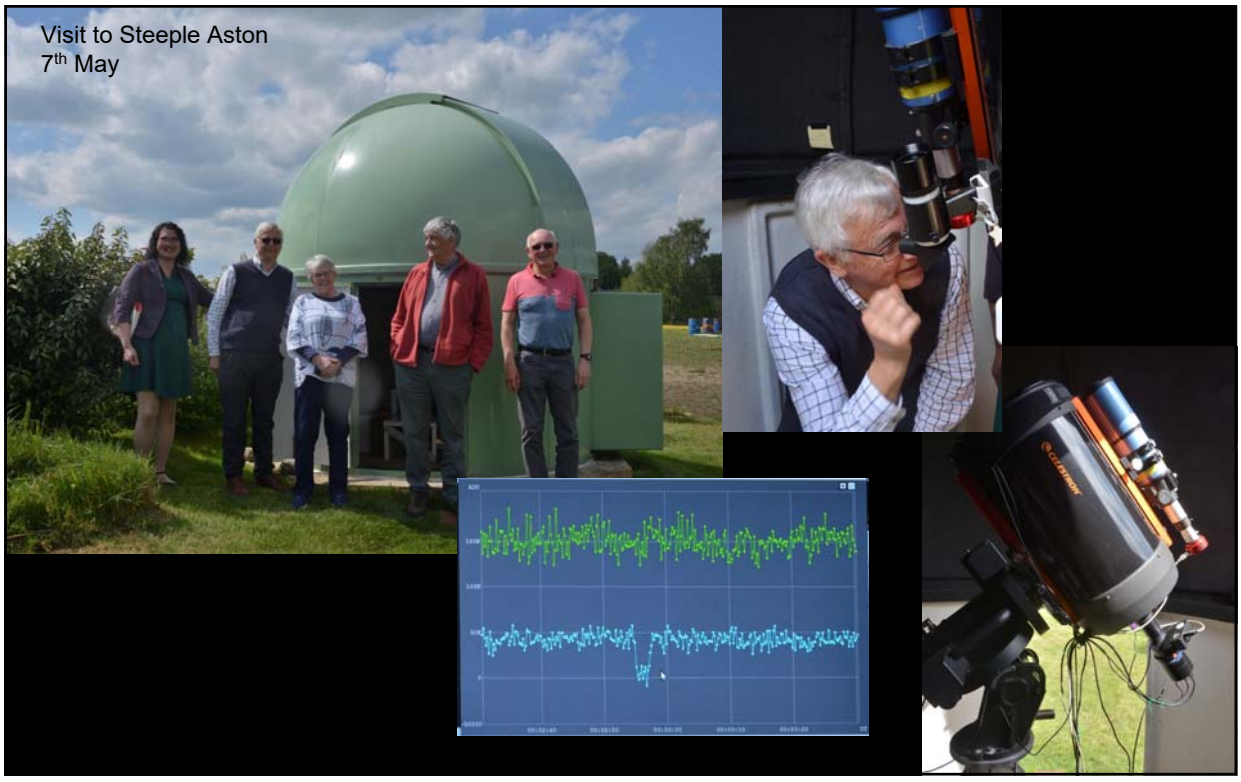
Marcham ASTRONOMY

13th May 2026



Steeple Aston
7th May © Simon Blackmore

Steeple Aston
7th May

Tea and cake with Vaughan and Lorraine
– Thank-you!

Big Marcham Weekend 2026 - 9th May

Tonight: Year 4 - Meeting No 33

- The sky tonight
- Recent news, sightings and Members' Matter
- Feature: *"Challenges, Triumphs and Disasters"*
  – Dr Eric Dunford
- Forward look

The sky tonight (22:30)**:** stellarium-web.org

The sky tonight (22:30)**:** stellarium-web.org

In the news…

Sculpture floats above Earth and dances on the edge of space

A collective of artists, scientists and engineers sent a mannequin wrapped in silk to the upper atmosphere to create an eerily beautiful work of art

Kaya Burgess, Science Correspondent

Thursday April 16 2026, 5.01pm, The Times

A Canadian collective of artists, scientists and engineers known as the Dorothy Project, created a lightweight mannequin and wrapped it in bright blue Italian silk.

Using a weather balloon made of biodegradable latex, which measured 2m across at ground level but expanded to many times this size as it ascended into the sky, the team filled it with hydrogen and affixed the sculpture, a radio transmitter and GPS tracker, and an Insta360 camera.

The balloon reached an altitude of 20.5 miles, a third of the way to space, which is commonly agreed to begin at about 60 miles.

"By superimposing this ghostly silhouette onto the planet, our only habitat, and the infinite blackness of space, we create an image that transcends aesthetics and invites reflection on our place in the universe.
"This dizzying contrast between the ephemeral nature of the body and the Earth, the result of 3.5 billion years of evolution, reminds us of our cosmic insignificance as well as our collective responsibility toward living beings."

