

# STARLIGHT JOURNAL

## FEBRUARY 2026



**Image by DMAS member Heather Johnson**

I took advantage of the clear skies last night (January 11, 2026) at Nine Eagles State Park near Lamoni. This was 2 hours of data.

### **SAVE THESE DATES NOW!**

Saturday, January 31 – Renew Your Membership (see the renewal form, page 14)  
Saturday, February 7 – Board of Directors Meeting at Drake Observatory 5:30 p.m.  
Saturday, February 7 – Monthly Member Meeting at Drake Observatory 6:30 p.m.  
Saturday, March 7 – Annual Chili Supper at Ashton Observatory 6:00 p.m.  
Saturday, March 7 – Monthly Member Meeting at 7:00 p.m.  
May 15-17 North Central Region Astronomical League conference Cedar Rapids

## February 2026 – President's Report

To all our newest members of 2025, welcome to DMAS!! We hope you find value as you join with club activities, whether club meetings, club special events like our upcoming chili supper in March or spending time with other club members. Does not matter how much or how little you know about astronomy, chatting with other members is always rewarding.

I encourage all members to join us on Saturday evenings for our Public Viewing Season that begins in April. So, you don't know the answer to a visitor's question, no worries, there is always a member who will have the answer. And that is how I learned more, in listening to members answer questions or their sharing of general astronomy information with our visitors. And I still ask questions today!

Did you know that even members can join us in the domes on public evenings to enjoy the views of night sky objects in the telescopes? The dome on Saturdays is not only for visitors, but also for members. Hope to see you there!

At our February membership meeting, we will list the priorities for 2026 as suggested by members. Voting on the items on the priority list will take place at the end of our meeting and the results will be shared in our next newsletter and March meeting. You can still offer your suggestions at the February meeting to be added to the list.

Last year's priorities included a slideshow for visitors waiting for a turn in the domes, electronic assisted astronomy (in the south dome), how to operate telescopes for public nights, work to fulfill all public lecture nights, members-only night for observing,

book club, astrophotography classes, and encouraging members to have their scopes in the yard on public nights. We focused on the top-voted items: the slideshow in the lobby, which was completed with appreciation to Bruce Mumm for creating these, continued progress of the south dome electronic assisted astronomy, all public lecture night slots were filled, and Heather Johnson provided a class on astrophotography with camera only to members. We had hoped for a member-only viewing night at Ashton, but the weather never seemed to cooperate. A book club never materialized due to low interest. We did have 2 club members who began learning how to run the scopes in both the east and west domes. If you are interested in helping in the domes, please contact Greg Woolever, our Observatory Director. You can also join us on any Saturday evening and let us know you would like to learn and help!

The Annual NCRAL (North Central Regional Astronomical League) 2026 Convention will be held May 15-17 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. To facilitate more DMAS members attending the conference this year, members voted to close Ashton Observatory that weekend. This is a wonderful opportunity to join other astronomers from surrounding states. Registration information will be shared as we receive it from NCRAL.

- JoAnn Cogil



DMAS

**The Des Moines Astronomical Society**  
**Monthly Members' Meeting**  
**February 7th, at 6:30 P.M.**  
**at Drake Municipal Observatory**

- Call to Order – Introductions
- Secretary's Report – January meeting minutes (printed in February Starlight Journal)
- Treasurer's Report
- Observatory Director's Report
- Timberline Report
- Committee Report
- Member Comments
- Other Business
  - Priorities for 2026 – offer suggestions with voting at the end of the meeting
- Dean Regas – Zoom presentation
  - March 11<sup>th</sup> – Comets & Meteors
- NCRAL 2026 Conference
  - May 15-17
  - in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
  - *Ashton Observatory will be closed this weekend as approved by membership*
- Nebraska Star Party
  - July 12 – 17
- ALCON 2026 Cincinnati
  - August 12-15
- Adjourn
- Next Membership Meeting Date: March 7th at Ashton Observatory
  - Chili Supper at 6:00 PM
  - Membership meeting at 7:00 PM
- Reminder – The modern bathrooms in the Park will not be open for use!



