



Galloway Forest Astronomical Society

Newsletter #51, March 2024

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Kirkcolm Primary

We took the planetarium to Kirkcolm Primary School in January and delivered sessions for both Kirkcolm and Leswalt pupils. As usual, the pupils seemed to enjoy the presentations, even the nursery class, and the school were kind enough to put a report in the local newspaper. Now we need to do some maintenance on the dome before we take it out again.

February: Clouds 3, GFAS 0

We tried a new strategy for an event in February. We set aside three separate evenings to hold an observation meeting at Newton Stewart Tennis Club: first attempt on a Saturday, then, failing that, the following Wednesday and finally, failing that, the Friday! Sadly, all three evenings were far too cloudy for any hope of observing anything but the undersides of the clouds, so all our preparations were in vain. It was especially frustrating for your GFAS committee because there were some opportunities on the intervening nights, the ones we hadn't planned for.

Looking ahead: programme of events

Here's what we're planning for later in the year:

March 15th: Observation evening / film night, Glentrool, confirmed: see below.

April, after the 11th, date etc. to be advised: Two-part evening session on total solar eclipses, **Part I** by our special envoys to the USA, Brian and Robin Rice, with an illustrated account of the eclipse of 8th April; **Part II**, a talk by Andy Sawers FRAS on the 1919 eclipse that tested Einstein's new theory of General Relativity.

June, a daytime event, details to be advised, a solar observing session in Newton Stewart, with backup dates in case of bad weather. See Page 2 for more details of the Solar Cycle this year.

March 15th, Glentrool Hive

As part of British Science Week (8th-17th March) we are going back to the Glentrool Hive for an observing session supported by a video programme. The Hive have secured funding to host this free event and GFAS will have some telescopes on hand as well as our 4K projector and 150 inch screen in case the weather fails us again. If it's clear, you'll be able to see almost the last of Orion and the other southern hemisphere constellations before they dip below our horizon for the summer. If not, we'll use Stellarium to give you a quick look at what you're missing and might see on a clearer night to come, then we'll have a screening of "Eyes on the Skies" from the European Space Agency. Many thanks to The Glentrool Hive and our members in Glentrool Village for organising and supporting this event for us.

Orion Farewell

The southern sky will be a busy place in the evening of 15th March. From about 7pm, after sunset, a crescent moon will be suspended over Taurus and quite close to the Pleiades.

The planets Mercury, Jupiter and Uranus will be setting in the west, while constellations Taurus, Orion and Canis Major (with Sirius, the brightest star) will be rising from the east. The International Space Station rises in the south-west at 7:30pm and races east through Orion at 7:35pm before setting due east at 7:41pm.

If we get a clear sky it should be a great observation opportunity for naked-eye, binocular, telescope and camera stargazing. If it's cloudy, we'll have a presentation in the Hive using the GFAS 4K projector and the 150 inch screen.

Now featuring "Eyes on the Skies", the ESA/Hubble video history of the astronomical telescope from Galileo in 1610 to the Hubble space telescope, with reference to the James Watt Space Telescope and many amazing cosmological discoveries still to be made.

Photo by Galloway Photography



GLENTROOL HIVE
THE WILD HEART OF GALLOWAY

Friday 15th March
From 7pm

Free Entry

Refreshments
Available

Glentrool Gallery &
Craft Shop Open

Glentrool Hive, Glentrool Village,
 Newton Stewart, DG8 6SY
 01671 840 717
 manager@glentroolhive.co.uk

GFAS Membership

We always welcome new and returning members, especially juniors who join for free. Subs remain at £15.00 Adult, £25.00 Family, £0.00 Juniors or Students in full-time education. Just email members@gf-astro.org for a form.



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Registered Scottish Charity SC035033.