An artist's impression of Voyager 1 in interstellar space

NASA/JPL-CALTECH

Nasa shuts down Voyager 1 instrument in effort to extend life of probe

The space agency is also preparing for an ambitious manoeuvre it is calling the 'Big Bang' to keep the craft, launched in 1977, running into the future

Rhys Blakely, Science Editor

Tuesday April 21 2026, 3.48pm, The Times

Nasa has been forced to switch off an instrument on humanity's most distant spacecraft, Voyager 1, after an unexpected dip in power raised the risk of a wider shutdown.

Engineers believe the move will buy the probe, which was launched in 1977 and is now travelling through interstellar space more than 15.7 billion miles from Earth, at least another year of operation.

They hope to use that time to prepare for a far more ambitious and risky power-saving manoeuvre they are calling the "Big Bang".

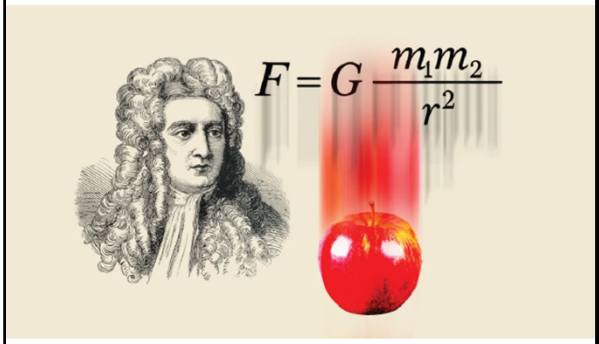
That Voyager 1 and its sister craft Voyager 2 are still operating is considered a scientific marvel. They were built in the age of cassette tapes at a time when the Ford Cortina was Britain's bestselling car. Their computers have less memory than a modern car's key fob.

Between 1979 and 1981, they captured the first close-up images of Jupiter and Saturn, revealing the planets' turbulent atmospheres and intricate ring systems in unprecedented detail.

In 1986 and 1989, Voyager 2 went on to capture our first, and still only, close-up views of Uranus and Neptune. Since then, they have become the first human-made objects to travel beyond the influence of the sun into the interstellar void.

The elusive 'big G': why we still cannot measure gravity

A decade-long experiment has failed to pin down the fundamental constant that holds everything together, hinting at gaps in our understanding of the universe



Isaac Newton published his law of universal gravitation in 1687 but scientists have yet to pin down the constant (G)

Rhys Blakely, Science Editor

Sunday April 26 2026, 7.05pm, The Times

The latest effort to measure the strength of gravity has ended much as it began: with the force that holds the universe together still eluding scientists.

For ten years, a team led by Stephan Schlamminger of the USA National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) sought to measure the value of the gravitational constant, a property known as "big G".

G is the number that tells you how strongly objects attract one another. It governs both the fall of an apple and the motion of galaxies.

Yet, after more than two centuries of measurement attempts, scientists are still arguing over its exact value. Other fundamental constants are known to many decimal places, but big G refuses to settle down. Different experiments have consistently returned slightly different answers.

The latest NIST experiments give a value for G of 6.67387 × 10^{-11} cubic metres per kilogram per second squared. This differs from earlier French measurements by 0.02%. It is the least well known of the constants that underpin physics.

Galileo's view of the universe, yours for €12m

A luxury home in Florence where the father of astronomy observed the heavens is for sale as Italy's flat-tax regime lures foreign millionaires

Tom Kington, Rome

Tuesday April 28 2026, 6.35pm, The Times

Four centuries later, the building is a luxury five-bedroom house up for sale at €12.5 million. The 642 sq m house offers a gym, split-level kitchen and private lift after its American owner put it on the market. "There is also a large garden, something of a rarity in Florence," said the estate agent selling the property.

Make Pluto a planet again: Nasa chief's big mission

Many experts have long scoffed at its 2006 reclassification as a dwarf planet. Now Jared Isaacman, spurred on by a ten-year-old girl, wants to challenge the ruling

A seminal image taken of Pluto by the New Horizons probe in 2015

AP

Jacqui Goddard, Miami

Tuesday May 05 2026, 12.00pm, The Times

When Nasa's New Horizons probe swept past Pluto in 2015, it captured thousands of images that transformed astronomers' view from a faint point of light in telescopes to a richly detailed landscape.