The Des Moines Astronomical Society  
**Board of Directors Meeting Agenda**  
February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026, at 5:30 P.M.  
at Drake Observatory

- Call to order
- Secretary's Report – September 2025 Meeting Minutes (published in October 2025 Starlight Journal)
- Treasurer's Report
- Observatory Director's Report
  - East Dome Telescope replacement
- Timberline Update
- Other Business
- Adjourn



**Reminder: It is time to renew your 2026 membership! The membership renewal form is available on page 14 of this newsletter. Thank you!!**

# Observatory Committee Report

## February, 2026, Greg Woolever, Observatory Director

Deep freeze seems to be the nature of things as I write. And clouds are also the dominant reality most days it seems, although the recent damaging snow and ice storms marching across the south and east have not afflicted us — so far. All of that makes it difficult to go outside, or to set up telescopes, but we are patient, and conditions will of course change, eventually, to be more accommodating.

As was presented at our January meeting at Drake Observatory, it is time to fill out the schedule for classroom presentations for the 2026 season at Ashton. We will continue with our plan of a classroom program on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month. Please let me know if you are willing to present a program this season. Or if you have suggestions for topics or guest speakers, let me know that. We strive to keep length under an hour, presenting between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m. Topics can be basic — our audiences are mostly not experts about astronomy. More technical

content is also valuable if that is your offering. Email me here: [gregwoolever@yahoo.com](mailto:gregwoolever@yahoo.com) .

April through October is seven months, so that's 14 programs for the season. Our visitors look forward to all of them!

Work continues on defining an order for a PlaneWave telescope to replace the existing scope in the east dome. The PlaneWave equipment is advanced, and configuring for current visual operation while also optimizing opportunities for future performance is not a simple matter, and the group working on all that is busy with the challenges. It will come.



Greg Woolever & the Observatory

Committee: Dave Heck,  
Norm Van Klompenburg,  
Jim VandeBerg, JoAnn Cogill,  
Greg Woolever.

# The Night Sky for February 2026

By JoAnn Cogil

From a recent Astronomical League FB post → *You know you're a Deep Sky Observer when .... from Steve Boerner, an Astronomical League Master Observer – “Others say you always look up when you walk out of a building.”*

I know I do this, do you?



**Mercury** - begins to show again as it moves away from the Sun this month. On the 18<sup>th</sup> it will be near the Moon, low in the west, at about 6 PM CST. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, it reaches its greatest elongation which is its furthest distance from the Sun. It is this action that allows it to be visible to us on Earth.

**Venus** – has left our morning skies and is slowly returning as our ‘evening star’ as it is now low in the western sky at sunset but very near the Sun. Viewing of the evening star improves in March.

**Earth** – Fun fact: If the Sun were as tall as a typical front door, Earth would be the size of a nickel and Earth would be about the size of an average sunspot.

**Mars** – remains lost in the Sun’s glare this month and should reappear in our morning sky in a couple months. Mars has a once every 26-month opposition which means it has alternating good and bad years for viewing, with 2026 being a not so good year.

**Jupiter** – is visible all night, will be near the Moon this month and you will find both in the constellation Gemini the Twins. Jupiter has a rotational period of just 10 hours, compared to Earth’s 24 hours. This is fast for something so big!

**Saturn** – sets after the Sun in the western sky, with best views early in the month. It is heading for a solar conjunction in late March

**Uranus** – On the 2<sup>nd</sup> it ends its retrograde motion. It stays close to the Pleiades this month and the Moon joins the group on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Neptune** – still traveling the sky near Saturn but is only about 1/525 as bright as Saturn.

## Planetary Alignment

This month, the planets put on a show with a planetary alignment forecasted for the 28<sup>th</sup>. All planets are in the sky, but some nights they have moved closer together which creates the ‘alignment’ event. The planets follow an arc across the sky, known as the *ecliptic*, which is a path the Sun, Moon and planets travel as they move across our sky. This occurs because the

planets orbit our Sun in a relatively flat, disc-shaped plane, which is the ecliptic line across the sky. This alignment provides an opportunity to observe multiple planets simultaneously with the naked eye.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> at sunset low in the west, we see Venus, Mercury and Saturn with our eyes. Neptune is near to Saturn but requires a telescope to be seen. Jupiter and Uranus follow behind with Jupiter still in Gemini and Uranus sitting between Jupiter and Saturn along the ecliptic. Uranus also requires a telescope to see. Mars sets before the Sun early in the evening, so it is not visible.



“Planetary alignment” on 2/28/2025 at 6:45 PM CST

*Image credit: Stellarium*

### Moon

**1<sup>st</sup> – FULL** moon at 4:09 PM CST

**9<sup>th</sup>** – last quarter

**17<sup>th</sup> – NEW** moon at 6:01 AM CST

**24<sup>th</sup>** – first quarter

This month's full moon is known as the *Snow Moon* for the typical heavy snowfall that occurs in February. It is also called the Hunger Moon, Raccoon Moon and Wolf Moon.