Chairman: Antony Berretti;

Secretary: Doug Snell, 5 Elm Grove, Newton Stewart, DG8 6JT

W: www.gf-astro.org E: members@gf-astro.org

Fb page: [@GallowayForestAstronomicalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/GallowayForestAstronomicalSociety/) / Group: [@gfas chat](https://www.facebook.com/gfaschat/)

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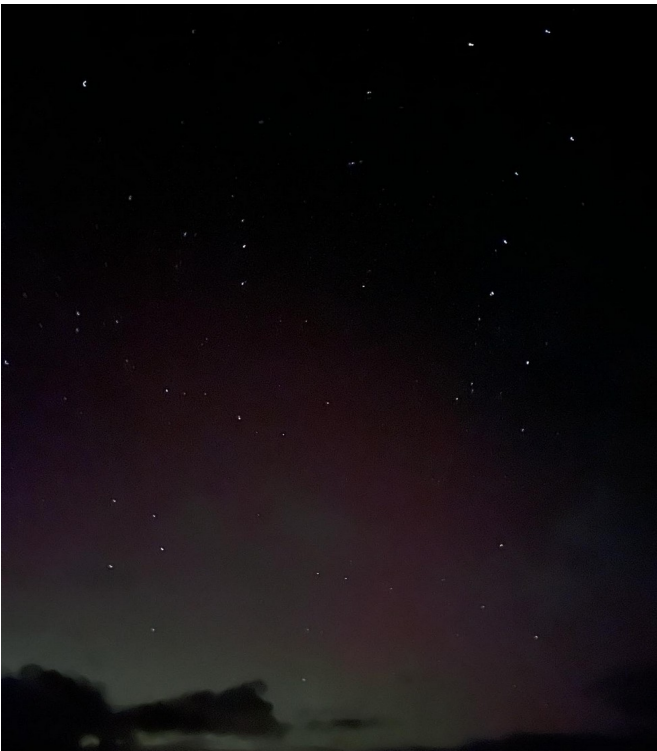
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Solar Cycle Maximum in 2024

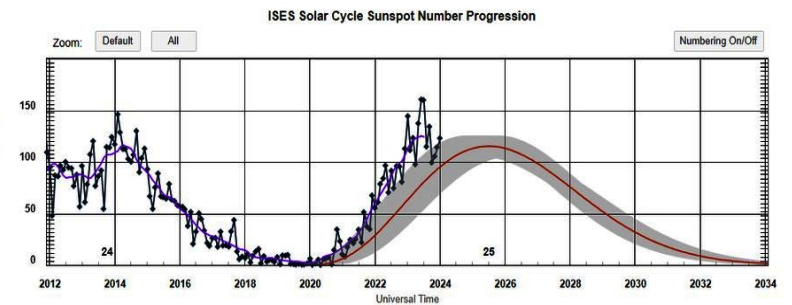
The Sun is approaching another peak in its activity cycle this year, which is why we've been seeing lots of Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) displays in Scotland and even further south. During the roughly 11-year cycle the number of sunspots visible on the face of the sun rises and falls as you can see in graph below. In June this year we'll arrange to set up some solar telescopes in Newton Stewart and invite members and friends to count some sunspots for themselves! Solar maximum is expected between January and October this year, but exactly when can't be known until it's past.



The photo on the left was taken on a mobile phone camera from Monreith (54.7 degrees north latitude), 18 miles south of Newton Stewart, looking north, last weekend. Notice Ursa Major at the top right and Ursa Minor top left. Many thanks to Andy for permission to use it.

It is only one of a number of aurora pictures he took and, while it isn't a dramatic as some of the images that have been shown on social media from the Western Isles last weekend, it shows us that the "Northern Lights" can be seen well south of their Arctic homelands when the sun is approaching the maximum.

Monreith is in the South Machars, an area well outside the Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park, but it is nevertheless a great place to view the night sky from.



A small observatory in Glentrool

In January 2018 GFAS were offered an entire observatory (a small one), similar to the one in the picture, together with two telescopes, located in Milngavie north of Glasgow. A team of GFAS members travelled to Milngavie to get it, dismantled the plastic dome and brought all the kit back to our storage shed in Newton Stewart.

Since then, despite our best intentions, we have not been able to set the plastic dome up and make it available for use. Now, however, a group of GFAS members in Glentrool Village, together with the Glentrool Hive team, have come forward with a plan to set up the dome on Glentrool Village green and equip it with a suitable telescope.

We have now offered the plastic dome to Glentrool Hive so that it can be erected as planned. Once it's complete, the observatory will be made available to GFAS members by prior arrangement with the Hive, and we hope that eventually it will be possible to access its telescope on-line through the internet.



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