is selected and highlighted in blue), 'New Topic', 'Drafts', 'New Poll', '# Hashtags', 'Chats', 'Directory', 'Calendar', 'Photos', 'Files', 'Databases', and 'Wiki'. Below the sidebar, it shows the group's email address: 'officers@WestminsterAstro.groups.io'. It also displays 'Group Information' including the number of members (14), topics (456), and the date it was started (03/09/21). A 'Group Email Addresses' section provides the post and subscribe addresses. To the right, there's a large image of a telescope and the text 'WESTMINSTER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY, INC' and 'ASTRONOMY IS LOOKING UP!'. Underneath the image, there's a 'Group Settings' section with several checkboxes. At the bottom, there's a 'Top Hashtags' section and a 'Archived Messages' table showing message counts for each month from January 2024 to December 2021. A 'Subscription' section at the very bottom indicates the user is subscribed to the group.

In the News—T Coronae Borealis

T Coronae Borealis, T CrB for short, AKA the Blaze Star, is about to go *bang!* Sometime between now and September it is expected to go nova, and to rapidly increase in brightness from apparent magnitude 10 to 2 or so. Today it is invisible to the naked eye even in the darkest skies, but will flare to about the same brightness as Polaris. (Your newsletter editor hopes it has not nova-d before this missive is emailed to you!)

The star is a recurrent nova; it repeats this show about every 80 years. A binary system, it is composed of a hot white dwarf and a cool red giant. The white dwarf sucks gas from its companion, eventually igniting a thermonuclear reaction.

Alas, this will last only a few days before settling back into its quiescent state at 10th magnitude. Stay on top of the latest data so you won't miss this. This site (https://app.aavso.org/webobs/results/?star=000-BBW-825&num_results=200) gives brightness data many (many!) times per day.

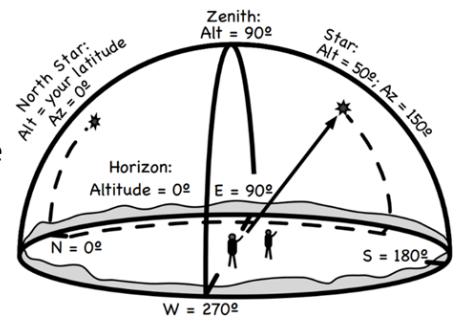


T CrB's last eruption didn't last long. But, if we have clear skies, it will be cool to watch this year!

How to Find Night Sky “Stuff” - By Laurie V. Ansorge

Whether you are looking for where the meteor shower mentioned in the news is, or for the current sighting of the latest comet, or for bright stars to finish setting up your ‘go-to’ telescope, some basic knowledge of how to find things in the night sky is essential. If you are reading this article, you have already made the first essential step in connecting with an astronomy club!

1. Just like navigating in a car on land you need to know two things: where you are, and where you want to go.
 - A. Where are we? The Westminster Astronomical Society is based out of Maryland at approximately 40° North latitude¹. On planet Earth, 0° is the equator and 90° North or South is the geographic pole. When we look for Polaris, also called the North Star, it will be about 40° above the horizon (where land meets the sky if not blocked by hills, trees or other objects). Using an azimuth/altitude description, remember you’re standing on a sphere or ball. Right over head is the ‘zenith’ or an altitude of 90° . In the diagram, looking north is 0° and south is 180° (half the sphere). Now when you look north, 40° above the horizon is where to look for Polaris.
 - B. Where do you want to look? Members of WASI have access to and can log on to: <https://westminsterastro.groups.io/g/main>. Once there, look on the left for ‘wiki’ or use this link: <https://westminsterastro.groups.io/g/main/wiki>. This displays a number of free tools like sky charts and software. These tools help find objects and constellations so you can find meteor showers, comets and stars, but there are some tricks to remembering some basics so you’re not tied to your computer on a beautiful starry night.
2. Let’s find some meteor showers.
 - A. First thing to know is that the meteor showers are the result of debris left from traveling comets! Therefore, as the Earth orbits the Sun it routinely travels through these debris fields and what we see are meteors. The best time to see them is between midnight and dawn. You can even set your calendar to view them: <https://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/meteor-shower/list.html>.
 - B. The next great meteor shower is the “Perseids” which peak August 11-12. You can tell which constellation to find the shower in by the name – Perseids are ‘radiating’ from Perseus (our hero). Using any star chart or software you’ll find that on those dates Perseus is low on the horizon in the early evening, but set your alarm to after midnight and you’ll find it rising in the sky to nearly the zenith by dawn! Higher up means cleaner sky viewing and more meteors!
3. But how can I remember how to find Perseus or any other constellation?!
 - A. Remember how Polaris is about 40° above the horizon? There are ‘circumpolar’ constellations that move around Polaris, counter-clockwise through the night like a celestial clock. Start by remembering that Polaris is at the end of the handle of the “Little Dipper”² This is located between



