

# STARLIGHT JOURNAL

## APRIL 2025



### The Deer Lick Galaxy Group – Image by DMAS member JR Paulson

NGC 7331 Group is a visual grouping of galaxies in the constellation Pegasus. Spiral galaxy NGC 7331 is the prominent foreground galaxy in the same field as other galaxies. It contains four other members, affectionately referred to as the "fleas". Although adjacent in the sky, this collection is not a galaxy group, as NGC 7331 itself is not gravitationally associated with the far more distant "fleas". NGC 7331, which is about 40 million Light-Years (LY) in distance, is similar in size to our own Milky Way galaxy. The other smaller looking galaxies above it are about 284 - 365 million LY away.

BTW, the odd moniker Deer Lick Group, by which this collection of galaxies is affectionately known, was coined by Tomm Lorenzin, author of 1000+ The Amateur Astronomer's Field Guide to Deep Sky Observing, "in commemoration of one of the finest nights of viewing EVER, at Deer Lick Gap, just off the Blue Ridge Parkway,....The name he gave has stuck ever since. Talk with either amateur or professional astronomers and they are more likely to recognize *Deer Lick* vs NGC 7311. Regardless of the name, the view of the group is very ethereal.

*(As with all the images in this newsletter, you will be greatly rewarded by viewing them on a large screen rather than a cellphone screen. – Ed.)*

**SAVE THESE DATES NOW!**

**Saturday, April 5** Member Meeting 6:30 p.m.

**Saturday, April 12 “Planet Parade” 8:00 p.m.** program by Greg Woolever

**Saturday, April 26 “Majestic Leo” 8:00 p.m.** program by Derryl Barr

**Saturday, May 3** Board Meeting 5:00 p.m.

**April 2025 – President’s Report**

Our annual Chili Supper was another success!! Many varieties of chili were provided, YUM!! As well as other delicious food we enjoyed. Thank You everyone who attended and shared food!!

The Observatory Spring Cleanup went very well with many members joining to make quick work. Thank You!! Jerry Ratliff, Ashton Park Officer, stopped by and showed us how to use the defibrillator that is in the observatory lobby. Even if you do not know how to use the defibrillator, take time to see where it is located in the Observatory lobby. Two most important things to know if there is a medical emergency at Ashton is to call 911 as it is better to have EMS on their way as soon as possible and getting the defibrillator when asked by another member.



April 5<sup>th</sup> begins our Public Viewing Season. We are always in need of volunteers on Saturday evenings. We want to make visitors feel welcome, so greeters are always good to have in the lobby or even outside the front door.

Bruce shared a demonstration of the “lobby program” at the last member meeting that he created for visitors to watch while waiting for a turn in the domes. During our spring-cleaning day, a TV was installed in the lobby to the left of the front door which allows for adequate viewing in the lobby while not interfering with dark skies outside. I know our visitors will appreciate the program for the information about the Observatory and the night sky.

Thank You!!  
JoAnn



**The Des Moines Astronomical Society  
Monthly Members' Meeting Agenda  
April 5, 2025 at 6:30 P.M.  
at Ashton Observatory**

- Call to order – Introductions
- Secretary's Report – Minutes
- Treasurer's Report
- Observatory Director's Report
- Timberline Update
- Committee Reports
  - Photography Class
  - Radio Telescope
- Member comments
- Other Business
  - Globe at Night
  - Drake Observatory Spring Lecture Series
  - Astronomy Day – May 12<sup>th</sup>
- Adjourn
- Next Meeting Date: May 3<sup>rd</sup> at Ashton Observatory



# Observatory Committee Report April 2025

## Greg Woolever, Observatory Director



Vernal Equinox has come and gone, and our 2025 season of activities at Ashton Observatory are about to begin. I hope you will find a way to participate in the fun and adventure of leading our visitors into encounters with the mysteries of the night sky.

The Observatory is ready for our visitors. Spring cleaning volunteers did a great job. And Norm and I have checked accuracy of pointing by the mount in the east dome. That did require a slight tweak of the time on the laptop to make sure it points where objects are located in real time. If you want to see the real sky, you have to know the real time....

We did attempt to have our free giveaway of donated equipment to local astronomy clubs on Saturday, March 22. Unfortunately no one showed up. A follow-up call did confirm at least one group is interested but just forgot to come, so we'll see if we can arrange a time to get together. Any remaining items will be made available at a "yard sale" at a later date.

