

# The Celestial Observer

May 2015



*The diversity of . . . nature is so great, and the treasures hidden in the heavens so rich, precisely in order that the human mind shall never be lacking in fresh nourishment.*

Johannes Kepler

## President's Letter

Hello to all:

Spring has finally arrived and summer is fast approaching. With the warmer weather and diminished mud, spending the evening outdoors is becoming easier, and I hope to see many of you at one of the Club's observing sites soon. Also, several club members were spotted at the Northeast Astronomical Forum (NEAF) in April. A brief overview of this year's NEAF gather can be found below. Look for photos at [www.nsaac.org](http://www.nsaac.org)

Barry Yomtov gave a fine presentation at the May 5 meeting and fielded questions on astrophotography. Thanks again, Barry, I hope you will join us again soon. In June Dwight Lanpher will be presenting at our club meeting on the 7th annual Acadia Night Sky Festival, which will be held in early September in Bar Harbor Maine ([www.acadianightskyfestival.com](http://www.acadianightskyfestival.com)). We'll be using Dwight's visit to restarting our tradition of meeting an hour before the scheduled Club meeting time at the China Blossom in North Andover (on Hwy. 125) for dinner and a chance to smooze with our speaker. Please put that meeting on your calendar and join us if you can for some Chinese food too! Hmm, Chinese food, hmm.

The list of club members who have volunteered their time in support of NSAAC has been growing. This is very heartening as the Club can only serve its membership through volunteer efforts. If you haven't been to a meeting lately or participated in Club operations in the past, now is good time to begin. Just reach out to us. Every little bit helps, from scope collimation to picking up coffee, your contributions help make the club run smoothly and make our time together fun.

Clear skies, Ed Burke

North Shore Amateur Astronomy Club is a non-profit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

## NEAF Report

*In mid-April several NSAAC members joined members of other regional clubs in the annual pilgrimage to the Northeast Astronomical Forum (NEAF) in Rockland NY. NEAF bills itself as the world's largest astronomy and space expo, and it didn't disappoint this year. Ed Burke offers this report on what the rest of us missed. Go to [www.nsaac.org](http://www.nsaac.org) to see Ed's photos of this annual tribal pow-wow.*

Our recent guest speaker, Dr. Alan Hirshfeld, presented on his *Starlight Detectives* book as part of the official show lineup. Ted Blank, regional expert on all things occultation, represented the International Occultation Timing Association at breakout sessions on the importance of amateur/professional science collaborations.

While there were many informative and entertaining sessions, one highlight was a presentation by Matt Penn, chief telescope scientist at the Kitt Peak McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope. Matt focused on the upcoming 2017 total solar eclipse and enlisting public support for The Citizen Cate Project, 'Cate' being short for "Continental-America Telescopic Eclipse." As part of this endeavor 60 telescopes will be positioned across the continental United States to follow the path of eclipse totality. The end product will be a 90-minute film of the eclipse, which will provide scientific data on coronal activity not otherwise easily observed. To learn more about this endeavor, please visit the project website: <https://sites.google.com/site/citizencateexperiment>

Having left (most) of my credit cards at home, the Expo hall was a safe place for me to be. The usual vendors were present with one exception, Jeff Goldstein of AstroGizmos. Jeff passed away earlier this year. His products were nevertheless available at the show and you could hear folks talking about and remembering Jeff as they wandered by the stack of AstroGizmos.

Moving around the expo hall it was impossible to miss the large telescope vendor exhibits. Each scope in Celestron's Nexstar product line now has built-in WiFi network, which enables remote control by mobile device via Celestron's free app. Older scopes can be retrofitted for remote control via a connected device. Surprisingly, WiFi and integration with mobile devices does not appear to be part of Meade's product roadmap. Meade wanted us to know about its renewed commitment to quality in its manufacturing and testing processes. The company also emphasized that product availability has improved through expanded inventories and improved management controls.

Over at the Explorer Scientific exhibit, the focus (pardon the pun) was on the competitive prices of their eyepieces, which they assert are the only waterproof

eyepieces on the market. Explorer Scientific will be bringing a 6.5 inch refractor with a carbon fiber tube to market this summer; it will have their unlimited lifetime “drop, repair, replace” transferable warranty.

Over at the Astronomy Foundation table, support for star parties is on the agenda for the upcoming year. The Foundation is working on a novel project: to make remote imaging telescopes available to clubs running star parties. Clubs will then have a ‘computer station’ from which photos can be taken of the objects being observed. The hope is that this technology will capture the interest of kids.

Cheers, Ed Burke

### **Sky Object of the Month – NGC 3115, a Lenticular Galaxy in Sextans.**

In the absence of an April newsletter, we’re mentioning Glenn Chaple’s April “Object” here. The full article and accompanying star chart is on the club website ([nsaac.org](http://nsaac.org)).

At 9<sup>th</sup> magnitude, NGC 3115, as Chaple puts it, “is a bright ‘shoulda-been-found-by-Messier’ object that eluded the French comet hunter’s eye and, therefore, his catalog.” William Herschel found it while surveying the area in 1787.

At 9<sup>th</sup> magnitude, NGC 3115 (#53 in the Caldwell Catalog) is the brightest example of a lenticular galaxy, a galaxy type that is intermediate between an elliptical galaxy and a spiral galaxy. Some call it the “Spindle Galaxy,” a nickname it shares with galaxy NGC 5866.

