THE

FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

An Affiliate of the Astronomical League

Vol. 30, No. 5 May 2026

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Club Calendar:
FRAC Meeting:
We will have our club meeting on Thursday, May 14, 2026, at 7:30pm at the UGA Gardens in Griffin and on Zoom.

Planetary Geologist at UGA and President of the Atlanta Geological Society Scott Harris will join us at the Garden to update us on his work to identify our local crater, the Roosevelt Impact Structure.

Public Observing Events:
In May, we have one public event. We will be at Indian Springs on Friday, May 8, and in case of clouds we will have a weather make-up date for Saturday, May 9. The event starts at 8:30pm.

FRAC Observing Events:
Our club observing weekend at Joe Kurz will be on May 15th and 16th from sunset until whenever.

The gate is now closed, so please be sure to leave the gate as you find it when the last person leaves for the night.

The lock code is 9321.

Please keep checking your email for updates regarding club events.

President's Message:
May Topic of the month, Education.

One of my favorite aspects of astronomy, and an important function of our club, is astronomical education. There is an entire universe of meeting topics we can dig into as a club. As we plan our meetings for the year, think about those topics you would like to see discussed. Rest assured, if you are curious about anything astronomically, it will make a good meeting topic. We have a lot of new members, so it may be something that was discussed in the past.

Additionally, I'll ask for your assistance. If you're willing, jump in and do a presentation! Trust me, it's a friendly audience.

We'll spend a portion of our meeting this month making our "topic of the month" for the coming year. Bring your ideas!
Clear skies,
Larry

Vice-President's Ramblings
This is your very last reminder about club dues. If you have not paid your dues, this newsletter email is likely to be the last communication you'll receive from the club. Due are $15, payable by check made out to FRAC or Flint River Astronomy Club. You can send your check to:

Mark Sutton
107 Pintail Way
Locust Grove, GA 30248

Or you can pay using Venmo, using our club's ID - @fracmoney24

If you are unsure if your dues have been paid for 2026, email me at stneckel@gmail.com

Sean

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Club Projects:

Our Solar System scale model project is still ongoing.

From George Ruff, our very patient project leader: “We're ready to mark, dig, and place everything. The brochures are printed and ready to place in the meeting room, too.”

An email will be sent out before our May meeting asking for volunteers for the build event. Once we have volunteers, a Zoom meeting will be held to discuss and plan.

FRAC T-Shirts
FRAC T-shirts are still available!! They are $20 at all FRAC gatherings.

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FRAC meeting:

FRAC meeting April 9, 2026, at 7:30pm at the UGA Gardens in Griffin and on Zoom.

12 club members and 1 guest were present at the UGA Garden for the April meeting: Larry and Twila Dove, Sean Neckel, George Ruff, Carlos Flores, Brennan and Chris Czock, Carmen and Wade Simmons, Ann Angelheart, Mark Hess, Ben Barker, and guest attendee Ryan Wahrmann.

5 club members joined us on Zoom: Alan Pryor, Doyne Tallman, Bill Evans, John Cruickshank, and King Davis.

Topics Discussed:

- Larry Dove gave a presentation on observing sunspots and the AL Sunspotter program.
- Volunteers are needed for construction of our Scale Solar System Model at the UGA Research and Education Gardens. An email will be sent out asking for volunteers. A planning meeting for the build event will occur on Zoom at some point.

FRAC Observings:
At Joe Kurz WMA on Friday, April 17, Carlos Flores and Wade Simmons enjoyed clear skies.

No members contacted us to say they were at the observing field on Saturday. If you were there, we hope you had a great evening of clear skies.

Public Observing Events:
In April we had one public event scheduled at Indian Springs State Park that was cancelled due to cloudy skies.

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Solar System Observing May 2026
Mercury is not observable during May.
Venus is visible in the western sky about 8:30pm until it sets at 10:30pm.
Earth has a crunchy outer shell and a gooey center.
Mars is just past solar conjunction and is not observable during May.
Jupiter is visible starting at 8:30pm until about 1:30am
Saturn is just past solar conjunction and is not observable during May.
Uranus is just past solar conjunction and is not observable during May.
Neptune is just past solar conjunction and is not observable during May.
Moon: Full: 5/1 LQ 5/9 New: 5/16 FQ: 5/23 Full (again) 5/31
https://in-the-sky.org/

In the sky, May 2026
May continues as galaxy season with two distinct galaxies to search for in the night sky. The first is the Blackeye galaxy, M64. With a portion of this galaxy obscured by a large dust lane, the image of this galaxy appears to have a black eye.

The second great target is the Sombrero galaxy, M104. Located in the Virgo constellation, this galaxy is viewed edge-on. The central bulge of stars in this galaxy has a distinct cloud band across the central portion giving the appearance of a typical Mexican hat.

Jupiter is high and bright, enough said. Enjoy!

One last target rising later in the evening is T Coronae Borealis, TCrB. The "northern crown", as it is known, is on track for a super nova outburst. Take a look at it now pre-explosion and be prepared to get another totally different view of this constellation if/when it explodes.