Some years February does not have a full moon, and this happens about once every 19 years. The last time that happened was in 2018 with the next time February won't have a full moon expected in 2037. Some call the month without a moon a 'Black Moon' month.

### Comet Watch

*Comet C/2024 E1 (Wierzchos)* – reached perihelion in January 2026 when it was at its closest point to the Sun. February 17<sup>th</sup> is the day of its closest approach to Earth when it will be about 94 million miles away. Look for it low at the southwest horizon about 1 hour after sunset.

It currently has a magnitude of about 8 but is expected to reach peak brightness this month with a magnitude of 5 which may make a good binocular target.

It comes from the Oort Cloud and took millions of years to get near us. Scientists think that as it leaves it possibly won't be back.

## Educational Opportunities

Dean Regas is an astronomer, public speaker, author, and podcaster who brings the complicated universe down to Earth for audiences of all ages.

Dean is an honorary member of the Des Moines Astronomical Society.

He is also the host of the "Looking UP" podcast

Visit Dean at his astronomy website: <https://astrodean.com/>



### Free Online Zoom Classes in 2026 with Astronomer Dean Regas

Feb 11: Life and Times of Galileo

Mar 11: Comets and Meteors

Apr 7: Top 10 Things to See in the Night Sky

May 5: It's About Time - How We Use the Sky

June 2: Webb and Rubin Telescope Updates

July 7: Along the Milky Way

Aug: TBD (depending on the itinerary of my eclipse trip)

Sep 1: Ancient Greek Astronomy

Oct 6: Monsters in the Sky - Constellations of Fall

Nov 3: Life and Death of Stars

Dec 1: Exoplanets News



## 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**.



## This Month in DMAS History

*From the StarLight Journal 25 Years Ago, February 2001*

There are no StarLight Journals in the online archives for January through June of 2001.

*From the StarLight Journal 10 Years Ago, February 2016*

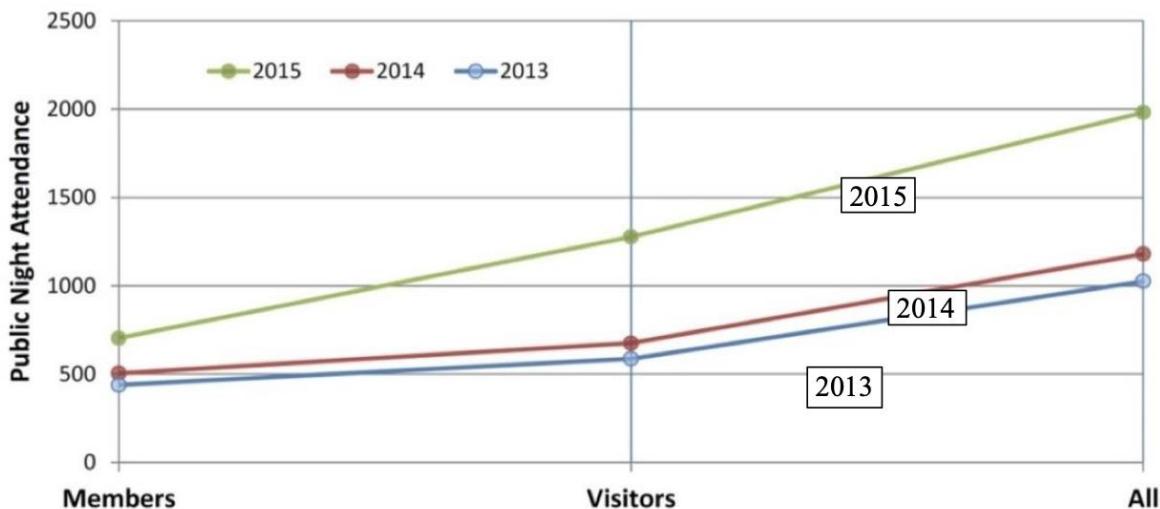
Observatory Attendance at Ashton in 2015 was nearly 50% higher than 2014. This includes both Saturday public nights and private groups signing in at Ashton. DMAS member attendance was also up nearly 30%. Total combined attendance was 1981. This is based on names recorded on the sign-in sheets at Ashton. Actual numbers are probably higher as not everyone signs in.

