

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT
RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

An Affiliate of the Astronomical League

Vol. 30, No. 7 **July 2026**

Officers: President, Larry Dove.

Vice President, Sean Neckel.

Secretary / ALCOR Terri Sutton.

Treasurer, Mark Sutton.

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and George Ruff; Program/Observing**

**Coordinator and Social Media Coordinator:
Tom Partin.**

Webmaster: Sean Neckel.

Newsletter Editor: Dawn Chappell.

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Club Calendar:

FRAC Meeting:

We will have our club meeting on Thursday, July 9, 2026, 7:30pm at the UGA Gardens in Griffin and on Zoom.

Mason Starr, a PhD candidate from Georgia Tech and Mission Operations System Engineer will talk to us over Zoom about Lunar Ice, University Operations, and Unexpected Surprises: Stories from NASA's Lunar Flashlight mission.

Public Observing Events:

In July, we have one public event scheduled. We will be at Indian Springs on Friday, July 17, and in case of clouds we will have a weather make-up date of Saturday, July 18. The event starts at 8:30pm.

FRAC Observing Events:

Our club observing weekend at Joe Kurz will be on July 10th and 11th 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:

We've all heard the term "Dog Days of Summer" and here in the south we know this time of year comes with heat and humidity. This year the almanac defines the dog days as July 3rd- August 11th. This coincides with Sirius, the Dog Star, rising with the sun. The ancient Greeks believed the combined heat of Sirius and the sun caused the hot, sultry weather this time of year.

Sirius is one of the brightest stars in the night sky. Located in the constellation Canis Major (Greater Dog), Sirius accompanies Orion, the Great Hunter. Gradually, both Orion and Sirius rise earlier so that by August 11th they are decoupled from the rising sun and the dog days end.

Hot, humid weather makes it tough most nights to see anything in the night sky except for the brightest stars. As for myself, comet 10P/Tempel and Asteroid 1997 NC1 are targets for viewing and imaging this month. Comet 10P is expected to brighten going into July. Asteroid NC1 makes its closest approach to earth on June 27th and should be visible until July 8th.

Clear skies,
Larry

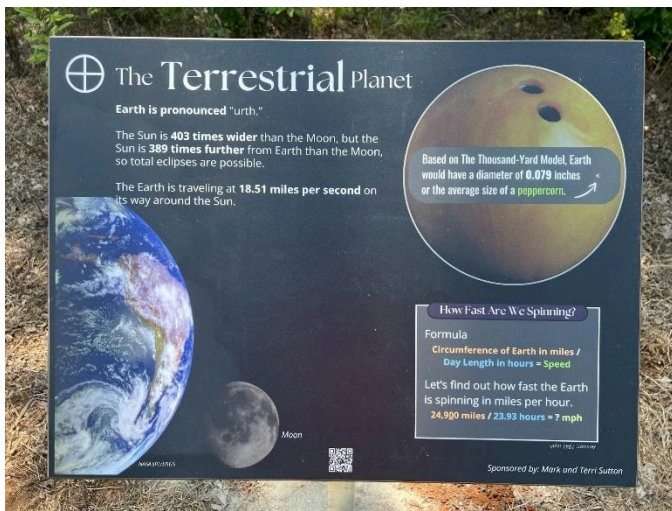
Vice-President's Ramblings

Having just gotten back from the solar system model build, I just wanted to say what a great time it was walking around in the heat and humidity with everyone. Our club members had a lot of fun, and the UGA staff were amazing. It was so satisfying to see the signs finally in place.

The biggest shoutout though, goes out to George Ruff. This has been his project for going on 4 years now, and to see it come to such an amazing outcome is a testament to how much passion and dedication he's shown. The signs look incredible

and it is something that as a club we can all take pride in for years to come.

Next time you see George, be sure to congratulate him, and thank him for doing such an amazing job.



"Hey! That's where I keep all my stuff!"