¹ Latitude lines run parallel to the equator. Longitude lines run from pole to pole.

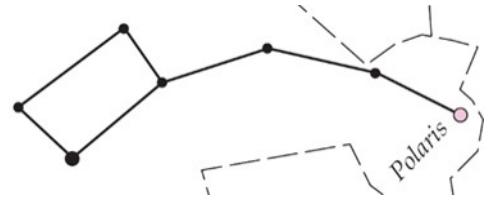
² “Little Dipper” is an asterism, or a part of the official constellation “Ursa Minor” or the Little Bear. The “Big Dipper” is part of “Ursa Major” or the Big Bear.

How to Find Night Sky “Stuff”, Continued

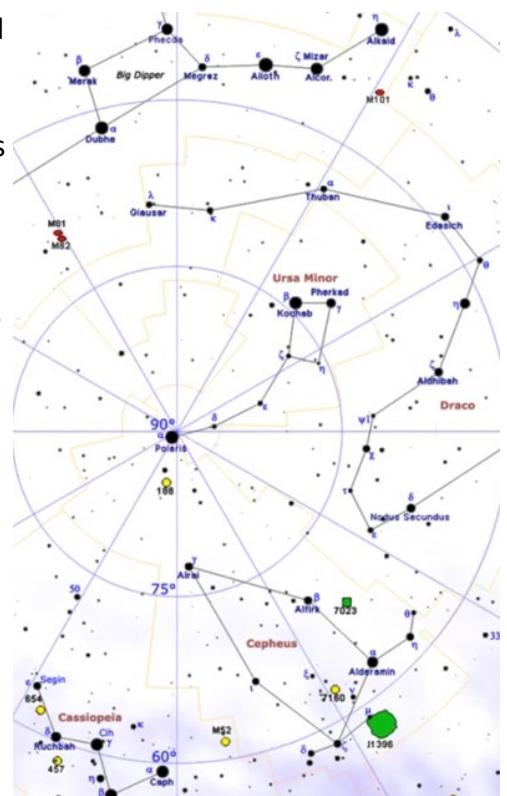
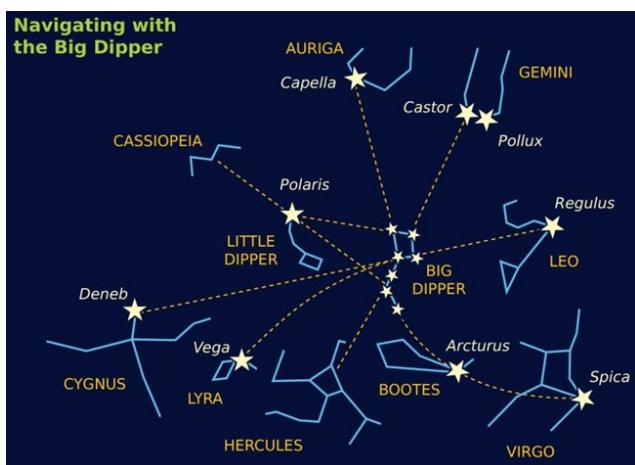
the Big Dipper and Cassiopeia³. I mention these as clues because they are easier to pick out in more light polluted skies because of the brighter stars.

- A. Once that Big Dipper is located, there's a lot to find by simply using its stars as pointers.