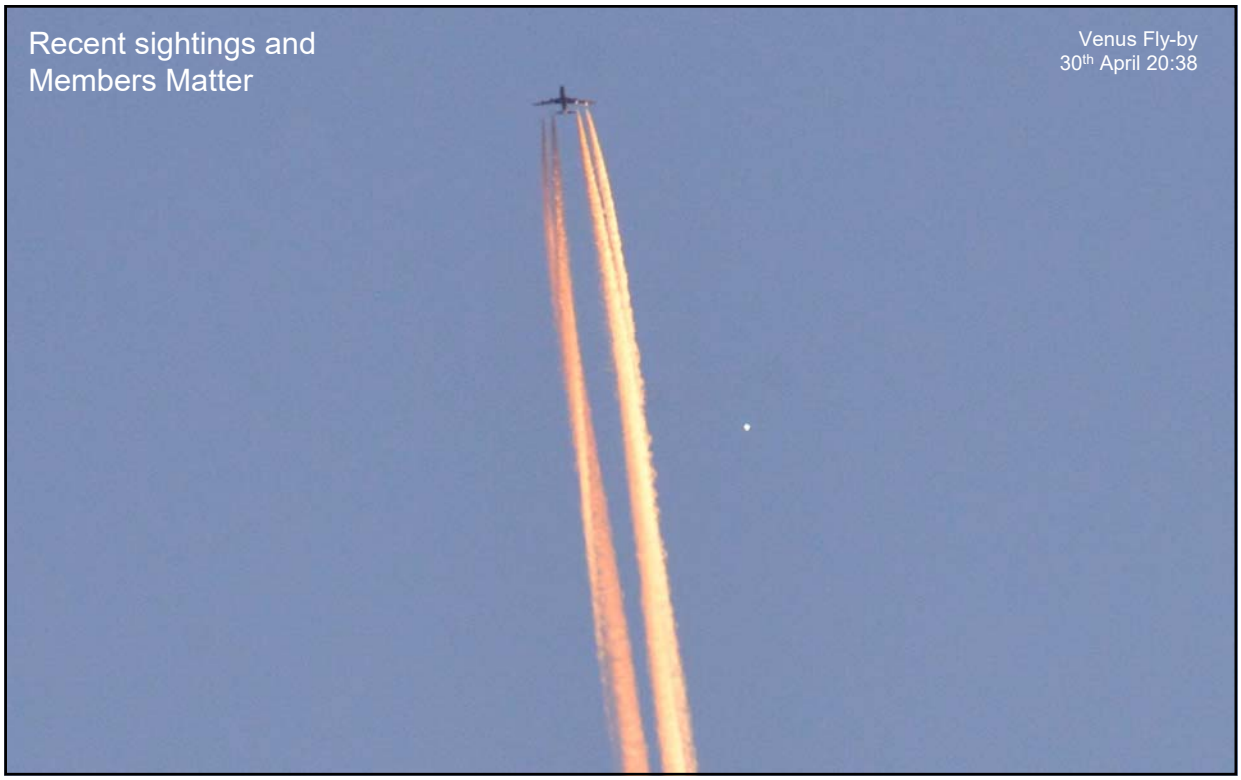
Nine years earlier a committee of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) — the largest professional body for astronomers — had voted on the definition of a planet, agreeing three criteria that a cosmic object must meet to be classified as one. Pluto made only two and lost its planetary status, driving 20 years of scientific controversy since.

The head of Nasa, Jared Isaacman, has declared that the space agency is working on settling the contention in Pluto's favour once and for all.

Alan Stern (New Horizons Principal Investigator) said: "No one ever heard of the IAU until they did this vote … they derive power from this keeping on coming up, but it's a settled matter. "I'm only half joking when I sometimes say IAU stands for Irrelevant Astronomical Union. What the IAU did in 2006 is an anomaly … Pluto is a planet."