While 2015 had one extra public night compared to 2014, private group activity was nearly double what was scheduled in 2014, at 29 private events.

Our sign-in sheets also record what visitors say about how they learned about our events. This optional column shows the highest factors were (1) friend/family/neighbor, (2) internet/website/Google/Facebook, (3) school/teacher, (4) Scouting groups, and (5) connections through the Ashton park/campground. These explanations represent 75% of the reasons reported. All of this seems to indicate a growing enthusiasm in the public for science and astronomy as we offer it under a dark night sky.

Here is a chart displaying attendance for 2013 through 2015:

**Ashton Attendance**



## TOTAL LUNAR ECLIPSE

### MARCH 3, 2026

In the very wee hours of the morning central Iowa will have the opportunity to see and photograph a Total Lunar Eclipse. It has been described in early publications as a Blood Moon. However, due to the hours and position of the setting moon a clear and unobstructed view of the south and west will be essential. The moon sets just minutes after maximum totality.



– DMAS member David Lynch

Moon Rise-----6:39 AM March 2nd  
 1st Contact Penumbra-----2:44 AM  
 1st Contact Umbra-----3:51 AM  
 Start of Totality-----5:04 AM  
 Maximum Totality-----5:34 AM  
 Moon Sets-----5:39 AM

Dear Observatory Family,

The Drake Municipal Observatory will be open Friday, February 20th starting at 7:30 p.m. If you are in town and not too busy, you are cordially invited to a warm astronomical evening (indoors if not out). Tell your friends and family, and as usual it is free and open to all. Of course, we will warn you if the road is impassable.

All the best,  
Herb Folsom





## The Des Moines Astronomical Society, Inc. Member Application/Renewal Form

PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY

**Renewal memberships are due by January 31.**

Prorated dues are only eligible to new members.

Check one: [ ]New member [ ]Renewal

NAME(S): \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

### Privacy

None of your contact information is ever shared with the public. You may also restrict it from being shared with fellow members on the member roster if you wish. Check which items you want to keep private:

[ ]Address [ ]Phone [ ]Email [ ] Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

### Monthly Newsletter Delivery

There are two ways to receive the newsletter – please check one.

[ ] Email – recommended (link to PDF file sent by email; copy also available on DMAS website).

[ ] Postal delivery (requires printing & postage expenses, plus time by editor).

#### DMAS Annual Dues Rates - check one.

Type	Votes	Dues
Individual (18 & up):	1.....	\$40.00[ ]
Family:	2.....	\$60.00[ ]
Associate:	0.....	\$21.00[ ]
Lifetime individual	1.....	\$500.00[ ]
Lifetime family:	2.....	\$600.00[ ]

#### New Member Prorated Dues Amounts - check one.

Date	Individual	Family	Associate
Jan-Jun	\$40.00[ ]	\$60.00[ ]	\$21.00[ ]
Jul-Dec	\$20.00[ ]	\$30.00[ ]	\$10.00[ ]

#### My Payment This Year.

Dues: ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Optional donation: ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total: ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Your payments to DMAS are tax deductible. Thank you!

Fill out this form and return it with your payment to start your member privileges. Make check payable to: DMAS

Mailing address:

Des Moines Astronomical Society PO Box 111  
Des Moines IA, 50301

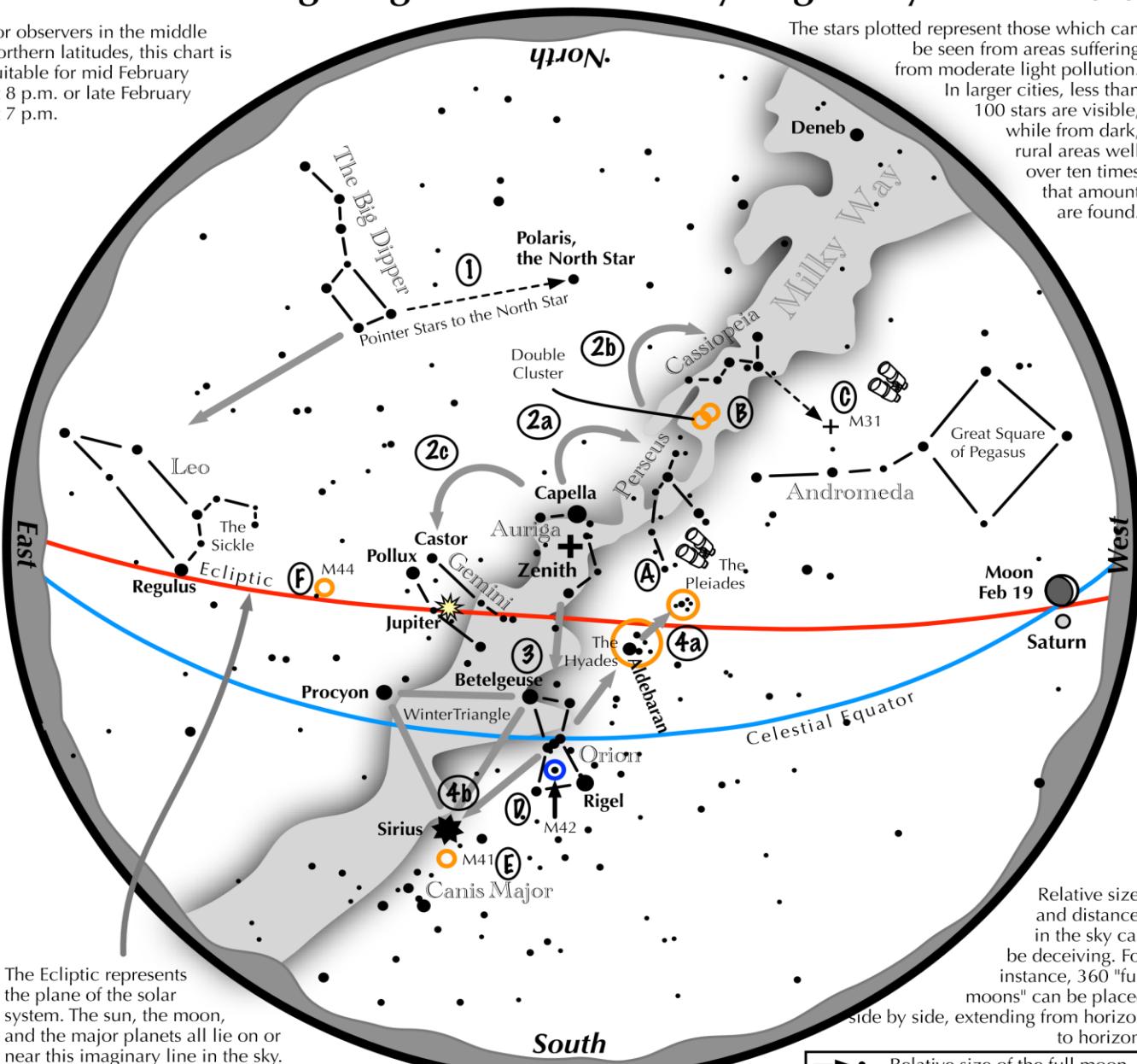
Alternate delivery of membership form:  
email to [info@dmastronomy.com](mailto:info@dmastronomy.com)

# Navigating the mid February Night Sky

2026

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid February at 8 p.m. or late February at 7 p.m.

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.



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

- 1 Above the northeast horizon rises the Big Dipper. Draw a line from its two end bowl stars upwards to the North Star.
- 2 Face south. Overhead twinkles the bright star Capella in Auriga. Jump northwestward along the Milky Way first to Perseus, then to the "W" of Cassiopeia. Next jump southeastward from Capella to the twin stars of Castor and Pollux in Gemini.
- 3 Directly south of Capella stands the constellation of Orion with its three Belt stars, its bright red star Betelgeuse, and its bright blue-white star Rigel.
- 4 Use Orion's three Belt stars to point northwest to the red star Aldebaran and the Hyades star cluster, then to the Pleiades star cluster. Travel southeast from the Belt stars to the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius, a member of the Winter Triangle.

### Binocular Highlights

A: Examine the stars of two naked eye star clusters, the Pleiades and the Hyades.  
 B: Between the "W" of Cassiopeia and Perseus lies the Double Cluster.  
 C: The three westernmost stars of Cassiopeia's "W" point south to M31, the Andromeda Galaxy, a "fuzzy" oval.  
 D: M42 in Orion is a star forming nebula. E: Look south of Sirius for the star cluster M41. F: M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies southeast of Pollux.



Astronomical League [www.astroleague.org/outreach](http://www.astroleague.org/outreach); duplication is allowed and encouraged for all free distribution.



## Our 2026 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**

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, 8755 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) 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 those 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

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