If you find it NGC 3115, share your observation comments with your Club members.

## Upcoming Activities

### Next Club Meeting, Friday, June 5

Our speaker will be Dwight Lanpher, President of Penobscot Valley Star Gazers. Dwight will make the long trek from his home in North East Harbor, Maine to tell us about the annual **Acadia Sky Festival**. Observing from and around Acadia National Park is a dark sky treat and a picture perfect setting for last summer stargazing. Great numbers of amateur astronomers have been participating in this event, with last year's gathering bringing together over 48 scopes and 5 bino stations on Cadillac Mountain. Dwight will give us a preview of this year's event, which is set for September 10-14.

Presentation begins at 8 pm. **Don't miss it!**





Photo courtesy of Acadia Sky Festival

**Meeting Location:** Brooks School

Brooks is east of Hwy 125 and south of Hwy 133. Enter the campus from Great Pond Road at point M on the Google map below and continue to the Science Center parking lot at point B. We'll meet there with our liaison and enter the Science Center. If for any reason the gate at point M is closed, enter the

campus at point A on Great Pond Road, drive to the security gate (point C) and indicate that you are with "North Shore Amateur Astronomy Club." Then continue on to the Science Center parking lot (point B).

The campus and meeting location:

<https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?mid=z2g0nAC6lh5w.kFBPV6o9jyl0>

## Star Parties

On 7 May Brewster LaMacchia organized a very successful star party at Rolling Ridge Conference Center in N. Andover for Lawrence school kids. Thanks to members who turned out with their scopes, or just helped out.

Brewster's lighted solar system scale model was also set up, and several satellites were observed. Later Dave Aucoin went on a nebula hunt, tracking down the Eskimo, Owl, Ghost of Jupiter, and Cat's Eye for all to see. Several meteors were observed, including a long earth grazer (probable) from the fading Eta Aquarid shower.

Next up on Brewster's outreach agenda are:

**May 26/28** - Sanborn Elementary, Andover

**June 16/18** - Battis Farm, Amesbury

**July 16/21** - Little Neck, Ipswich

**August 20/25** - Hamilton -Wenham Library

(second date is a "cloud date")

**September 18** and **September 25** - Essex Heritage Trails & Sails Location to be determined (no cloud dates for these)

**Collins Observatory** Club-sponsored public viewings are held at Salem State University with Dennis Gudzevich at the controls of the 12-inch Meade. The observatory is closed on school holidays and cloudy nights, so check the website, <http://nsaac.org/about-the-club/salem-state-university-collins-observatory/>

**Mendel Observatory** Merrimack College's observatory is open every Wednesday from dusk until 10 p.m. when the sky is clear, with Kevin Ackert and Fred Sammartino operating the 20-inch scope. Check <http://nsaac.org/about-the-club/merrimack-college-mendel-observatory/> before driving out.

## Non-NSAAC Events

**StarConn 2015 June 13, 8 a.m. – 11 p.m.** The Astronomical Society of Greater Hartford is sponsoring this full day event for amateur astronomers. This year's program will be dedicated to 'Advanced Amateur Astronomy.' Speakers will be discussing amateur involvement in: Variable Star Observing, Solar Imaging, Radio Astronomy, Timing Occultations, Lunar Observing, and CCD Photometry.

StarConn 2015 will be held at Wesleyan University's Exley Science Center in Middletown, CT with observing at the Van Vleck observatory following the event. For details and registration, go to [www.asgh.org/starconn/](http://www.asgh.org/starconn/)

### **Maine Astronomy Retreat August 16-22**

The second annual Maine Astronomy Retreat is now open for registration. For six nights participants will revel under the dark skies of Medomak Retreat Center in Washington, ME.

The retreat is led by J. Kelly Beatty, Sky & Telescope's senior editor; Bruce Berger, director of Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston Research and Imaging Observatory; Greg Mort, renowned artist and life-long amateur astronomer, telescope maker, and astrophotographer; and Rick Binzel, professor of Planetary Science at MIT and Science Team member for NASA's New Horizon Mission to Pluto.

During the day, there will be lectures and programs by expert facilitators, plus all the stuff you'd expect at a Maine lake camp: canoes, kayaks and sailboats, tennis and basketball courts, and an archery range. Food and lodging is part of the package.

### **Acadia Sky Festival September 10-14**

What better way to wrap up the summer than a road trip to ASF on Mount Desert Island, ME (Bar Harbor, Acadia National Park). Hear all about it from Festival ringleader, Dwight Lanpher, at the Club's June 5 meeting.

## Volunteers Needed

Want to help the Club with its mission? Volunteering is a great way to meet other members and learn new things.

- Assist Brewster LaMacchia with any of the upcoming slate of star parties and presentations. Contact: [starparty@nsaac.org](mailto:starparty@nsaac.org)

- Help out at Merrimack College Observatory on Wednesday evenings.  
Contact: Kevin Ackert at [treasurer@nsaac.org](mailto:treasurer@nsaac.org)
- Help Ed Burke with the website. Contact: [webmaster@nsaac.org](mailto:webmaster@nsaac.org)

### **Minutes of the NSAAC Members Meeting**

Henceforth, meeting minutes are now located on the club website: [nsaac.org](http://nsaac.org)