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Club Projects:

1000 Yard Solar System Build Day:

On June 30, 8 club members, along with the UGA Research and Education Garden staff built our 1000-yard solar system model on the Garden's grounds. George Ruff, Sean Neckel, Larry and Twila Dove, Ann Angelheart, Brian Kennedy, Ben Barker, and Brett Hayslett braved the heat and humidity to plant the posts in the ground, pour, and pack concrete, and attach the signs to the posts. A big thanks goes out to the UGA staff, who dug all the holes for us, opened the building for us to cool down, and drove all our stuff around and dropped it at the worksites.

Currently, 11 of the 12 posts and signs are planted and assembled. We still need to place one last sign and assemble the sun (yellow bowling ball) on its stand. When you're at the garden next, be sure to take the time to walk the solar system!!



The FRAC 1000 Yard Solar System Build Crew, L to R: Larry Dove, George Ruff, Sean Neckel, Ann Angelheart, Ben Barker, and Twila Dove. Brian Kennedy is taking the picture, and Brent Hayslett is not pictured.

FRAC T-Shirts

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

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FRAC meeting:

FRAC meeting June 11, 2026, at 7:30pm at the UGA Gardens in Griffin and on Zoom.

15 members and 1 guest joined us at the meeting at the Garden building. Members Larry and Twila Dove, Wade and Carmen Simmons, Sean Neckel, Carlos Flores, Alfred McClure, Dave and Rosanne Stone, George Ruff, Tom Moore, Brent Summers, John Cruickshank, Ben Barker, and Mark Hess. We were also joined by our guest Dave Holman.

8 club members joined us on Zoom: Chelsea Neckel, Doyne Tallman, Alan Pryor, Bill Evans, Brian Kennedy, Clayton Wilson, Ann Angelheart, and Aaron Calhoun.

Topics Discussed:

- We need to contact Rob Bartlett at the GADNR to present the photo that we took from Joe Kurz to him.
- Discussed the plan for the solar system scale model build day on 6/30/2026.
 - Brian Kennedy and Ben Barker volunteered to be our photographers for the day.

- Larry Dove gave a presentation on viewing solar transits.
- The group came up with meeting presentation and discussion topics for the rest of 2026.

FRAC Observings:

The club held its monthly observing event at Joe Kurz WMA on Friday, June 12th and Saturday, June 13th.

Public Observing Events:

In June we had one public event scheduled at Indian Springs State Park. Tom and Brittany Partin, Dave Stone, and Larry Dove attended and showed the skies to 6 guests.

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Solar System Observing July 2026

Mercury is close to the sun and not observable.

Venus is visible in the western sky about 9:00pm until it sets at 11:19pm.

Earth officially has a sign now. See above.

Mars is visible starting around 4am until dawn.

Jupiter is visible starting at 9:00pm until about 10pm.

Saturn is visible starting around 1:45am until dawn.

Uranus is just past solar conjunction and is not observable during July.

Neptune is just past solar conjunction but is visible starting around 1:15am until dawn...

Moon: LQ 7/7 New: 7/14 FQ: 7/21 Full 7/29

<https://in-the-sky.org/>

In the sky, July 2026

Venus still shines brightly in the evening sky, but we are slowly losing Mercury and Jupiter. Both Mercury and Jupiter will be lost to the sun by mid-month. Stay up late and catch Saturn rising after midnight or make it an early morning target for observing. Here in the heart of summer any morning observing has to be completed before twilight ends around 5:30 am.

As we celebrate our country's 250 anniversary, an awesome target for imaging is NGC 6946, the Fireworks Galaxy. Hidden in the constellation Cepheus, NGC 6946 has multiple star forming regions giving the galaxy many red colored areas. Additionally, this galaxy has a history of supernova

explosions, seen as bright points of light where no background stars exist. It is this history of supernova explosions that give the Fireworks Galaxy its well-deserved moniker.

Classifieds:

From Alan Pryor:

I am asking if there is anyone in the club that has a telescope mount that can track and a telescope that could be capable of photography if a camera were attached. I ask because I would rather give the camera to someone (a beginner) who could use it rather than put it up for sale via Woodland Hills Camera and Telescope.