As you likely noticed, there was a lot of hype about a "planet parade" in January and February. I will present our first classroom program on April 12 on that topic, to clarify the misunderstandings and reveal the truths. I include an image from that program illustrating the relative sizes of the planets as they appeared on February 28 – see below. Everything is governed by actual size and distance. Pretty amazing how big Venus appears right now, as it is at its nearest distance.

We have had good responses from DMAS members for other programs this season. Only two dates are still open for our twice per month schedule!

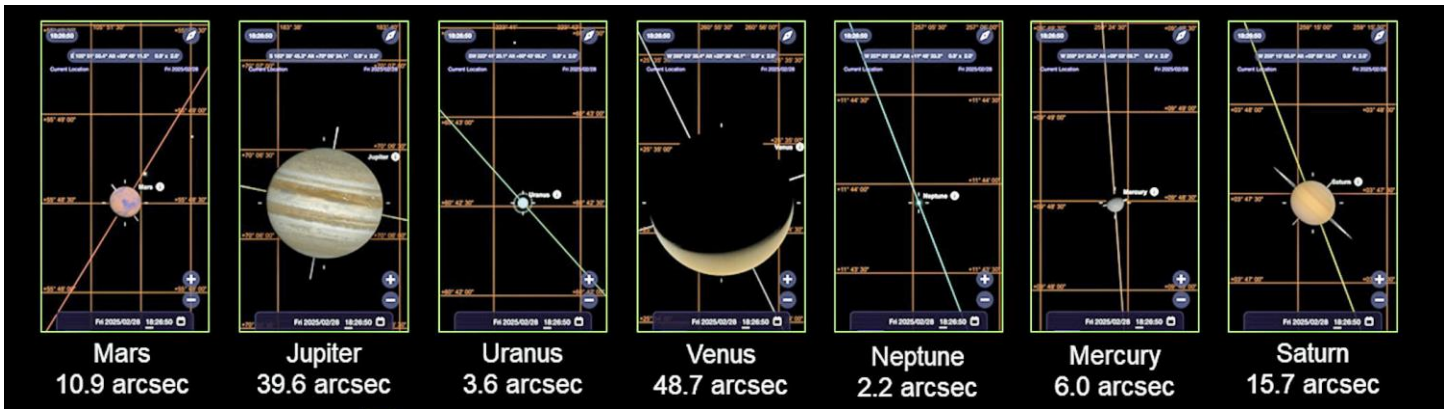
We'll have our first private group in April too, so activities are rolling out.

I also include a sketch of what Venus looked like in the eyepiece as Norm and I tuned up the Paramount mount this past Saturday. Turns out Venus, the only thing we could point at in the daytime, was at inferior conjunction, meaning it was even with the Sun on the ecliptic, although being 8 degrees 27 minutes directly above the Sun. It was amazing that we could have such a strong visual image of Venus then – a VERY thin crescent but still bright against the daylight sky. I promise – we could see it plainly!



Thanks - Greg Woolever & the Observatory Committee: Dave Heck, Norm Van Klompenburg, Jim VandeBerg, Greg Woolever.





Relative sizes of the “planets on parade” on February 28, 2025. Look how big Venus was! (source: Skysafari 7 Pro) – Greg Woolever

## Ashton Spring Clean Up Day a Success!

The annual spring cleaning at Ashton was Saturday, March 15. At noon Park Officer Jerry Ratliff provided training on using the AED device in the Observatory. This is a medical device for providing life-saving help for cardiac emergencies. AED stands for "automatic external defibrillator." It's our hope that as many DMAS members be trained on using the AED as possible.

The cleaning crew:

- Derrick Bennett
- Paul Caligiuri
- JoAnn Cogil
- Cindy Cunningham
- Heather Johnson
- Dave Lynch
- Paul McCuen
- Bruce Mumm
- Cole Skinner
- Jim VandeBerg
- Greg Woolever

(some volunteers had to leave before the picture was taken)





### **NGC 3718, NGC 3729 and Hickson 56 Galaxy Group – Image by DMAS member JR Paulson**

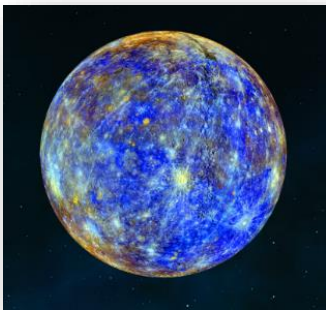
Ursa Major is full of exciting galaxies to see. This image contains a galaxy called NGC3718 (lower center of image) that was likely warped by the smaller barred spiral galaxy NGC3729 (top center of the image). It is found just under the bowl of the big dipper. It shines with an apparent magnitude of 10.5 and is 8.0 x 2.5 arc-minutes in size. It is a very unusual spiral with two rudimentary arms and a very thin dark lane of occluding gas and dust across its central portion. Just to the left of NGC3718 is a chain of distant galaxies commonly known as the Hickson Compact Group 56, or Arp 214. This is a small collection of 5 galaxies, 4 of which are interacting with each other. This group lies much, much farther from us and its about 8 times farther than the NGC3718 and NGC3729 galaxies, which are approximately at a distance of 52 million light years.