Recent sightings and Members Matter

Venus Fly-by
30th April 20:38




Sun Dog
12th April 18:37

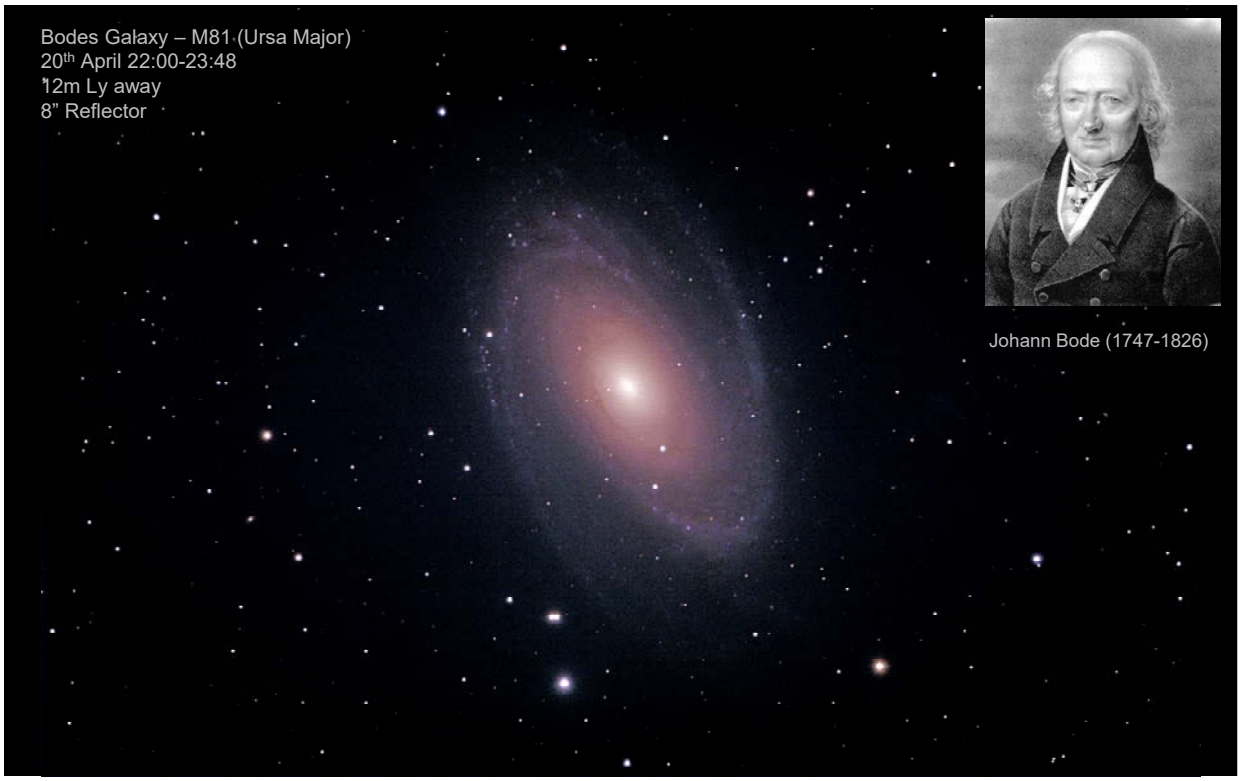

Sun Dog
12th April 18:37


Crescent Moon
20th April 20:26

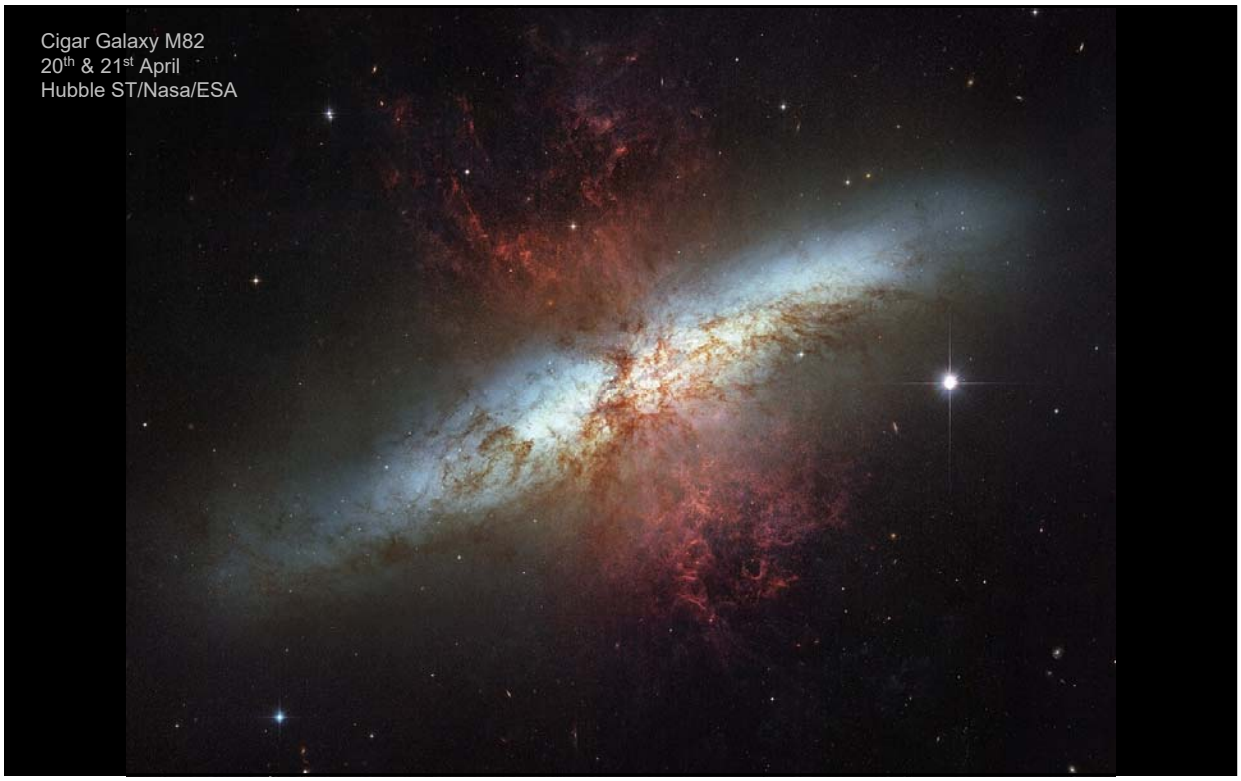

Crescent Moon and Pleiades
20th April 21:23

Mike Greig – 20th April
Moon, Pleiades, Hyades…and a horse
'At the other end of the technology spectrum'