- I. For example, the handle of the Big Dipper is like a big ‘arc’ in the sky. Remember that “arc to Arcturus and speed onto Spica” helps you leap to Bootes and Virgo.
- II. The outer two stars of the Big Dipper point to Polaris, from which you can find Cassiopeia.
- III. The Big Dipper inner cup stars are pointers in each direction towards Regulus, the brightest star in Leo, and Deneb, the tail of the Swan that ‘swims the length of the Milky Way’ (a great way to orient the Milky Way under light polluted skies).
- IV. See the diagram below for more navigational markers.
- V. What about Perseus? Well, he's part of the lore connected with Cassiopeia and her daughter Andromeda who was tied to a big rock (the great square). Because the legends are tied together, logic tells us they're closer together in the night sky. Cassiopeia is the queen in this story and Cepheus is the King. Using the star charts we find that Perseus is just between Cassiopeia and Andromeda... of course he is because our hero saved Andromeda!



There are many more little tricks to remembering where things are in the sky and each one helps you build your memory and enjoyment of the night! Some examples are the Summer Triangle, the Winter Hexagon, the Winter Triangle, and many more stories across many cultures.



³ <https://www.constellation-guide.com/constellation-map/circumpolar-constellations/>

Maine Astronomy Retreat

I'm reaching out to astronomy clubs throughout the Northeast to let you know about the annual Maine Astronomy Retreat at Medomak Retreat Center in Washington, Maine — a vacation for you and your telescope!

This summer, September 2-8, 2024, we're hosting our tenth gathering! For six nights you'll revel under our expansive dark skies. Our site is quite remote, with a limiting visual magnitude of 6.3 (SQM value: 21.3 MPSAS). We'll have telescopes on hand, but by all means bring yours — let it really show you what it can do! And there'll be no need to pack all your gear away each night — you can just leave it set up on our secure, fully powered observing field. And during the day, the expansive Medomak facility is at your disposal. Enjoy our quiet waterfront equipped with canoes and kayaks, play tennis and basketball on our courts, or take a scenic drive and explore the beautiful coastal towns of mid-coast Maine.

The Maine Astronomy Retreat is a star party like no other. First of all, it's limited to just 50 participants. Second, there's no need to bring a tent, sleep in a sleeping bag, or eat uninspired food. Medomak provides comfortable, private cabins with real beds, bed/bath linens, hot showers, and electricity. And third, you'll enjoy delicious, locally-sourced meals prepared on the premises — including snacks and hot coffee all night. And it's all included in your tuition.

I am one of the retreat's co-leaders, along with Bruce Berger, director of the Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston's Research and Imaging Observatory. This year our keynote speaker is Mike Menzel, NASA Systems Engineer for the James Webb Space Telescope — and, before that, a Deputy Program Manager for the Hubble Space Telescope. (Mike is also an avid amateur astronomer with a 12-inch Skywatcher reflector.)

More details and registration details can be found at <http://www.astronomyretreat.com> Please contact me (J. Kelly Beatty at chairperson@tristateastronomers.org) or Bruce Berger (bruce@scopemaker.com) if you have questions! Or if you'd like to speak with a live human, please feel free to give Medomak a call at 1-866-MEDOMAK.

