

# THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the FLINT RIVER  
ASTRONOMY CLUB  
(an affiliate of the Astronomical League)

**Vol. 12, No. 5** **July, 2008**

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**Officers:** President, **Bill Warren:** (770)229-6108, [warren7804@bellsouth.net](mailto:warren7804@bellsouth.net); Vice President, **Larry Higgins**; Secretary-Treasurer, **Steve Bentley.**

Board of Directors: **Tom Moore; Charles Anstey; Tom Danei;** and **Felix Luciano.**

AlCor/Webmaster, **Tom Moore;** Ga. Sky View/Astronomy Day Coordinator, **Steve Knight;** Observing Chairman/Public Observing Coordinator, **Bill Warren;** Program Co-Chairmen: **Larry Higgins** and **Bill Warren;** NASA contact: **Felix Luciano;** Event Photographer, **Tom Danei;** and Newsletter Editor, **Bill Warren.**

Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: [www.flintriverastronomy.org](http://www.flintriverastronomy.org); discussion group at <[FRAC@yahoogroups.com](mailto:FRAC@yahoogroups.com)>.

Please notify **Bill Warren** if you have a change of home address, telephone no. or e-mail address.

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**Club Calendar.** **Fri.-Sat., June 27-28:** Cox field observings (at dark); **Sat., July 5:** Cox Field observing (at dark); **Thurs., July 10:** FRAC meeting (7:30 p.m., Stuckey Bldg. on

the UGa-Griffin campus); **Fri.-Sat., July 25-26:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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**President's Message.** The size of an astronomy club doesn't necessarily indicate the quality of the club, any more than the size of one's telescope determines how much enjoyment one can derive from observing. A far more accurate indicator of how well a club is fulfilling its goals is the extent to which its members participate in club activities. So let's play the numbers game and see how FRAC rates.

We measure FRAC's membership in terms of "membership units," those units consisting of either individual or family memberships. We do it that way for voting purposes in officer/board elections, voting for Bylaws amendments, etc. To do otherwise would give large families greater voting power than individual members without families.

At any rate, FRAC presently has 41 membership units on its rolls.

Over the past ten months, between Aug. '07 and May '08, FRAC meetings drew a total of 216 members and visitors, or 21.6 attendees per meeting. And while in this case we're talking about individual attendees and not membership units, it's still pretty darned impressive for a club as small as ours to average nearly two dozen attendees per meeting. It shows, I think, that our members are enjoying our meetings, or else the attendance figures would be much lower.

In the same 10-month span, we had 177 attendees at our Cox Field observings (17.7 avg.). And while those figures also include multiple attendees – for example, **Larry**

**Higgins** and I attend most observings – it’s also true that poor skies (especially last March and April, when clouds kept away all but 12 attendees) and rising gas prices have made deciding whether to pack up the ‘scope and head for Cox Field under less than ideal skies a risky proposition.

Still...

Clear skies during the last weekend of May and the first weekend of June brought out a total of **34** members and guests to four Cox Field observing evenings, indicating that our members want to observe and enjoy each other’s company at Cox Field, and will do so when the sky cooperates.

Or consider our star party, **Ga. Sky View ’08**. Counting **Tom Moore**, who couldn’t attend but paid his registration fees anyway, **21** members registered for Camp McIntosh.

Then there’s public outreach.

Over the past eight months, 63 FRAC members have participated in twelve outreach activities. Twelve FRAC members have already qualified for Outreach Award certificates and pins, and others are closing in fast.

**Dr. Mike Reynolds**, coordinator of the Outreach Club, was “frankly astonished” at the amount of outreach activities a small club like FRAC has engaged in.

So it’s not as if FRAC members are sitting around collecting belly button lint and waiting for clear skies or the price of gas to go down. We’re a club on the move, and that movement is *forward* and *upward*.

I therefore suggest the following motto for FRAC: “**The Greatest Little Astronomy Club in America.**” That phrase pretty much sums up who and what we are. It fits us like a comfortable pair of bedroom slippers.

Thanks to each and every one of you for what you’ve done and are doing to make FRAC worthy of such a claim. Your support and participation in our many activities is worth more than I could possibly express.

Keep up the good work!

Finally, I know you’ll want to welcome our two newest members, **Alan & Vicki Pryor** of Lithia Springs, Ga. (For more about the Pryors, see p. 3.) We hope you’ll have fun with us for years to come, folks!