Bodes and Cigar Galaxies in Ursa Major
20th & 21st April


Bodes Galaxy – M81 (Ursa Major)
20th April 22:00-23:48
12m Ly away
8” Reflector
Johann Bode (1747-1826)

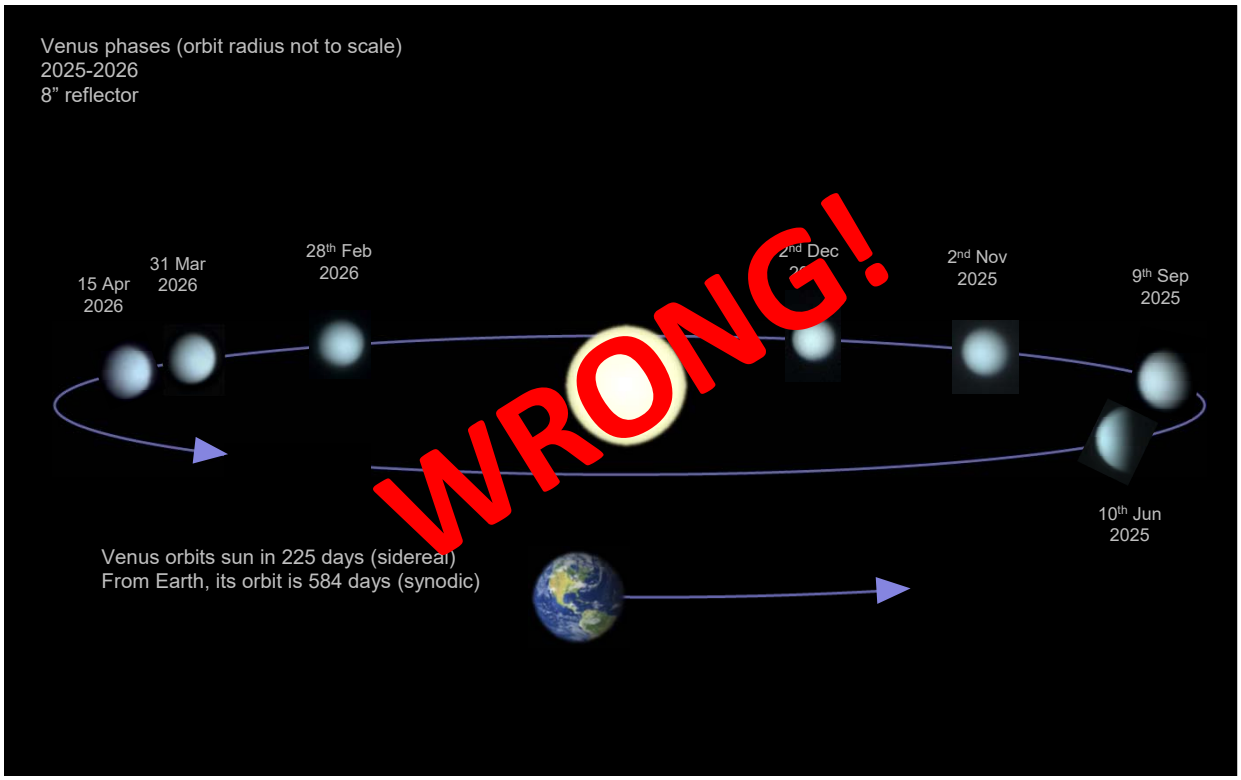

Cigar Galaxy – M82 (Ursa Major)
21st April 21:43-23:53
12m Ly

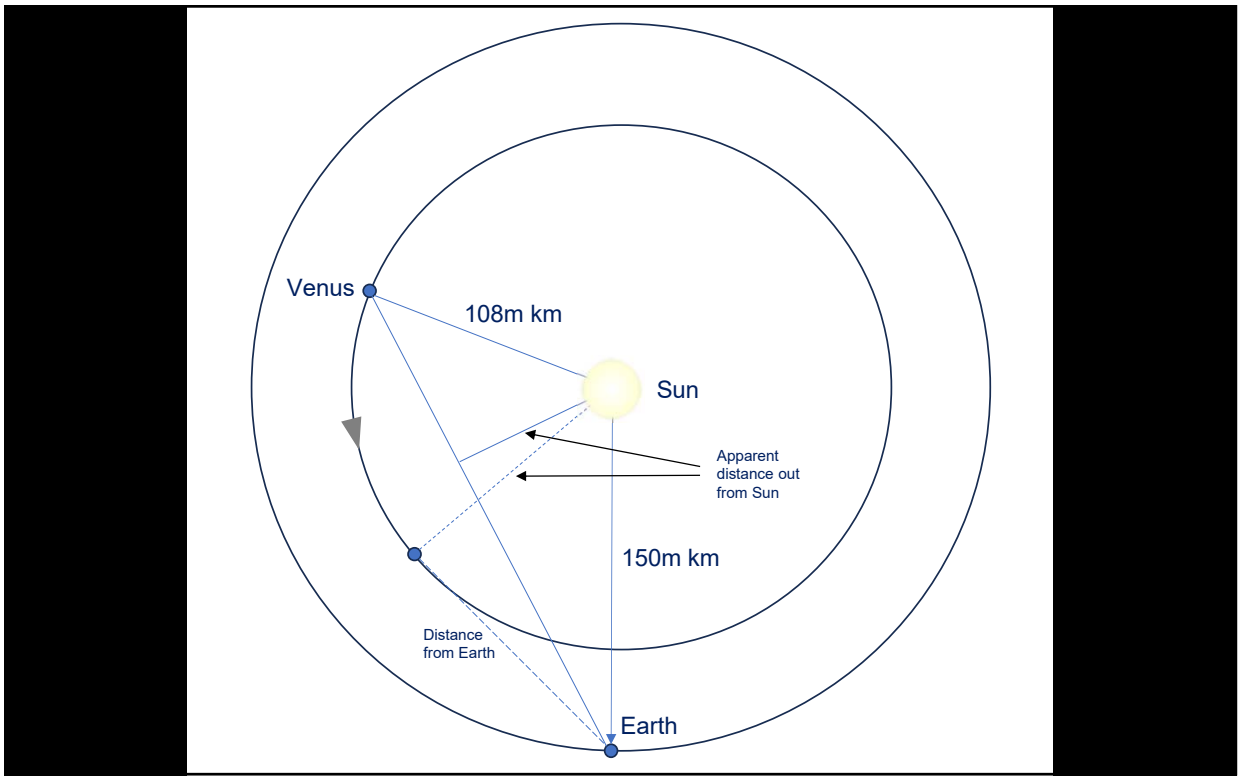

Cigar Galaxy M82
20th & 21st April
Hubble ST/Nasa/ESA

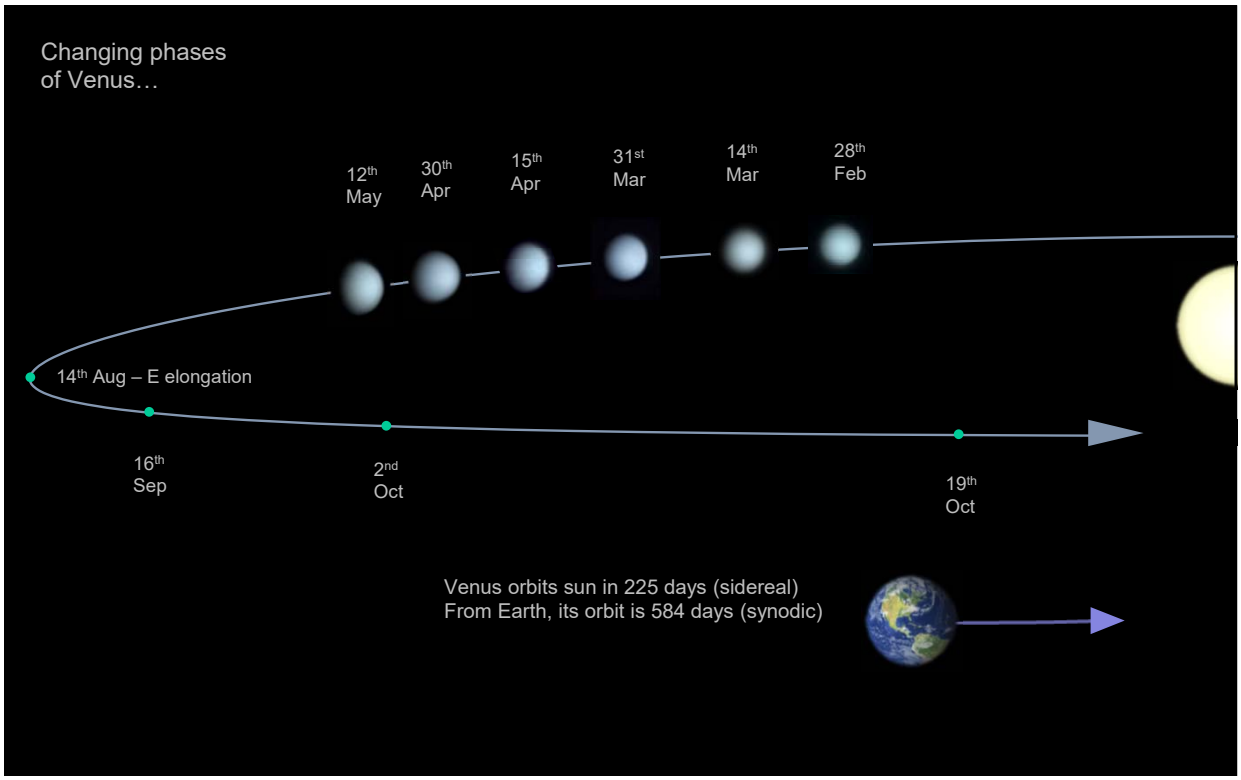

Butterfly Galaxies NGC4567,4568
and NGC4564
19th April ~01:00
60m Ly (Virgo)


Venus, Uranus and the Pleiades
23rd April 21:50
Uranus


Venus, Uranus and the Pleiades
24th April 21:49
Uranus


Venus phases (orbit radius not to scale)
2025-2026
8" reflector
15 Apr 2026
31 Mar 2026
28th Feb 2026
2nd Nov 2025
9th Sep 2025
10th Jun 2025
WRONG!
Venus orbits sun in 225 days (sidereal)
From Earth, its orbit is 584 days (synodic)


Venus
108m km
Sun
Apparent distance out from Sun
150m km
Distance from Earth
Earth


Changing phases
of Venus…
12th May
30th Apr
15th Apr
31st Mar
14th Mar
28th Feb
14th Aug – E elongation
16th Sep
2nd Oct
19th Oct
Venus orbits sun in 225 days (sidereal)
From Earth, its orbit is 584 days (synodic)


Glimpses of
Mercury...in IR
25th Apr
11:58
30th Apr
09:24


Simon Blackmore
Moon and Venus – 21st April 2026 21:40
Pollux
Jupiter
AURIGA
Moon
Alhena
Elnath
ORION
TAURUS
Alnilam
Venus
Rigel
W