## The Night Sky for April 2025

*By JoAnn Cogil*

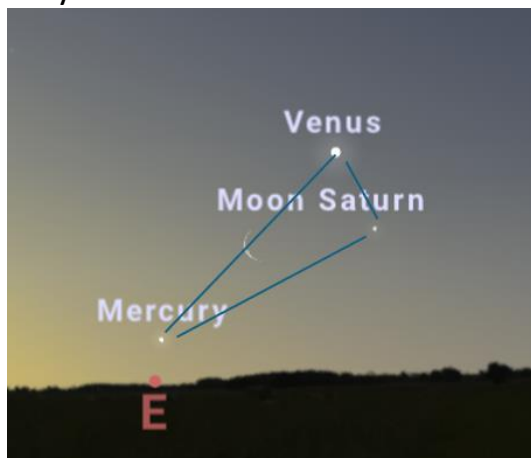
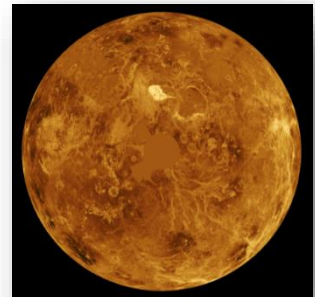
This month looks to be a fairly quiet month as night sky viewing goes. The nights are getting shorter, but thankfully warmer.



**Mercury** – on the 21<sup>st</sup>, Mercury is at its greatest western elongation, which is its highest point above the morning horizon. The little planet starts the month quite dim but will brighten as the days progress.

**Venus** – Our bright neighbor moves to the morning eastern sky. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Venus, Mercury, and Saturn all appear before sunrise, but

Venus will outshine the other two, making it difficult to see Mercury & Saturn. This trio forms a right triangle, but very low on the horizon with the moon in the middle.







**Earth** – April 22<sup>nd</sup> is EARTH DAY, as we recognize the continued need to take care of our beautiful planet.

**Mars** – Is in the evening sky, near Gemini all month. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, we find the red planet with the Moon, Castor & Pollux in the Southern twilight. This is the closest the Moon will be to any planet this month. Mars has moved near M44, the Beehive Cluster by the 30<sup>th</sup>, which provides a fun pairing to be seen.



**Jupiter** – Also in our evening sky but will set about midnight this month. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup>, Jupiter can be found near the Moon.

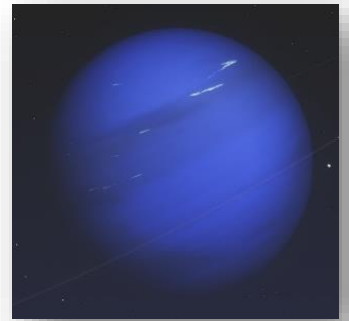
**Saturn** - Has now joined the morning sky. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, Saturn & Mercury will be side by side in the Eastern morning horizon, look just below Venus. Telescope viewing may show a fine shadow of the rings.



**Uranus** – Early this month will be our last chance to see Uranus as it sits between Aries & Taurus. It will then be lost in twilight by the month's end.



**Neptune** – Is quite close to the Sun this month, showing in the eastern morning sky. But if you are looking for a target challenge this month, Neptune is your planet! Venus & Saturn are easier to see near the area of Neptune though.



### April Moon

4<sup>th</sup> – First quarter

12/13 – FULL Moon at 7:22 PM CDT on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

This is a 'micromoon' as the full moon coincides with apogee, when the Moon is farthest from Earth.

20<sup>th</sup> – Last quarter

27<sup>th</sup> – NEW Moon at 2:31 PM

CDT

This month's full moon is called the "Pink Moon" by Native American tribes as it marked the appearance of the moss pink or wild ground phlox, one of the first spring flowers. It is also known as the 'Sprouting Grass Moon', 'Growing Moon' and even 'Fish Moon' for the Shad fish that swim upstream to spawn.