**-Bill Warren**

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**Last Month’s Meeting/Activities.** On May 30<sup>th</sup>, **Felix Luciano** and **yrs. truly** enjoyed good (but not great) skies at Cox Field. We spent about 2 hrs. racing through the skies, seeing what could be seen and comparing details and resolution of individual stars in bright and faint deep-sky objects. For example, we saw the interacting galaxy pair **NGCs 4038-4039 (The Antennae, or Ring-Tail Galaxies)** in *Corvus* as a single, faint entity with but a hint (that might have been wishful thinking) of their semicircular or shrimp-like shape.

The following evening was simply splendid, with clear skies that hovered around mag. 5.8 in transparency. Here’s how good it was – and how much our 12 attendees enjoyed themselves: When **Larry Higgins** and **yr. editor** packed it in and left at 1:30 p.m., *we were the first to leave!* Between us and **Felix Luciano, Mike Stuart, Robert McCarty, Tom Moore, Carlos Flores, Tom Danei, Steve Knight** and **Angela, Joshua & Ashley**

**Smith**, at one time or another during the evening the twelve of us probably saw most of what could be seen in the night sky. (That's an exaggeration, of course – but it's *not* exaggerating to say that everyone had a great time.)

The next Friday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, we had ten members and guests at Cox Field, including **Charles Turner, Joel Simmons, Dwight, Laura & Elizabeth Harness** and **Tyler Yolander, Kevin Murdock, Tom Moore, Mike Stuart** and **yr. editor**. The skies: great. The fellowship of members enjoying each other's presence: priceless.

Meanwhile, on that same June 7<sup>th</sup> evening, **Steve & Betty Bentley** (who is coming back strong from her knee surgery but at the time was not yet nimble enough to chase down guys who might pinch her on the flying buttress in the dark at Cox Field) entertained a couple from Lithia Springs, **Alan & Vicki Pryor**. Alan was very impressed – who isn't? – with Steve's 18-in. Obsession 'scope, to the extent that Alan later ordered a 20-in. Obsession for himself – a classic case of aperture fever, if ever there was one. When it arrives sometime in mid-July, Alan will officially have the largest 'scope in FRAC.

Anyway, they star-hopped in the Bentleys' front yard for several hours that evening, and had about as much fun under the stars as people can have without neighbors calling the cops.

Next evening, our unexpected but highly welcome trend of clear night skies continued, bringing out ten members and guests to enjoy an excellent evening of observing and socializing: **Joel Simmons, Larry Higgins, Charles Turner, Carlos Flores, Tom Danei,**

**Tom Moore, visitors Mitch, Katie & Sean Turner** and **yr. editor**.

We had a nice crowd of 22 members and guests present at our June meeting: **Charles Turner, Curt Cole, Tom Danei, Carlos Flores, Mike Stuart, Tom Moore, Joel Simmons, Dwight Harness, Kevin Murdock, Steve & Betty Bentley, Steve Knight, Angela Smith, Joe Auriemma, Dan Pillatzki, Charles, Lisa, Erica & Jeffrey Anstey, Ken Walburn, Larry Higgins** and **yr. editor**. Our speaker, Charles Anstey, gave an interesting, informative and enlightening talk on the physics principles that govern our solar system, using models and even a demonstration outside to illustrate his points.

During the business portion of the meeting, in separate votes the members voted unanimously to (a) devote \$75 of club funds to purchasing door prizes for the Dec. Christmas dinner party; (b) purchase a \$100 Visa Gift Card for the Coxses; and (c) change the club's birthday party/officer & board elections back to its original date in February.

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“People want to know: where did we come from? Where are we going? And when do we get there?”

**-Robert Kirchner**

*The Extravagant Universe*

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**This 'n That.** **Larry Higgins** recommends that, if any of you are having trouble with your telescope -- or if you need advice on how to set it up or use it: *bring it to the next club meeting*. It's understandably difficult to work

on 'scopes and equipment in the dark at Cox Field, but with the security lights outside Stuckey Bldg. our members who want to help you will have plenty of illumination to work by.

Before the June meeting, Larry showed **Ken Walburn** how to set up and operate the GoTo system on Ken's new 60mm ETX 'scope.

As the *Bible* says, "Go ye and do likewise." Larry, **Steve Knight** and other club members are ready and willing to help you however they can.

\*Attention **Charles Anstey: Dan Pillatzki** had a question for you that wasn't asked during the Q&A portion of your talk – and No, it wasn't about how big is **Uranus**? Perhaps you'll answer it for him at the July meeting: "The Moon's gravitational influence on Earth's tides is obvious on the side facing the moon; what about high tides on the side facing away from the Moon?"