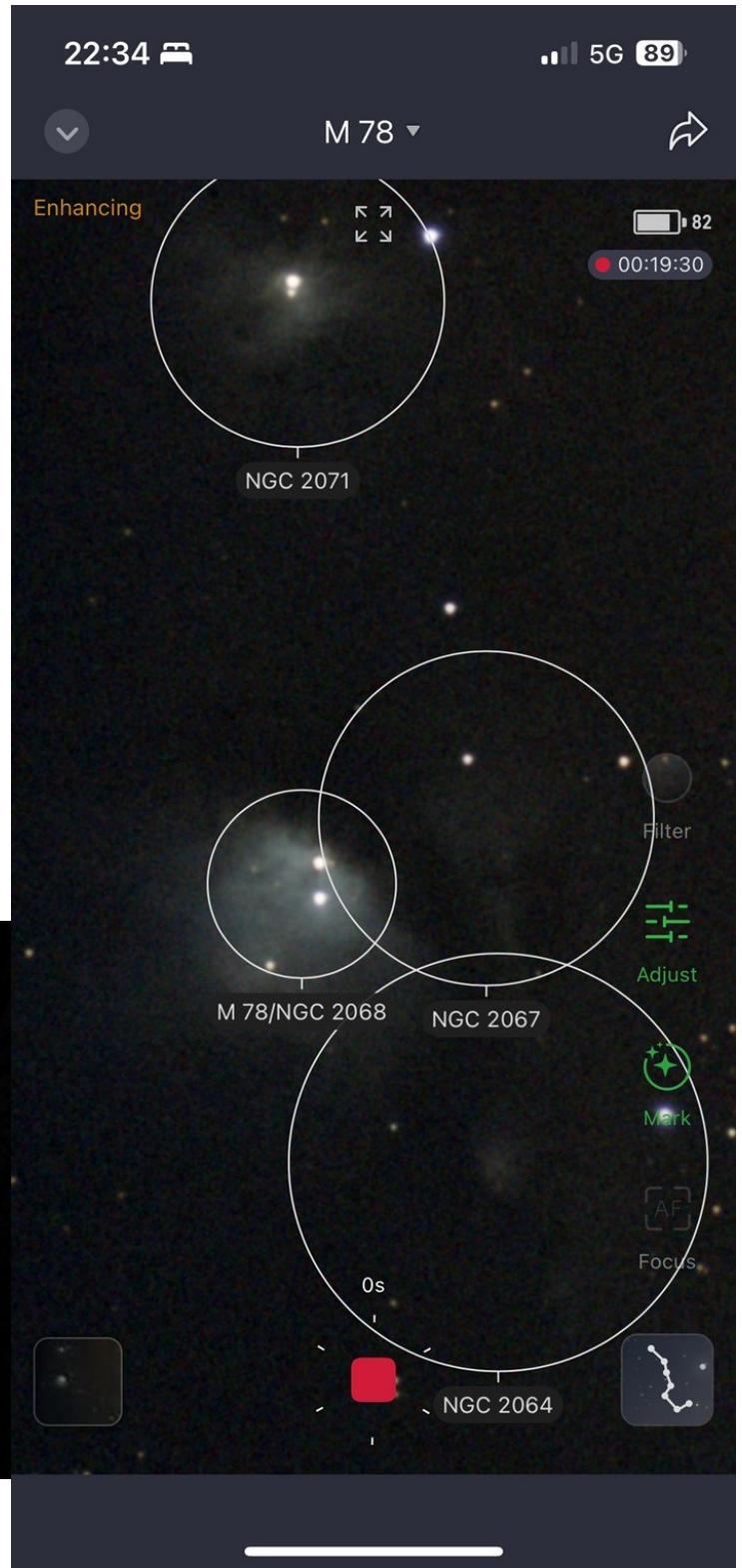
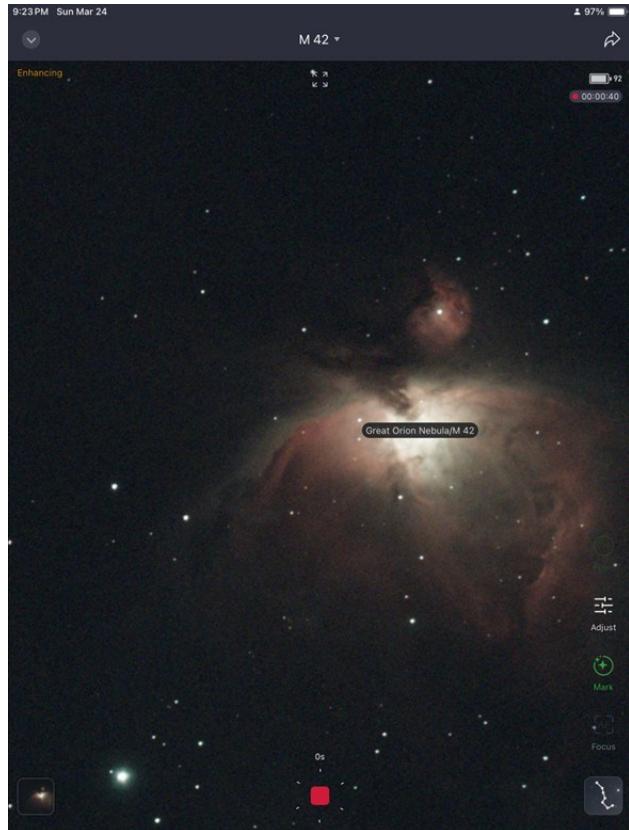
Registration Fees:

\$1,790.00 double occupancy cabin, all-inclusive lodging and meals.

\$2,250.00 single occupancy cabin, all-inclusive lodging and meals.