### Meteor Showers

**Lyrids** – runs from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 25<sup>th</sup> this month, with its peak night on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

This is an average meteor shower with about 20 meteors per hour expected. It comes from the dust particles left from the Comet C/1861 G1 Thatcher, which has an orbit of 416 years. It can produce bright dust trails that last several seconds.

Fun fact – this meteor shower has been observed for almost 2,600 years.

### Comet

**C/2022 E2 (ATLAS)** – is just beginning to show this month but will peak for better viewing opportunities in the fall.

**Word – A monthly article by DMAS member Bruce Mumm**

Every specialty has a specific jargon to describe unique conditions in the field; Astronomy is no different.

This month's word is:

Other measures of distance: Last month we defined **Astronomical Unit** for measurements within the solar system. To describe distances outside of the solar system we use different terms like lightyear and parsec.

**Lightyear** – contrary to how it sounds, it is actually a measure of distance; that distance being the distance that light travels in one year. Light travels at a constant speed of 186,000 miles per second or 5.9 trillion miles.

**Parsec** – the distance at which a star would have a parallax of one second (PARallax SECond = parsec). This is also the distance from which the earth's orbit would appear to be one second wide. This equates to a little greater than 3.26 lightyears.

**Member of the Year Award – JR Paulson**

At the member meeting on March 1, the Member of the Year Award was presented to **JR Paulson** in recognition of service and leadership, especially for presenting classroom programs for education about astronomy and for his contributions of inspiring astronomical images. Several other members received recognition for their support and involvement at the observatory.

**2025 Conference**

**April 25th, 26th, and 27th in  
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

We are excited to invite you to the annual NCRAL Convention in Minnetonka, MN! It's a fantastic opportunity to connect with like-minded enthusiasts, share knowledge, and dive into the latest in amateur and professional astronomy. The Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St.

Paul is a great place to visit: <https://www.minneapolis.org/150-things-to-do-in-minneapolis/>. We look forward to seeing you there for a weekend of great talks, camaraderie, and stargazing. Please [register for the conference](#) here.

**Subscribe to the NCRAL newsletter and download archived issues at <https://ncral.wordpress.com/newsletter-archive/>**

**DES MOINES ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY  
PLEASE WELCOME THESE NEW MEMBERS!**

**January – Chris Conmy**

**February – Cindy Cunningham**

**February – Peter Steier**

**February – Teddy Collins (Associate)**

## **Drake Observatory Spring 2025 Lecture Series Schedule**

Visitors can expect an Astronomy lesson followed by stargazing with expert guidance. **Lectures begin at 8 PM**, regardless of weather. **Sky Viewing begins at dark if sky conditions are favorable.** Children 15 and younger must be accompanied by an adult. **Admission is free and open to all!**

April 4<sup>th</sup> Are We There Yet: Measuring Distance in Space

April 11<sup>th</sup> Moons: Worlds Onto Themselves

April 18<sup>th</sup> History of Astrophotography: Recording the Universe

April 25<sup>th</sup> Annie Cannon: Harvard Calculator and Astronomer

May 2<sup>nd</sup> Everything You Always Wanted to Know About \* (But Were Afraid to Ask)

May 9<sup>th</sup> Black Holes: Do They Exist?





## Spring Chili Supper was a Great Celebration!









***Image of the Northern Lights by DMAS member Heather Johnson***

This image features the moonrise over a pressure ridge on Lake Tornetrask in the Scandinavian mountains, approximately 68° north latitude.