The mount would have to be able to take guider commands. The telescope would need to have enough back focus to bring the camera to focus. It would be nice to have a telescope that can bring all the colors to focus at the same time, but with focus offsets for each filter you could overcome that (for the most part).

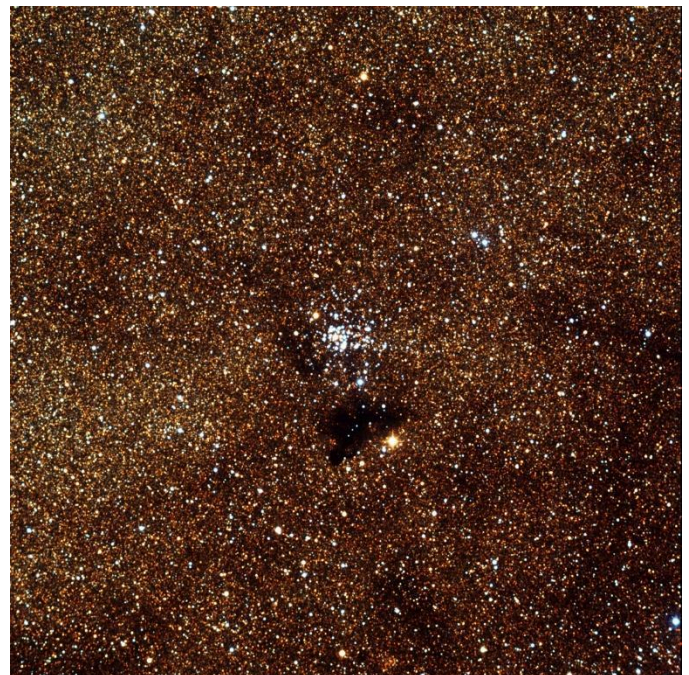
If there are no people in the club that fit those criteria, then I will go ahead and send it to Woodland Hills.

Contact Alan if you are interested at

adpryor1953@comcast.net

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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NGC 6520 Courtesy of Alan Pryor
June 2017

NGC 6520 is an open star cluster in the constellation of Sagittarius. It is the group of white stars in the photo. However, the photo also contains Barnard 86, a dark nebula, also known as the Ink Spot. Both of these are seen against the background of the Large Sagittarius Star Cloud. The photo is a reminder of just how many stars are in our galaxy. When you are looking at this you are looking in the approximate direction of the center of the Milky Way Galaxy.

M101 has six companion galaxies and the gravitational interaction between it and its satellites may have spawned its grand design pattern.

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NGC 6520 is a little west of the top of the Teapot of Sagittarius. The star cluster should be easy to view with dark skies and a 3" scope since it is at a magnitude of 7.6. With dark skies you should be able to view the Ink Spot too, but a larger scope will reveal it more readily. However, the rich star field of the Large Sagittarius Star Cloud is impressive in itself.

NGC 6520 is about 5,000 light-years away. The stars are estimated to be less than 200 million years old, and many have pretty hot surfaces at around 30,000 degrees F. This makes them much more luminous than our sun.

A full-sized photo can be seen at [NGC_6520](#).



Pinwheel Galaxy, courtesy of Eugene Rush

Pinwheel Galaxy (M101), Courtesy of Eugene Rush

This photograph of the Pinwheel Galaxy (Messier 101) was taken at Sharpsburg, GA over three days on April 20, May 3 and May 14, 2026 using an 8-inch Ritchie Chretien telescope with a ZWO ASI533MC Pro camera and Optolong L-Quad Enhance filter. The image consists of 90, 80-second and 24, 300-second subs.

The Pinwheel Galaxy is a face-on, counterclockwise spiral galaxy located 21 million light years from Earth in the constellation Ursa Major. M101 is a large galaxy, with a diameter of 252,000 light-years. By comparison, the Milky Way has a diameter of 87,400 light-years.