

# THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



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FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

May, 2002

**Officers:** President, **Steve Knight:** (770)227-9871, 114 Central Lake Circle, Griffin, GA 30223 <sdknight@bellsouth.net>; Vice President/newsletter editor, **Bill Warren:** <warren1212@mindspring.com>, (770)229-6108; Secretary/Treasurer, **Dawn Knight** (see above); AlCor, **Neal Wellons**, and Web Site Coordinator, **Cody Wellons:** (770)946-5039; Librarian, **Tom Moore:** (770)228-6447. Event Photographer: **Doug Maxwell** (770)719-7959. Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: <<http://welcome.to/frac>>, discussion group at <FRAC@yahoogroups.com>.

Please notify **Bill Warren** promptly if you have a change of address or e-mail.

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**Club Calendar. Sat., May 11:** Dinner on the Grounds and Club Meeting (Cox Field, 5:30); and **Fri.-Sat., May 10-11** and **Fri.-Sat., May 17-18:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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**Vice President's Message.** With **Steve** thoroughly worn out from a long, hard and eminently satisfying **Astronomy Day**, I thought I'd weigh in with some thoughts on the occasion.

Having participated in scores of public observings with FRAC over the past 5+ years, I'd rate this year's Astronomy Day observings as the best and most fun of any observings I've ever attended. The crowds were large and enthusiastic, the preparations by **Steve** and **Dawn** impeccable, and since I bought my 3-1/2" refractor and solar filter to Kohl's I spent some time that evening listening to my clubmates talking with our visitors about telescopes, astronomy and the night sky.

If ever I had wondered about how far we've come in five years, that question was resolved to my complete and utter satisfaction that evening. Under observing conditions that began with the light pollution of Kohl's parking lot and auto headlights at dusk and gradually but steadily deteriorated thereafter, our folks simply accentuated the positive and acted as if it were just another night at the office, treating everything they showed as if it were their personal favorite object in the sky. I can't imagine how **Steve** found the **Trapezium** when neither **Betelgeuse**, **Rigel** nor any of the other stars in Orion could be seen.

At any rate, thanks to everyone who participated in Astronomy Day at Beaverbrook or Fayetteville. You carried FRAC's message loudly, proudly and convincingly. **Felix**, you were *incredible!*

**David O'Keeffe** (1133 Crystal Springs Trail, Hampton, GA 30228, [770]477-7576, <dpokeeffe@mindspring.com> joined FRAC in Fayetteville. Welcome to the club, David!

Instead of a May club meeting, we're having our 2nd annual "Dinner on the Grounds" at Cox Field at **5:30 p.m. on Sat., May 11th**. C'mon along, bring the family and let's have a ball, y'all. It'll be a good chance for your family to meet the assortment of oddballs, kooks, etc., that you, the police and possibly the FBI as well have been talking about for so long. Imagine how your children's eyes will light up when they meet **Tom Moore** for the first time. (Tell them not to worry, he's had his rabies shots...)

-**Bill Warren**

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**Last Month's Meeting/Activities.** With our scheduled April observing weekend washed out by clouds and rain, it was good that eight

members and two guests showed up for an unscheduled observing at Cox Field on April 6th: **Steve & Dawn Knight, Smitty, David Ward, Dan Newcombe, Roger and Leejay Poore, David & Brendan O'Keeffe** and yr. editor. Observing highlights included David Ward bagging 28 Herschel 400s and, on April 1st, **Greg Potter** getting his Messier quest off to a rousing start at Cox Field by logging 16 of the buggers.

We had fourteen members in attendance at our April meeting: **Smitty, David Ward, Greg Potter, Dawn & Steve Knight, Larry Fallin, Tim Astin, Felix Luciano, Doug Maxwell, Bill Snyder, Carl & Josh McKinney, Neal Wellons** and yr. editor. Our program dealt with homework astronomy -- Steve's Denver observing chair and modifications he's made to his telescope; Smitty's binocular/meteor shower observing chair and his "binocular box"; and Doug's homemade 8" telescope. Very talented, those gentlemen. Yr. envious editor has trouble figuring out which are the business ends of a hammer and a nail.