Moon, Jupiter, Castor, Pollux
22nd April 2026 21:36

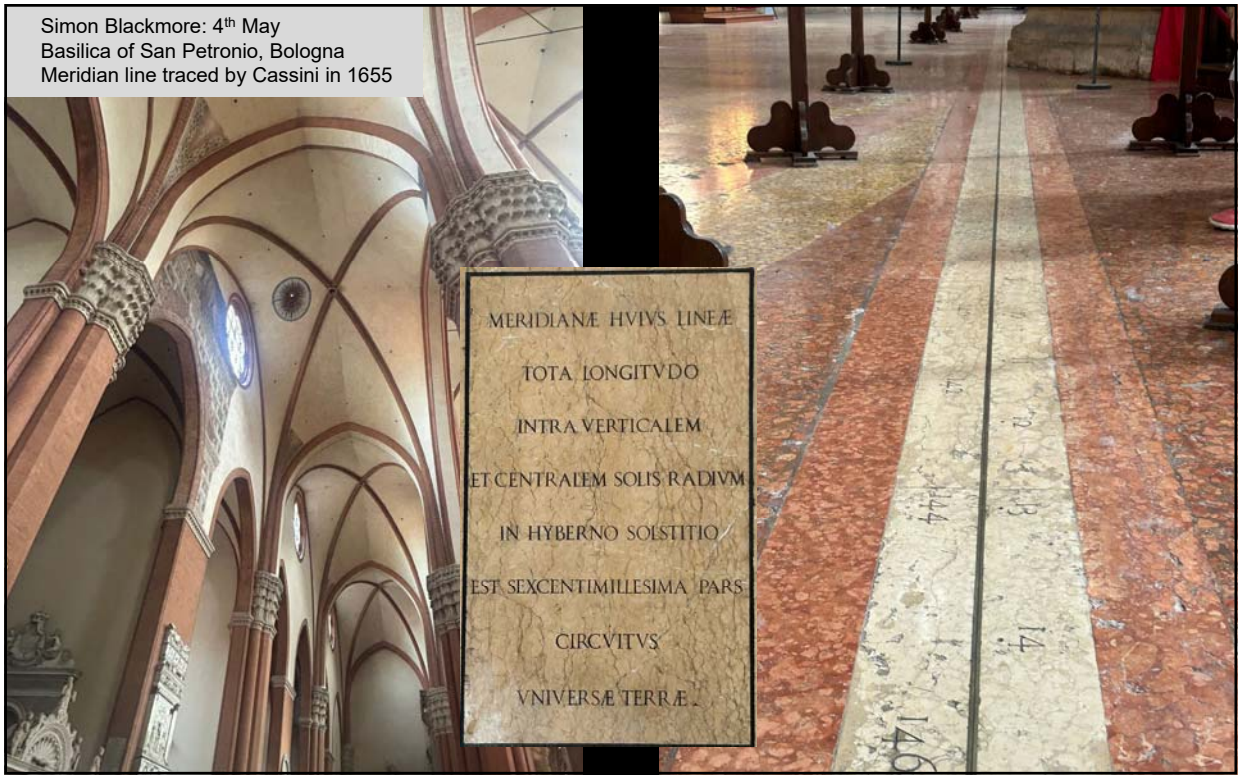

Moon
22nd April 2026 21:15


Liam Shorter - Moon
22nd April 2026
Phone to eyepiece ~21:15

Bartle Frere
30th April 2026 21:25

Aaron – 'on the way North'
Rising Moon 1st May


Simon Blackmore: 1st May
Jupiter and the Dioscuri over
Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna


Simon Blackmore: 4th May
Basilica of San Petronio, Bologna
Meridian line traced by Cassini in 1655