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Classifieds:

For sale QSI583wsg camera for $450. It has a

built-in off-axis guide port. A Lodestar guider camera is included. It is monochrome. It has a built-in 5 position filter wheel. Also included is a set of Astrodon filters: Luminance, Red, Green, Blue, and Ha. It has a 120V power supply, but it can run off a 12-volt battery too. It will cool the sensor to 35 degrees C below ambient. Contact Alan Pryor at adpryor1953@gmail.com

Dawn Chappell has some vintage Star Party t-shirts. 2 gray Chiefland shirts and 3 Georgia Sky View, 2004-2006, all in size XL. If you would like a piece of recent (relative to the age of the universe) astronomy history, contact Dawn at collegeparkcid@hotmail.com

If you have something you would like to buy, sell, or trade, email the specifics, including your contact information to stneckel@gmail.com

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Messier 95 / NGC 3351, Courtesy of Alan Pryor

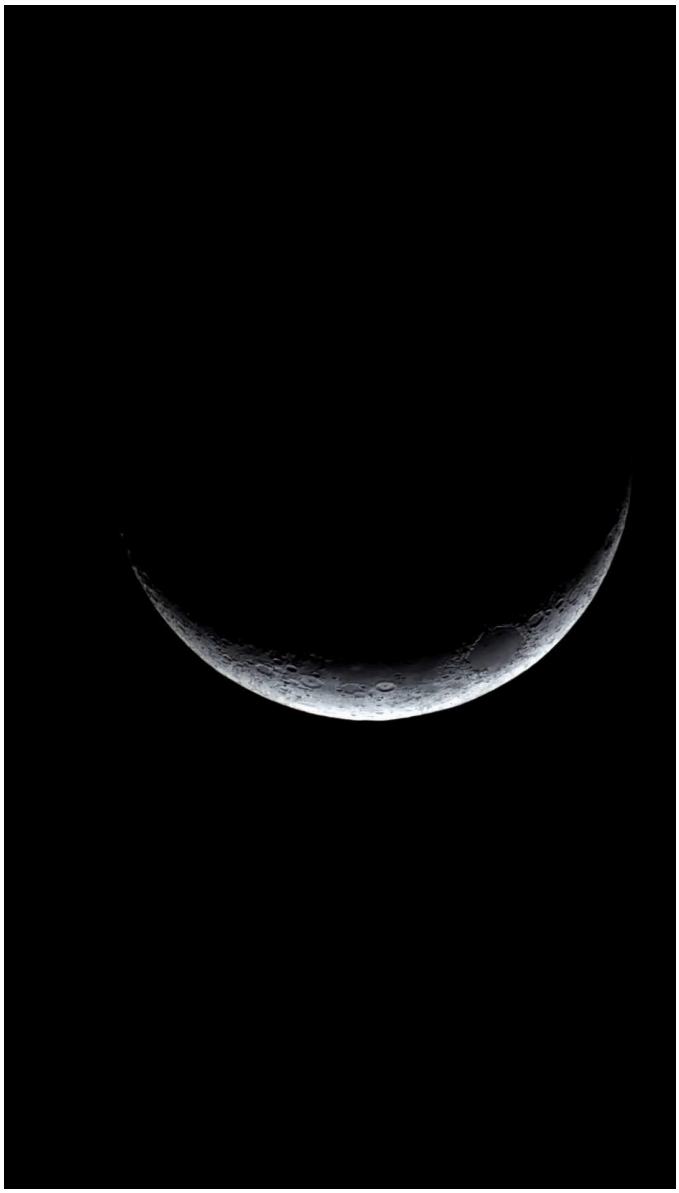
Messier 95 or NGC 3351 is a barred spiral galaxy in Leo. It is about 33 million light-years away and has a magnitude of 9.7. In May, it will be west of zenith right after sunset. A 6" scope should be able to spot this galaxy in dark skies, but a 10" scope would be better. It lies almost 9 degrees east of the star Regulus. For comparison it is about the same distance as Regulus and the star Algieba which is 8 degrees north of Regulus.

M95 has a bar which is formed by stars that have a flattened elliptical orbit around the center of the galaxy. Just beyond the bar is a bright ring of stars. The ring has some stars with a slight blue tint. The ring is also a star forming region. Beyond that there are faint arms. Some HII regions are also visible.

A full-size photo of M95 can be found at M95.

Barnard's Loop, courtesy of Eugene Rush

This photograph of Barnard's Loop (Sh 2-276) was taken at Sharpsburg, GA on February 28, 2026, using a ZWO ASI585MM Pro camera with a 24 mm lens and Ha filter. The image consists of 25, 180-second and 5, 300-second subs and processed by extracting the background using GraXpert and Corel Paintshop Pro X9. Barnard's Loop is an emission nebula located in the Orion constellation and is a part of the Orion molecular cloud complex which also contains the dark Horsehead and bright Orion nebulae. The loop is about 1,400 light years away and is thought to have originated in a supernova explosion about 2 million years ago. This faint nebula is named after the pioneering astrophotographer, E. E. Barnard, who photographed it and published a description in 1894.



The Moon, courtesy of Sean Neckel

I took this picture of the waxing moon at about 8% illumination on March 2nd, 2025, at 7:14pm, just 2 days after the new moon on February 28. I used my SeeStar 50 from in my yard just after sunset (and just barely over the trees) to capture this image. Observing the moon when it is illuminated at 50% or less is the best time to observe in my opinion. The craters, mares, and mountains cast shadows that give them depth, and they really stand out. If you look closely at some of the larger craters here, you can see their central peaks in shadow while the crater floor is partially lit. Crater rims are easier to see too.

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