



Galloway Forest Astronomical Society

Newsletter #62, May 2026

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April Meeting - Mary McIntyre FRAS

Mary gave an interesting, thought-provoking, sometimes funny and sometimes downright scary presentation to members and some non-member visitors on Thursday 30th April, called “What has the space programme ever done for us?”. With Artemis II not long back from its extraordinary journey around the Moon, some people believe that space exploration is a waste of money. But there are so many everyday things that we take for granted that wouldn't exist without it. Mary's talk took a deep dive into this subject, looking in detail at direct benefits we enjoy because of satellites, rockets, novel materials and computing methods and so on, but also taking a look at some of the less well-known spin-offs.

This was a recorded Zoom session and we will email GFAS members a link to the recording for those who couldn't get to the meeting. We can't give non-members access to the recording, sorry about that. This is the first time we have posted a society meeting on-line like this so it would be very useful to get feedback from any member viewing it - please email your comments!

Mary and her husband are both keen astrophotographers, with their own small observatory and a large collection of telescopes and cameras, a few of which are shown, along with Mary herself, in the picture on the right.

Many thanks to Mary, to Andy Sawers for the setting-up and introduction and also to Newton Stewart Golf Club for hosting a most enjoyable evening.



Upcoming Events Update

Our events at Newton Stewart Golf Club are free to GFAS members. For non-members there is a small charge of £3.00, refundable against your membership fee should you wish to join us within a couple of weeks. Our observing events are open to all.

- **Thursday 4 June, 7pm:** Dr **Caroline Harper**, head of science at the UK Space Agency, will talk about the **James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)** – Venue: **Newton Stewart Golf Club**
- **Saturday 20th June, 10:00am - 12:00noon:** “Summer Solstice Eve” public solar viewing, all welcome - Venue: **Belted Galloway car park, Riverside Road, Newton Stewart**
- **Thursday 2 July, 7pm:** – Dr **Christopher Berry**, lecturer at University of Glasgow, will talk about **Gravitational Waves**. In part 2, **Brian and Robin Rice** will give a talk on solar eclipses – Venue: **Newton Stewart Golf Club**
- **Wednesday 12 August - Afternoon / evening,** Near-total (90%) Solar eclipse, observing session, weather permitting - Venue: a location in Galloway, to be confirmed.
- **Thursday 22 October, 7pm:** Royal Observatory Greenwich senior curator and author **Dr Louise Devoy** will talk about the **history of the ROG**. Her recently-published book is quite marvellous! After the talk, weather permitting, we will be outdoors observing the Moon, Saturn and other targets. – Venue: **Newton Stewart Golf Club**

On the Loom Other events to look out for (dates and venues still to be confirmed):

- Amateur astronomer **Katrin Raynor** will tell us about how the great story of space exploration has been told through philately!
- An evening of astrophotography. **Alistair Scobie**, GFAS member and a trustee of the Scottish Dark Sky Observatory being built at Clatteringshaws, will showcase and discuss his brilliant work.

Newsletter Articles Please send us your astro news! We consider all contributions to our newsletters and we always acknowledge the source of anything we use. Please email us any original astronomy items for consideration.

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 or download a form from the website.



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Registered Scottish Charity SC035033.

Chair: Andy Sawers FRAS Secretary: Jayne Davis

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

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

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Alistair Scobie and the Sharpstar SCA260

In our March newsletter we featured GFAS member Simon Graham and his Seestar S50 instrument. This month we have a contribution from GFAS member Alistair Scobie, who uses a very much more powerful setup, built around a Sharpstar SCA260 Cassegrain reflecting telescope as shown on the right.

It is described as “a fast-focal-ratio aspherical Cassegrain astrograph”, but it is actually a 260 mm (just over 10 inch) reflector with secondary mirror and corrective lens structure, all built into a carbon-fibre tube to reduce the weight. It can image objects down to visual magnitude 13.8. The human eye, by contrast, cannot see objects much less bright than about magnitude 6.4, many hundreds of times brighter than that.



The Whirlpool is a favourite target for earthly astronomers, but it's not often you see it in such a spectacularly detailed image, especially taken from south west Scotland when good clear skies aren't that often available.

It was discovered on October 13 1773 by Charles Messier while looking for objects that could confuse comet hunters, and was designated in Messier's catalogue as M51.

The smaller object at the left is the interacting galaxy NGC 5195 (M51b). The pair are about 24 million light-years away, in the northern sky, a bit below Ursa Major. At apparent magnitude 8.4 it can be seen with a good pair of binoculars - although it won't look like this image!

Observing notes

Alistair has given us the following notes on how this image was produced. “The Whirlpool Galaxy was shot in LRGB from my garden in Castle Douglas mainly on two April nights of which this Monday was the second. Hydrogen alpha was collected on additional sessions and incorporated into the final image. Total integration time was 17 hours.”

Integration per filter: - Lum/Clear: 5h (100 × 180") - R: 1h 30m (30 × 180") - G: 1h 30m (30 × 180") - B: 1h 30m (30 × 180") - Hydrogen α : 7h 30m (90 × 300").

We hope that Alistair will be able to give members a presentation on this and his other astrophotography projects during this season.

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