

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT
RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

An Affiliate of the Astronomical League

Vol. 24, No. 3 **May 2020**

Officers: President, **Sean Neckel**; Vice President, **Aaron Calhoun**; Secretary / ALCOR **Mark Grizzaffi**; Treasurer, **Steve Hollander**; Board of Directors: **Dwight Harness, Felix Luciano, and George Ruff**; Program/Observing Coordinator: **Sean Neckel**; Facebook Coordinator: **Aaron Calhoun**; Webmaster: **Tom Moore**; Newsletter Editor: **Dawn Chappell**; NASA Contact: **Felix Luciano**

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Reminder:

Membership dues - please turn in ASAP if you have not already. \$15 by cash or check made out to FRAC or Flint River Astronomy Club. Send to Sean Neckel at 788 Rising Star Rd. Brooks, GA 30205

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Club Calendar:

Springfest in the Garden, May 3, 2020 - postponed, no date set.

FRAC Meeting - May 14, 2020 - cancelled.

Astronomy in the Park at High Falls State Park, May 16, 2020 - cancelled.

Events not cancelled:

Club observing weekend – Friday and Saturday May 22-23, 2020, Sunset until whenever. Joe Kurz WMA

Please remember that social distance and gathering restrictions still apply until otherwise stated. A maximum of 10 observers may gather, keeping a minimum 6-foot distance.

Please keep checking your email for updates regarding club events. There are likely to be additional cancellations or postponements.

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Trivia:

1. How large is the Sun in miles?
2. How many Earth's can fit inside the Sun?
3. How does the Sun get its energy?

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President's Message:

Hello FRAC members, I hope that you are all staying safe and healthy.

It's May already. To be honest, this month's newsletter deadline snuck up on me a bit.

Despite travel limits, working from home part time, my kids going stir crazy, and not going out unless necessary, April flew by for me. Somehow, several projects for my work have gotten done, even though I was working from home. I've also nearly completed my workshop, which just a month ago was an unfinished room in our basement. My tools have been reorganized. All our astronomy equipment, which was everywhere in our basement is now arranged on shelves. My wife has put in two gardens in the past month and is now working to put in an irrigation system.

Every weekend, we line up a series of projects to keep ourselves busy. I set a goal for the day and try my best to get them done with what we have in the house. Just yesterday I built a shelf from a plywood remnant and hardware we had in the basement. The last few boxes from when we moved a year ago are finally getting put away today (probably).

UPDATE: It's been 5 days since I wrote this, and they didn't get put away.

On weekdays, after I've worked from home or at the office, I pick a room, and spend a couple hours doing *something*.

Am I just distracting myself from the reality of what is going on outside and around the world, keeping my mind occupied while normal routines are

disrupted? Probably. Does it really matter?
Probably not. I've gotten a lot of *stuff* done.

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There is not a timetable for when we will return to normal, but I hope that we might have a FRAC meeting in the next 3 to 4 months. When we get back together as a club, I think that we should spend some time sharing what we did during our time apart. Remember when you had to do the dreaded "What I did during my summer vacation" essay during the first week back to school? Like that, but fun. Bring pictures, stories, examples of things you've done or made to the meeting.

Astronomy related or not, I think it would be nice to see what everyone has done with their time at home when we finally reconnect.

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Previous Meetings/Activities:

FRAC Meeting: April 9, 2020 - was cancelled.
April 24, 2020, 8pm: Girl Scout Camporee
Observing - was postponed to September 11, 2020, 7:45pm.
April 25, 2020, 8:15pm: Civil Air Patrol Observing - was postponed, no date set.

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Solar System Observing - May 2020

Venus is in the sky in the evenings and is steadily moving into the sunset. I spotted it as early as 3:30 in the afternoon, but it becomes more easily visible as sunset approaches.

Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars are all visible throughout the early morning hours until sunrise. Saturn and Jupiter are between Sagittarius and Capricorn. Mars is in Capricorn.

Neptune rises a couple hours before the sun near Aquarius.

Uranus is in conjunction with the sun.

Mercury in conjunction with the sun early this month but will become visible in the evening sky by mid-month. Look for it to be less than 1° from Venus on 5/22, and 3° from the crescent moon on 5/24.

Moon: Full: 5/7 LQ: 5/14 New: 5/22 FQ: 5/29

Random bits of information:

If you had a scale model where the sun was the size of a pea. Earth would be 2.3 feet away. The closest star, Alpha Centauri would be 122 miles away. The star Betelgeuse would be the size of a car 13,770 miles away!

From APOD:

Newly discovered Comet SWAN has already developed an impressive tail. The comet came in from the outer [Solar System](#) and has just passed inside the [orbit](#) of the Earth. Officially designated [C/2020 F8 \(SWAN\)](#), this outgassing interplanetary iceberg will pass its closest to the [Earth](#) on May 13, and closest to the [Sun](#) on May 27. [The comet](#) was [first noticed](#) in late March by an astronomy enthusiast looking through images taken by NASA's Sun-orbiting [SOHO](#) spacecraft, and is named for this spacecraft's [Solar Wind Anisotropies](#) (SWAN) camera. Although the brightness of comets are notoriously [hard to predict](#), some models have Comet SWAN becoming [bright enough](#) to [see](#) with the unaided eye during June.

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Trivia Answers:

1. 865,380 miles.
2. 1,300,000
3. Nuclear fusion of hydrogen into helium.

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