**Zombie Die-Hard** certificates were presented to **Steve Knight** and **Larry Fallin** for staying up all night at Chiefland on March 15th. **Katie's Club** certificates were awarded to **Dawn Knight** for finding **M74** without a finderscope low in the W sky on Sept. 8th, 2001, and for finding the incredibly elusive galaxy **NGC 4236**, "The Faintest Galaxy There Never Was" (as she aptly described it) on April 6th, 2002;" and to **Steve K.** for finding **M31** deep in Griffin's sky glow on Sept. 8th, 2002.

**David Ward** won the door prize, a red light flashlight.

Our Astronomy Day triple-header was a roaring success. We showed the Sun to the children and adults at Beaverbrook's Spring Carnival, then moved our road show to the parking lot at Kohl's Department Store in Fayetteville from 3 until 10 o'clock. **Dawn & Steve's** advance preparations (e.g., calling newspaper and school system representatives to alert Fayette Countians to our observing) drew large crowds, as did Kohl's having a one-day-only sale on that day.

Thanks to all who did such a masterful job

of showing off the sky and talking about astronomy with our many visitors at either site: **Steve & Dawn, Joe Auriemma, Neal Wellons, Felix Luciano, Mike & Danielle Stuart, Larry Fallin, Doug Maxwell, David Ward**; two members of the Middle Ga. Astronomical Society, president **Chuck Woodward** and **George Lilley**, both of whom came early and stayed late; and yr. editor.

**Dan Newcombe** dropped by Kohl's for awhile; **David O'Keeffe** and wife **Cherrie** and daughter **Sarah** joined FRAC; **Doug Maxwell** showed off his new homemade Dobsonian mount for his 8" reflector; **David Ward** wowed the crowds with incredible views of the Moon on a TV set hooked up to his 8" SCT; and **Dawn Knight** was stunning as always in a Revlon mudpack, curlers by Yves St. Laurent, chenille bathrobe by Gloria Vanderbilt and Winnie the Pooh slippers by Walt Disney.

**Doug Maxwell** was named our first Event Photographer. Hey, Doug, that means now you're expected to attend our events. It'll be worth it, though, considering the huge salary and retirement benefits we offer.

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**Membership Renewals Due in May: Rod Dougherty; Bill Snyder; and Neal, Cody & Suzie Wellons.** Please send your check for \$12 payable to either Steve Knight or the Flint River Astronomy Club c/o Steve's address listed in the upper left hand portion of p. 1.

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**This 'n That.** It's official: You can now get \$10 off your annual subscriptions to *Sky & Telescope* and/or *Astronomy* magazines by ordering them through FRAC. Just give **Steve** or **Dawn** a check for \$29 (for *Astronomy*) or \$29.95 (for *Sky & Tel*), and they'll do the rest. The only way to get the discount, though, is to go through them.

\*In renewing his FRAC membership, **Joe Morris** sent Steve a check for \$50 and said, "Keep the change." Thanks, Joe, from everyone in FRAC. *You da MAN!!!*

\*In **March, 2003**, we'll present our first annual **CAPT. MIDNIGHT AWARD**, in the form of a trophy or plaque to whomever earns

the most A.L. observing pins between March 1, 2002 and Feb. 1, 2003. Pins earned prior to March 1, 2002 will not count, and all pins must be earned through FRAC.

\***David Ward** recently bought several copies of the 3-vol. set *A Man on the Moon* (list price: \$99.95) by **Andrew Chaikin** at the sale price of \$19.87 per set and sold them to FRAC members at cost. Thanks, David.

\*The link to the Macon astronomy club is <<http://www.middlegaastronomicalsociety.0cat.ch.com>>, it being a zero at 0catch, not the letter O.

\*From our "**There's Hope for the Rest of Us (Except Tom Moore, That Is)**" Dept., there is this: **Daqing Zhang**, the Chinese astronomer who co-discovered **Comet Ikeya-Zhang**, made his discovery using an 8" reflector.

\*Okay, that was a cheap shot about **Tom**. In the interest of fair play, let's say something nice about him. How about: *If space is a vacuum, Tom Moore is a Hoover Deluxe!*

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**Upcoming Meetings/Activities.** At 5:30 p.m. on **Sat., May 11th**, we'll hold our annual "Dinner on the Grounds" as our way of thanking the **Coxses** for all they do for us. Since it's a potluck dinner, we'll be calling you in the week prior to the dinner to find out what you're bringing or may need to bring.