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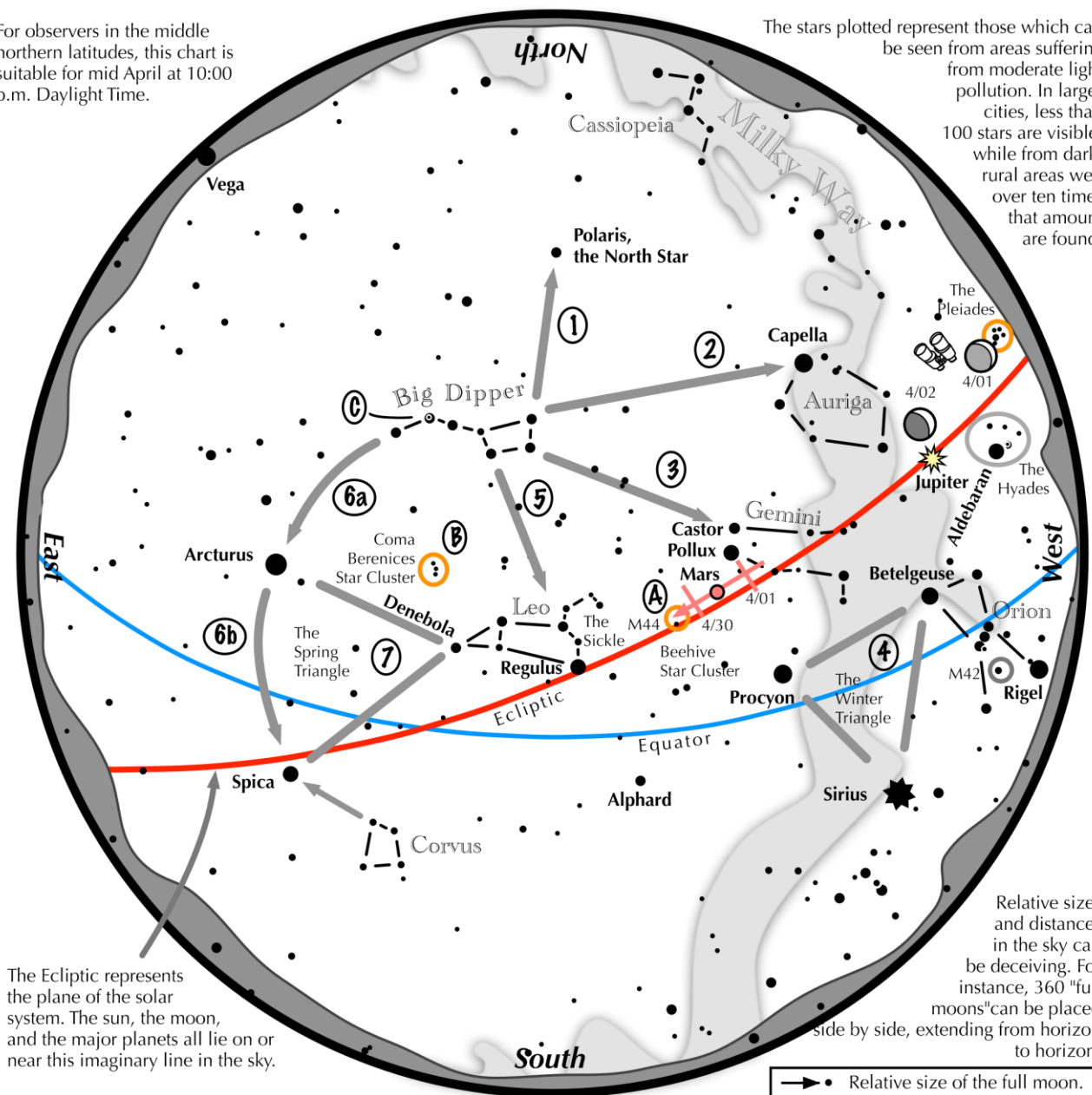
## Image of the Northern Lights by DMAS member Heather Johnson

This incredible photo was from Heather's trip to Abisko, Sweden, which is roughly 200 km north of the Arctic Circle

# Navigating the April Night Sky, Northern Hemisphere

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid April at 10:00 p.m. Daylight Time.

The stars plotted represent those which can be seen from areas suffering from moderate light pollution. In larger cities, less than 100 stars are visible, while from dark, rural areas well over ten times that amount are found.



The Ecliptic represents the plane of the solar system. The sun, the moon, and the major planets all lie on or near this imaginary line in the sky.

Relative sizes and distances in the sky can be deceiving. For instance, 360 "full moons" can be placed side by side, extending from horizon to horizon.

## Navigating the April night sky: Simply start with what you know or with what you can easily find.

- 1 Extend an imaginary line north from the two stars at the tip of the Big Dipper's bowl. It passes Polaris, the North Star.
- 2 Draw another imaginary line west across the top two stars of the Dipper's bowl. It strikes Capella low in the northwest.
- 3 Through the two diagonal stars of the Dipper's bowl, draw a line pointing to the twin stars of Castor and Pollux in Gemini.
- 4 Look in the west-southwest for the bright Winter Triangle stars of Sirius, Procyon, and Betelgeuse.
- 5 Directly below the Dipper's bowl reclines the constellation Leo with its primary star, Regulus.
- 6 Follow the arc of the Dipper's handle. It first intersects Arcturus, then continues to Spica.
- 7 Arcturus, Spica, and Denebola form the Spring Triangle, a large equilateral triangle.