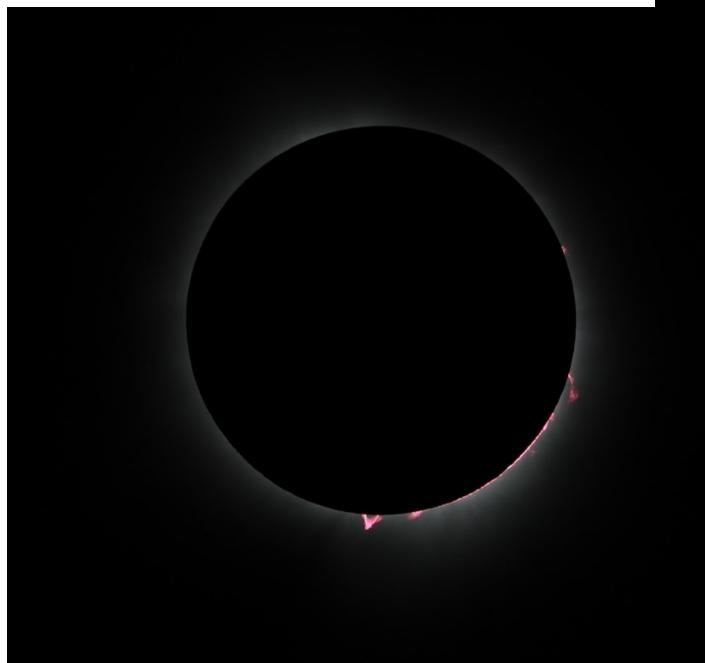
Astrophotos From Our Members

Doc Desai got some nice shots with his Seestar S50:



Astrophotos From Our Memebers

Joel and Michele Smith got these cool shots of the eclipse from Frohna, Missouri. They used a Canon EOS Rebel T6i with an EF 100-400mm F 4.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 380mm:

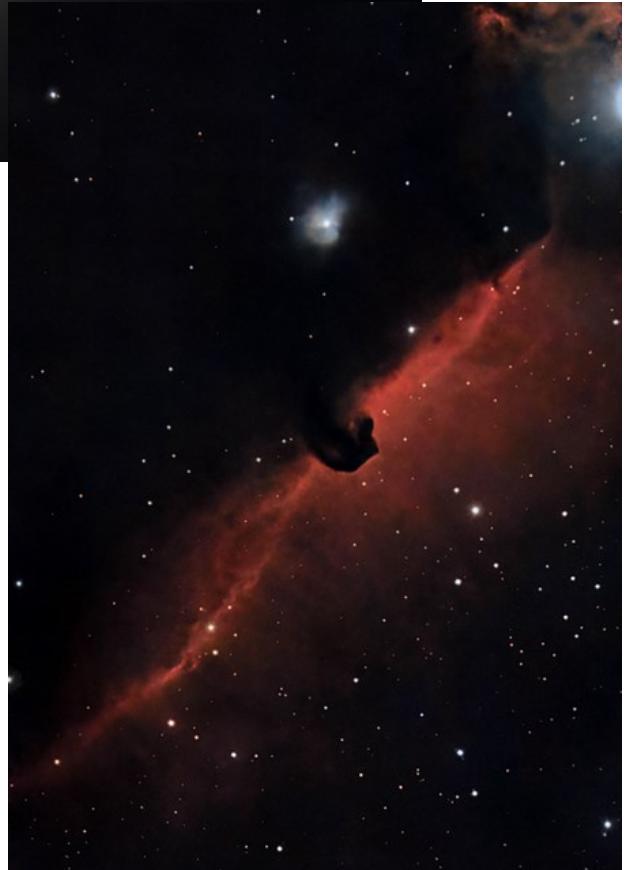


Astrophotos From Our Memebers

Matt Orsie caught the eclipse from Dayton, OH with his Canon 7D Mark II 400mm with a 100,000 ND filter:



His Seestar S50 showcased the Horsehead Nebula. It's amazing what this inexpensive scope can capture. This is a 30 minute exposure:

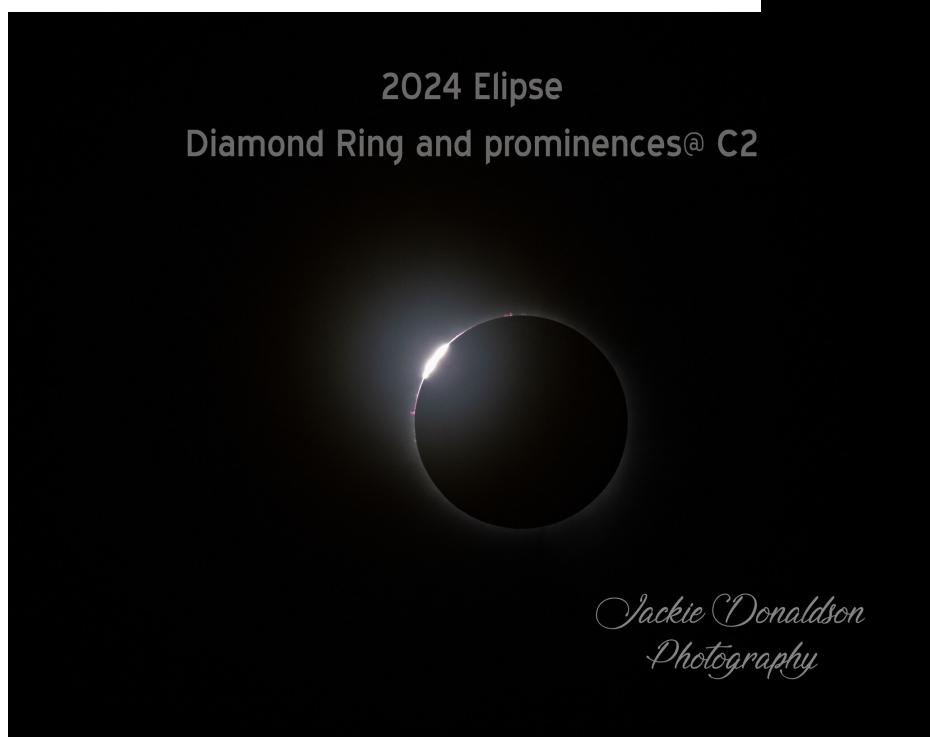


Astrophotos From Our Memebers

Jackie Donaldson caught the eclipse highlights magnificently:



Bailey's Beads and Prominences @ C3

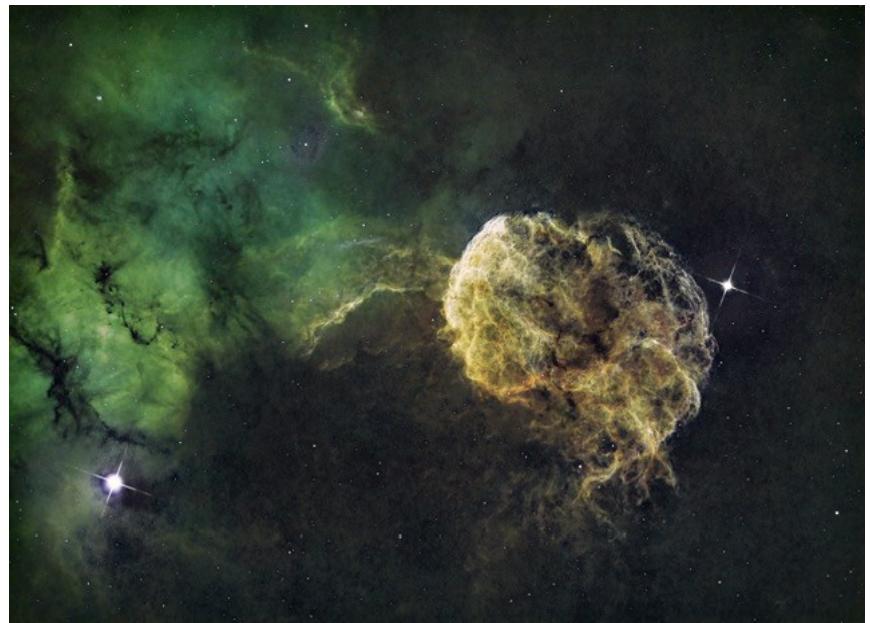


Astrophotos From Our Members

Laurie Ansorge fought cloudy skies in Leakey, TX, but got this great image:

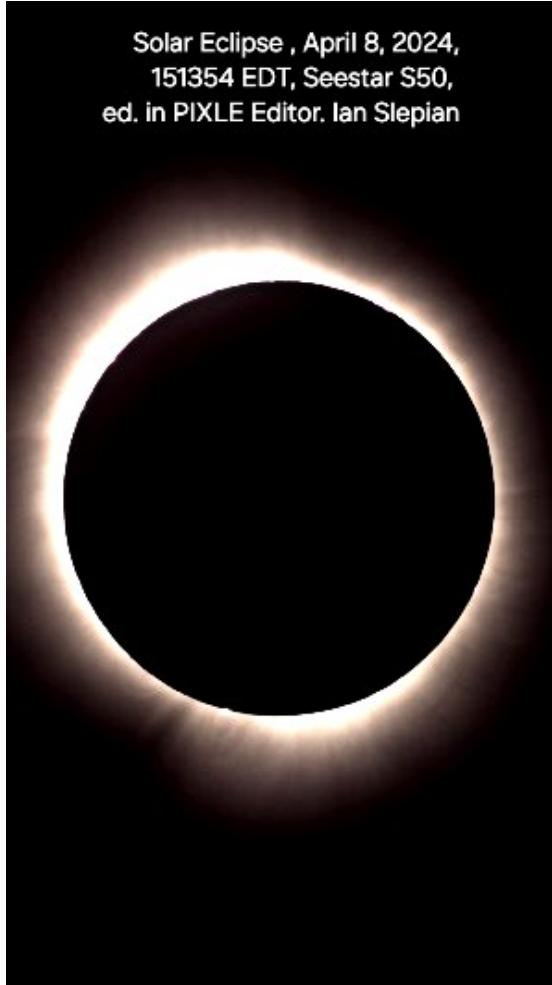


Dave Weisman used his Askar 500 mm focal length refractor, on an AM5 mount, with a ZWO 2600MM camera to get this shot of the Jellyfish nebula. It is assembled from sulfur II, hydrogen alpha, and oxygen III filters using the SHO palette. There's 4 to 5 hours of data in this. What a dynamic image!



Astrophotos From Our Memebers

Ian Slepian was in Cleveland, also using a See-star S50:



Solar Eclipse , April 8, 2024,
151354 EDT, Seestar S50,
ed. in PIXLE Editor. Ian Slepian

Jeff Silver's eVscope2 caught this nice shot of M44, the Beehive Cluster. It's also known as the Praesepe (Latin for "manger", "cot" or "crib"):



WASI FAQs

Library - Did you know we have over 700 books about astronomy in our WASI library? There are available to WASI members. Here's the complete card catalog: <https://westminsterastro.groups.io/g/main/files>.

Loaner telescopes - We also have a telescope lending library. If you'd like to borrow a scope, talk to Curt Roelle.

Astronomical League - All WASI members are also members of the Astronomical League. Check out their 80+ observing programs, many of which come with awards: <https://www.astroleague.org/>

Newsletter - Please send pictures, articles, and ideas for the newsletter to jack@ganssle.com.

Facebook - We're active and sharing images on our Facebook page, found here:



Join/Renew membership link: <https://www.westminsterastro.org/join-wasi/>

If you've already entered your contact information (renewing), skip the "database" link: <https://paypal.me/WAstroSInc>

Dues are payable via PayPal on the link above, by check or cash (and through your bank's on-line bill payment). Membership Dues are \$25/year for individuals or family, and youth under 18 is \$5/year.

- On time payment means eligibility for the annual incentive .
- Keep access to the members-only groups.io pages/information
- Receive members-only access/notifications on Night Sky Network
- Keep/get discount rates for popular astronomy magazines
- Borrow from the WASI scope/literature library

Files and club member correspondence & wiki links are found here: <https://westminsterastro.groups.io/g/main>. Remember to set your communication preferences.

Outreach/event calendar is found on: <https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/index.cfm>. Set your communication preferences here as well.

Changed address, email or phone? Please update your information and send a message to the webmaster and/or treasurer@westminsterastro.org.

We meet monthly on the 2nd Wednesday of the month:

Back to Basics from 7:00 PM – 7:30PM; General Meeting 7:30PM – 9:30PM
Bear Branch Nature Center Carroll County; 300 John Owings Rd.; Westminster, MD 21158
Website: <https://www.westminsterastro.org/> (Zoom info for hybrid meetings)