We'll have a brief meeting after the dinner -- no speaker, just briefly addressing present and future club concerns and upcoming events. Those who attend will receive a 4-pp. handout prepared by yr. editor entitled "*A.L. Observing Club Object Duplications*," which lists all Lunar, Double Star and deep-sky objects that appear in more than one observing club.

Our May Cox Field observings are slated for **Fri.-Sat., May 10th-11th**, and **Fri.-Sat., May 17th-18th**. The new moon will be on **Sun., May 12th**.

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**The Sky in May.** Throughout the first half of May, five planets -- **Jupiter, Saturn, Venus, Mars & Mercury** -- will be visible in the western sky.

On **May 6th**, **Mars, Venus & Saturn** will be only 2.8° apart, easily fitting into a binocular field of view. On **May 10th**, Venus and Mars will be 1/4° apart, easily fitting into a low-power telescopic field of view. And on **May 14th**, Venus, Mars, Saturn and a thin crescent **Moon** will be just 13° apart in the W sky.

**Jupiter** will lie higher in the sky than Venus, Mars and Saturn throughout May. **Mercury** seldom travels far from the horizon, but from a proper vantage point it will be bright and easily accessible. Start early.

On the evening of **Sat.-Sun., May 4th-5th**, the minor **Eta Aquarids meteor shower** will peak at about 20 meteors per hour.

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### THE LOONY BIN

fiction by **Bill Warren**

"From what I've seen and heard so far," the prospective member observed, "the people in your club are like Captain Crunch cereal: nuts and flakes. Is everyone in FRAC certifiably insane? Are all of you loonies, or what?"

"Oh, we're certifiable," I replied. "There's no doubt about that. You'd have to be crazy to enjoy being around us wackos for more than a few minutes." A pause. Then: "Well, there is one of us who's what you might call normal: takes baths occasionally, doesn't drool or howl at the moon, and might even be trusted with a knife and fork at supper. But there's only one of us like that."

"Which one is he?," the stranger asked, looking around the group.

But then I was called away, and the conversation ended.

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### THE "REALM OF THE GALAXIES"

article by **Bill Warren**

If, as many of our members are or have been, you're into the Messier or Herschel 400 observing programs, you already know about the galaxy-rich patch of sky that stretches from southern *Virgo* to the N through *Coma Berenices*, *Canes Venatici* and *Ursa Major*. Those four constellations alone account for **31** of the Messiers, or 28% of the total -- but they also comprise a hefty **138** of the Herschel 400s, **136** of the Herschel 2s and **80** of the Arp Peculiar Galaxies.

In the Herschel 400 Club, *Virgo* leads the way in Spring with 50 objects, followed by *Ursa Major* (47), *Coma Berenices* (24) and *Canes Venatici* (17). But those aren't the only Spring H400s: *Leo* has 23, *Leo Minor* 9, *Bootes* 5, *Hydra* 4, *Sextans* 4, *Corvus* 3 and *Crater* 2, giving that season alone an astonishing **188** (47%) of the H400 targets.

Many of those 188 objects are fairly bright and conspicuous -- but you have only 1/4 of the year to observe 47% of the total, and finding even the brighter ones can be somewhat difficult and confusing due to the large number of galaxies in the area. That's why that particular portion of the night sky is often referred to as the "Realm of the Galaxies." It's centered around the area between *Vindemiatrix* (ε *Bootes*) and *Denebola* (β *Leo*).

Galaxies are all around us, but they are most evident during those times of year -- Spring and Fall -- that reveal the sky above and below the obscuring plane of the Milky Way. (Yes, Virginia, there is a wintertime Milky Way: it runs SE-NW from below *Centaurus* through *Puppis*, *Monoceros*, *Gemini*, *Orion*, *Auriga*, *Perseus* and *Cassiopeia*, where it joins the Summer Milky Way.)

As a quick peek at **Larry Fallin's** "Constellations of the Month" chart (p. 5) for April and May will verify, those months are the busiest of the year for Herschel 400 chasers, there being a total of **50** objects -- 1/8th of the total -- reaching their highest point in the sky at mid-evening. Miss them now and, like the Atlanta Braves, you'll be playing catchup ball in the coming months as the night sky drifts westward 1° each night.

