THE
FLINT RIVER
OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

An Affiliate of the Astronomical League

Vol. 30, No. 2 February 2026

* * **********

With the advent of advanced and reasonably priced smart astronomy viewing units, I find myself wondering if we're bypassing the essential foundations of introductory astronomy. These new devices make setup incredibly easy. For instance, with a smart unit, you simply use your smartphone to select a celestial object, press a "go to" button, and the device automatically finds, focuses, tracks, and even records the object, producing stunning images that would have required hours of meticulous processing just a few years ago.
While I genuinely enjoy using my Seestar, I can't help but question whether I've bypassed the true learning curve of basic astronomy. As I explore the Astronomical League's observing programs, they emphasize the importance of learning about the night sky manually. Are we as a club really helping newcomers establish that foundational knowledge, or are we too quick to say, "This is a great hobby, and feel free to ask any questions"?
This thought has been weighing on my mind for some time, and I believe it's important for us to consider how we can ensure a deeper understanding of astronomy for those new to the field.

What is amateur Astronomy VS Astro Photographer

Aspect	Amateur Astronomer	Astro Photographer
Focus of Interest	Observing celestial objects, understanding their movements, and educating others about astronomy.	Capturing high-quality images of celestial phenomena.
Equipment Used	Telescopes, binoculars, star charts, and sometimes basic cameras.	High-resolution cameras, specialized telescopes, mounts, and software for post-processing.
Skills Required	Knowledge of celestial navigation, astronomy basics, and observational techniques.	Technical skills in photography, editing software, and understanding light and optics.
Goals	To observe and understand the universe, often sharing experiences with community or clubs.	To produce visually stunning images, possibly for publication or competition.
Community Engagement	Often participates in clubs, workshops, and public outreach events.	Frequently shares work online, participates in photo competitions, and may collaborate on projects.
Understanding of Science	Focuses more on theory, understanding astronomical phenomena, and educational aspects.	Emphasizes the technical and artistic elements of imaging celestial bodies.
Time Investment	Variable; can range from casual observations to more dedicated sessions.	Generally requires extensive time for both taking images and post-processing.
Physical Activity	Can involve traveling to dark sky locations for better viewing.	Often requires setting up equipment at night and waiting for long exposures.
Software Use	May use basic astronomy software for tracking celestial bodies.	Uses advanced editing software like Photoshop, PixInsight, or others for enhancing images.
Outcome Products	Observational reports, public talks, and educational outreach materials.	High-quality images suitable for prints, exhibitions, or online portfolios.

Focus of Interest

Amateur astronomers typically gravitate toward understanding and enjoying celestial phenomena through direct observation. They may share their findings through community outreach or personal insights. Meanwhile, astro photographers focus on capturing the beauty and accuracy of celestial objects through photography, often prioritizing artistic expression along with scientific accuracy.

Equipment Used

Amateur astronomers generally use telescopes and binoculars for observation, often accompanied by star charts or apps. Astro photographers invest in specialized equipment such as high-resolution cameras, tracking mounts, and filters to optimize their photography.

Skills Required

While both groups need foundational knowledge in astronomy, amateur astronomers primarily require observational skills. Astro photographers must also possess technical photography skills and an understanding of post-processing techniques.

Goals

The goals differ significantly; amateur astronomers aim to deepen their understanding of the universe, while astro photographers seek to create compelling imagery.

Community Engagement

Amateur astronomers often actively engage in local astronomy clubs, workshops, and public talks to share knowledge. Astro photographers frequently showcase their images online, participate in competitions, and contribute to photography forums.

Time Investment

The time commitment for amateur astronomers can vary widely, ranging from casual, sporadic observations to more involved sessions. On the other hand, astro photographers usually dedicate extensive periods not only to capturing images but also to post-processing and refining their works.

Understanding of Science

Amateur astronomers prioritize grasping the underlying scientific principles of astronomy, while astro photographers are more focused on the technical aspects of photography and art.

Physical Activity

Both engage in physical activity by often traveling to optimal locations for their pursuits. However, astro photographers might face the additional challenges of setting up gear and managing long exposure times during their night-time photography endeavors.

Software Use

Astro photographers typically use advanced post-processing software to refine their images, while amateur astronomers may only require basic software for tracking celestial objects.

Outcome Products

Amateur astronomers often contribute observational reports and educational materials to encourage community interest in astronomy. In contrast, astro photographers produce visually stunning images that may be displayed in galleries, magazines, or online portfolios.

Club Calendar:
FRAC Meeting:
Thursday, February 12, 2026

Bring your Binoculars & Telescopes
George Ruff will be the Speaker tonight
We will present to UGA a photograph tonight
Annual Election of officers

Please continue to check your email and the FRAC Facebook group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/2002160466558902 for news updates.

NGC 2392
Alan Pryor
NGC 2392 is a planetary nebula in the constellation of Gemini. It is also known as the Eskimo Nebula or the Lion Nebula. It is best seen in February or March, and a 4" or 6" scope can easily reveal it visually. The blue tint should be visible too. NGC 2392 can be found by going to the 3.5 magnitude star, Wasat, in Gemini and then moving 2.5 degrees to the east. You should find the nebula there. In February of 2026 if you are looking at Jupiter you could swing about 5 degrees east to find NGC 2392.
NGC 2392 has a magnitude of 9.1, and it is about 6,500 light-years away. It is unusual in a couple of respects. It has 2 shells of gas surrounding the central star. Strong winds from the central star driven by radiation have pushed material out to form the filaments which give the appearance of a lion's mane. Also, there is some evidence that the central star has a white dwarf companion. If so, the white dwarf could pull enough mass from the central star to cause a Type 1A supernova in the future.
This photo was taken with an 11-inch Celestron EdgeHD, and the camera was a QSI683wsg. There were 6 sets of 5-minute red, blue and green frames and 9 luminance frames of 5 minutes each.
This photo can be scene at:
https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPHM-e11TX3CD5ZO2Pvjbz4K3xkq-ZTqCWcJXv020FQQatVSzoKchd0d_rMFzSamg/photo/AF1QipOHT0eX1ZmL4IXhhatAIwUkqvJLam_7WmTIggRp?key=RldwVkU0TkZOQkxGa0JvcGNzSDNhcjF5T1VYQXVn

****

I'm a straightforward person, and as I approach my 74th birthday next month, I've seen many changes in my world. I remember watching the transition from propeller-driven commercial airlines to milestones like the Bell X-15 breaking the sound barrier, and later, the SR-71 soaring at incredible speeds. I reflect on the evolution of cars, from the 1955 Chevy with its revolutionary 265 cubic inch V8 engine to the new Corvette that can outpace a Ferrari on the racetrack. I still get excited thinking about Bill Elliott setting a speed record of 212.809 mph at Talladega in 1987, and I have fond memories of Parnelli Jones driving the STP Special Turbine at the Indy 500 in 1967.

These experiences have filled my life with excitement. However, as the leader of our astronomy club, I've come to realize that I may no longer be the best fit for this role. I feel it's time to step aside and allow the club to evolve, encouraging the next generation of dedicated and educated members. I want to see someone who can inspire young explorers to continue the beautiful pursuit of understanding the heavens above us.

Thank You

Alfred McClure