\*In case you ever need them, here again are the GPS coordinates for Cox Field, this time courtesy of **Tom Danei**:

N 33 09 22  
W 84 25 52

\*With **53 hrs.** of outreach activities logged beyond the basic Outreach Award, **Larry Higgins** has qualified for a Stellar Award, the Outreach Club's 2<sup>nd</sup> level of achievement.

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"The total number of stars in the universe is greater than the number of all the grains of sand on all the beaches of Earth combined."

-**Ellen Jackson**

*The Mysterious Universe*

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**Upcoming Meetings/Activities.** We'll finish the month of June with weekend observations at Cox Field on **Fri.-Sat., June 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>.**

On the following weekend, we'll limit our Cox Field appearances to **Sat., July 5<sup>th</sup>,** at which time we'll have a potluck cookout on the grounds, with each attendee bringing something to eat or drink. Our regular observing session will follow.

Says **Steve Knight**, who suggested having the cookout and will coordinate the event: "I'll pull my camper out there, bring the grill, charcoal and some chairs. We'll have a cookout, music, A/C, DVD player, cold fridge and full kitchen. There's also a bathroom in there. If you need to warm stuff or keep it cold I've got you covered. There's a microwave too.

"Bring your favorite picnic fixins, I'll have some stuff, probably some burgers, macaroni salad, spinach dip.

"Reply with what you're bringing so we can have all bases covered. I have cups, utensils, and I think plates from GSV.

"Start time will be around 5:30 sharp. That will give us plenty of time to cook, eat, hang out, and the sun to set."

**Yr. editor** will be in Florida that weekend, alas, and will miss what promises to be a fun, family-oriented event.

Our club meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. on **Thurs., July 10<sup>th</sup>**. **Yr. editor** will talk about the A. L.'s **Universe Sampler Observing Club**.

On **Sat., July 19<sup>th</sup>**, **Dr. Richard Schmude** will receive his **Astronomical League Award** for outstanding national or international contributions to amateur astronomy at ALCON, the A. L.'s annual convention. This year's ALCON is slated for Des Moines, Iowa; here's hoping that the terrible flooding recently in Des Moines hasn't forced the convention's planners to move it elsewhere at the last minute.

We'll finish up July with weekend observings at Cox Field on **Fri.-Sat., July 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>**.

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“If it weren't for supernovae, we wouldn't exist. The carbon in our cells, the oxygen that we breathe, the calcium in our bones – all were cooked up in the stars and expelled into space by supernova explosions.”

-**Alex Filippenko**, astronomy professor  
Univ. of California, Berkeley

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**The Sky in July.** The unquestioned highlight of July observing occurs early in the month: **Mars** and **Saturn**, still located near **Regulus** in *Leo*, will draw ever closer to each other between July 1<sup>st</sup>-July 10<sup>th</sup>.

On the 5<sup>th</sup>, Mars, Regulus and Saturn will form a straight line of 5° length – that's three finger-widths held at arm's length against the sky. And at their closest at 2 a.m. on July 10<sup>th</sup>,

Mars and Saturn will be about 3/4° apart – less than a pinky-width at arm's length – and will be a splendid sight in a rich-field telescope or wide-field, low-power eyepiece.

**Jupiter**, at mag. -2.8 the 2<sup>nd</sup>-brightest planet and brighter than any star in the night sky, will be up all evening in July. Look for its bright moons – **Io**, **Callisto**, **Ganymede** and **Europa**. The view will be bouncy in binos unless you use a tripod or something like **Larry Higgins's** table-mount bino stand.

**Venus**, presently shining at mag. -3.9 and brightest of the planets) sets about 30 min. after the **Sun** in early July.

Blue **Neptune** (mag. 7.9) and greenish **Uranus** (mag. 5.8) are visible in binoculars in July but better seen telescopically. The July issue of *Astronomy* (p. 47) tells how to find them in *Capricornus* and *Pisces*, respectively. Both are very small, but their colorful disks are immediately distinguishable from stars.

**Mercury** is a morning star in July.

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, a faint **Comet LINEAR** will be a scant 8' – about 1/1/2 pinky-widths in your low-power eyepiece field of view – from the globular cluster **M4** in *Scorpius*.

The **Delta Aquarids meteor shower** occurs between mid-July and mid-August, peaking on July 27<sup>th</sup>. The radiant, or point from which its meteors appear to be coming, is located in *Aquarius*, of course, in the SE sky. The Last Quarter Moon will not significantly diminish our view of its meteors.

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