### Binocular Highlights

- A: M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies to the southeast of Pollux.  
 B: Look nearly overhead for the loose star cluster of Coma Berenices.  
 C: In the Big Dipper's handle shines Mizar next to a dimmer star, Alcor.



Astronomical League  
[www.astroleague.org](http://www.astroleague.org)

Duplication allowed and encouraged for all free distribution.



## This Month in DMAS History

*From the StarLight Journal 25 Years Ago, April 2000*

The drawing for the meteorites donated by Kathy Gannon was finally done (this was to be done last month): John Harris, a new DMAS member, won the Gibeon meteorite (iron meteorite becoming more rare and valuable) and Joe Galloway, current member, won the tektite meteorite (controversial, might be from the Moon). Information sheets were presented with both of the meteorites.

*From the StarLight Journal 10 Years Ago, April 2015*

Our March 21, 2015, Messier Marathon turned out to be a very rare opportunity to observe with no clouds all night long. The sunset was at 7:29 p.m. and sunrise was at 7:11 a.m. Nearly 12 hours of dark skies except for certain towns to the south. The evening started with nice views of Venus and Jupiter. A very beautiful 39 hour old moon was just setting, beautifully leading Venus toward the western horizon. What a picture! We enjoyed above freezing temps and little wind. Plenty of time to look for the “not-comets” or fuzzy patches of stars that French Astronomer and comet hunter Charles Messier-(1730-1817) listed and dismissed as of little interest.

Ten members of DMAS - Norm Van Klompenburg, Doug Rudd, Dave Lynch, Larry Musselman, Paul McCune, Kent Hayek, Jan Winter, Terry Haimann, and Joyce and Vern Naffier - came out to try to concentrate on finding as many Messier objects as they could. Some used binoculars while others used telescopes. Maps, computers and other tools helped us find our way. Each of us was keeping our own records of Messier objects that we saw.

Some of those present were experienced Messier hunters. By 11:00 p.m. they already had a growing list of finds and were into the Virgo Clusters where they found about 20 Messier objects without any hesitation.

Some of us less experienced checked our maps and were saying “And which constellation is that again?” “Uhh, let me check,” and having a good time doing it. We were having a little problem with some of the dimmer objects because of some haziness, which made them difficult to see. In addition to this DMAS 10, three unexpected guests came and were given a personal tour of the night sky by Norm.

## Astronomical League

### Explore these Rewarding and Educational Observing Programs

The **Astronomical League** is an umbrella organization of amateur astronomy societies. Currently their membership consists of over 330 organizations across the United States, including the **Des Moines Astronomical Society**.



### Your 2025 Des Moines Astronomical Society Officers, Directors & Observatory Committee

**President:** JoAnn Cogil  
**Vice-President:** Pat Meade  
**Secretary/ALCor:** Jim VandeBerg  
**Treasurer:** Bruce Mumm

**Observatory Director:** Greg Woolever  
**At Large Director:** Norm Van Klompenburg  
**At Large Director:** Jessica Weinreich  
**At Large Director:** Dave Bailey

**Observatory Committee:** Greg Woolever, Norm  
Van Klompenburg, Dave Heck, and Jim  
VandeBerg

**Contact us at:** [info@DMastronomy.com](mailto:info@DMastronomy.com)

The *Starlight Journal* is the monthly newsletter of the **Des Moines Astronomical Society, Inc.** P.O. Box 111, Des Moines Iowa 50301-0111. Our Observatory is located in Ashton Wildwood Park, 8717 West 122nd Street North. Founded in 1970, we are a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization. Our website is [DMastronomy.com](http://DMastronomy.com). More information and photos can be found on our Facebook page.

**Article Deadline:** Before the 21<sup>st</sup> of the month, please send your articles, photos, sketches, poems, cartoons, and news to Jim VandeBerg ([FinePineCabin@gmail.com](mailto:FinePineCabin@gmail.com)). Articles may be edited to fit the allotted newsletter space. Copyrighted material must have permission from the copyright holder. Views and opinions expressed within submissions are that of the author and not necessarily those of the Des Moines Astronomical Society, Inc.

### The Purpose of our Society

- Secure the pleasure and benefits of an association of persons interested in amateur astronomy
- Promote the science of astronomy
- Encourage and promote activities of an astronomical nature
- Foster observational, computational, technical, and creative skills in various fields of astronomy
- Pursue activities with other amateurs and professionals
- Educate the public

Des Moines Astronomical Society  
PO BOX 111  
Des Moines, Iowa 50301