The key here is, of course, to be organized in your approach to observing. To be ahead of

the game, you need to know what you want to look for before you go out to observe, and have star charts ready to help you find them. That's true of all observing, but especially as regards the A.L.'s pin program. And that's precisely why Larry's monthly charts are so important: *he's done the organization for you, listing what to look for each month in the Messier, Caldwell, Double Star and Herschel 400 clubs.*

Having already completed those clubs, I've been remiss in acknowledging Larry's contribution, but I cannot possibly overstate its importance to FRAC's deep-sky observers in helping us to prepare to observe.

The "Realm of the Galaxies" is, or can be, a formidable challenge, but not necessarily an insurmountable obstacle. Whether pursuing Messiers, Caldwells, Double Stars, Herschel 400s or anything else, the process is the same: *one object at a time*, each one a test of your skills, patience and determination.

**Theodore Roosevelt** wrote, "The credit goes, not to the critic, but to the man who is actually in the arena -- who, when he succeeds, knows the triumph of high achievement; and when he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

If you never want to be more than you are now, you never will be. Such people, the Danish theologian/philosopher **Soren Kierkegaard** claimed, are already dead. They just don't know it.

Thanks, Larry; may you live forever.

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You can see more detail on the Moon with binoculars than can be detected on any of the planets with the largest observatory telescope.

- Orion Telescopes catalog

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*Editor's Note: Are you having trouble organizing your monthly searches for objects in the night sky? If so, Larry Fallin offers a monthly guide to which Messiers, Caldwells, Herschel 400s and Double Stars are up. His May installment appear on next page.*

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## Constellations of the Month - May

	Messiers	Caldwells	Double Stars	Herschel 400
<b>Canes Venatici</b>	M3	C21 NGC 4449	Alpha Canum Venaticorum	NGC 4111 NGC 4449 NGC 4800
	M51	C26 NGC 4244		NGC 4143 NGC 4485 NGC 5005
	M63	C29 NGC 5005		NGC 4151 NGC 4490 NGC 5033
	M94	C32 NGC 4631		NGC 4214 NGC 4618 NGC 5195
	M106			NGC 4258 NGC 4631 NGC 5273
				NGC 4346 NGC 4656
<b>Coma Berenices</b>	M53	C35 NGC 4889	24 Comae Berenices	NGC 4147 NGC 4314 NGC 4473
	M64	C36 NGC 4559		NGC 4150 NGC 4350 NGC 4477
	M85	C38 NGC 4565		NGC 4203 NGC 4394 NGC 4494
	M88			NGC 4245 NGC 4414 NGC 4548
	M91			NGC 4251 NGC 4419 NGC 4559
	M98			NGC 4274 NGC 4448 NGC 4565
	M99			NGC 4278 NGC 4450 NGC 4689
	M100			NGC 4293 NGC 4459 NGC 4725
<b>Corvus</b>	<i>none</i>	C60 NGC 4038	Delta Corvi	NGC 4027 NGC 4361
		C61 NGC 4039		NGC 4038
<b>Virgo</b>	M49	C52 NGC 4697	Gamma Virginis	NGC 4030 NGC 4536 NGC 4762
	M58			NGC 4179 NGC 4546 NGC 4781
	M59			NGC 4216 NGC 4550 NGC 4845
	M60			NGC 4261 NGC 4570 NGC 4856
	M61			NGC 4273 NGC 4594 NGC 4866
	M84			NGC 4281 NGC 4596 NGC 4900
	M86			NGC 4303 NGC 4636 NGC 4958
	M87			NGC 4365 NGC 4643 NGC 4995
	M89			NGC 4371 NGC 4654 NGC 5054
	M90			NGC 4429 NGC 4660 NGC 5363
	M104			NGC 4435 NGC 4665 NGC 5364
				NGC 4438 NGC 4666 NGC 5566
				NGC 4442 NGC 4697 NGC 5576
				NGC 4478 NGC 4698 NGC 5634
		NGC 4526 NGC 4699 NGC 5746		
		NGC 4527 NGC 4753 NGC 5846		
		NGC 4535 NGC 4754		