MERIDIANÆ HVIVS LINEÆ
TOTA LONGITVDO
INTRA VERTICALEM
ET CENTRALEM SOLIS RADIVM
IN HYBERNO SOLSTITIO
EST SEXCENTIMILLESIMA PARS
CIRCVITVS
VNIVERSÆ TERRÆ


SOLSTITIVM HYBERNVM
DECEMBRIS DIE XXI
AEQVINOC AVTVM
SEPTEMBR
DIE XXII
AEQVINOC VERN
MARTII
DIE XX


Full (Flower) Moon
1st May 2026 22:51


Full (Flower) Moon
1st May 2026 23:21

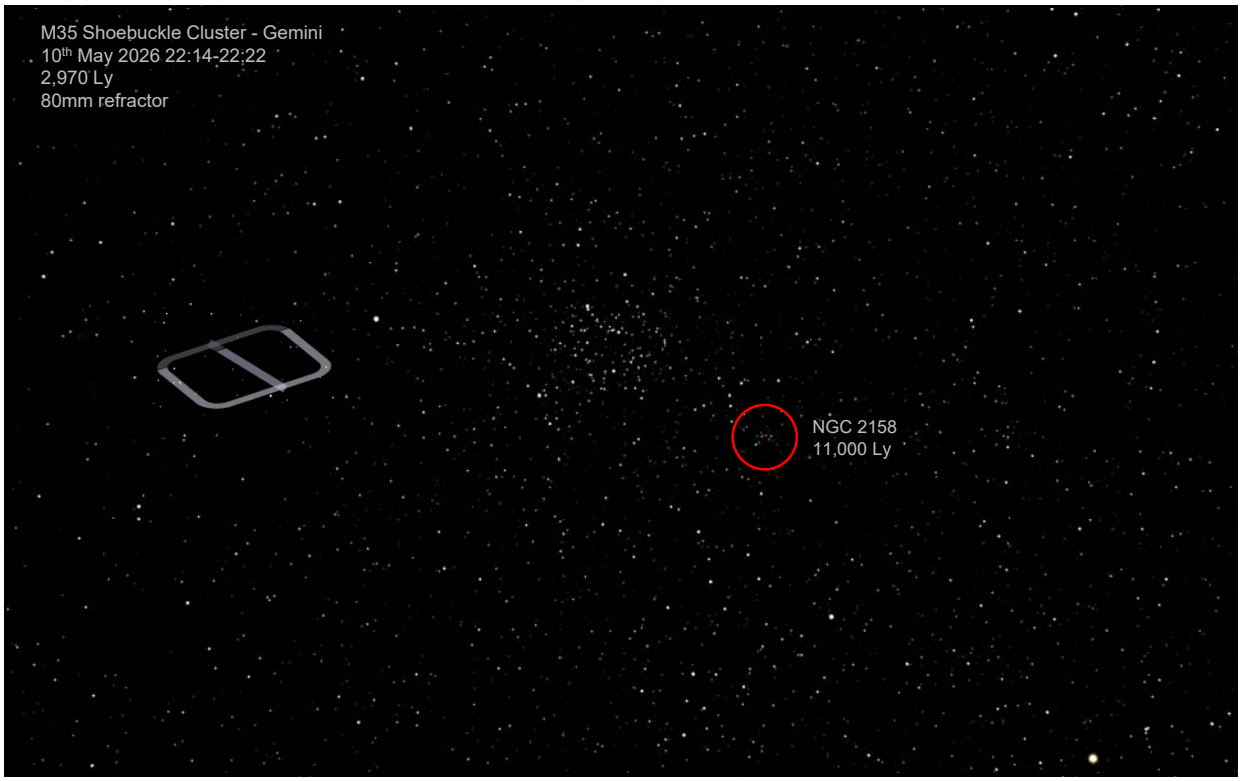

Mike Greig
Pinwheel Galaxy, M101 7th May
Garford using Dwarf Mini Telescope

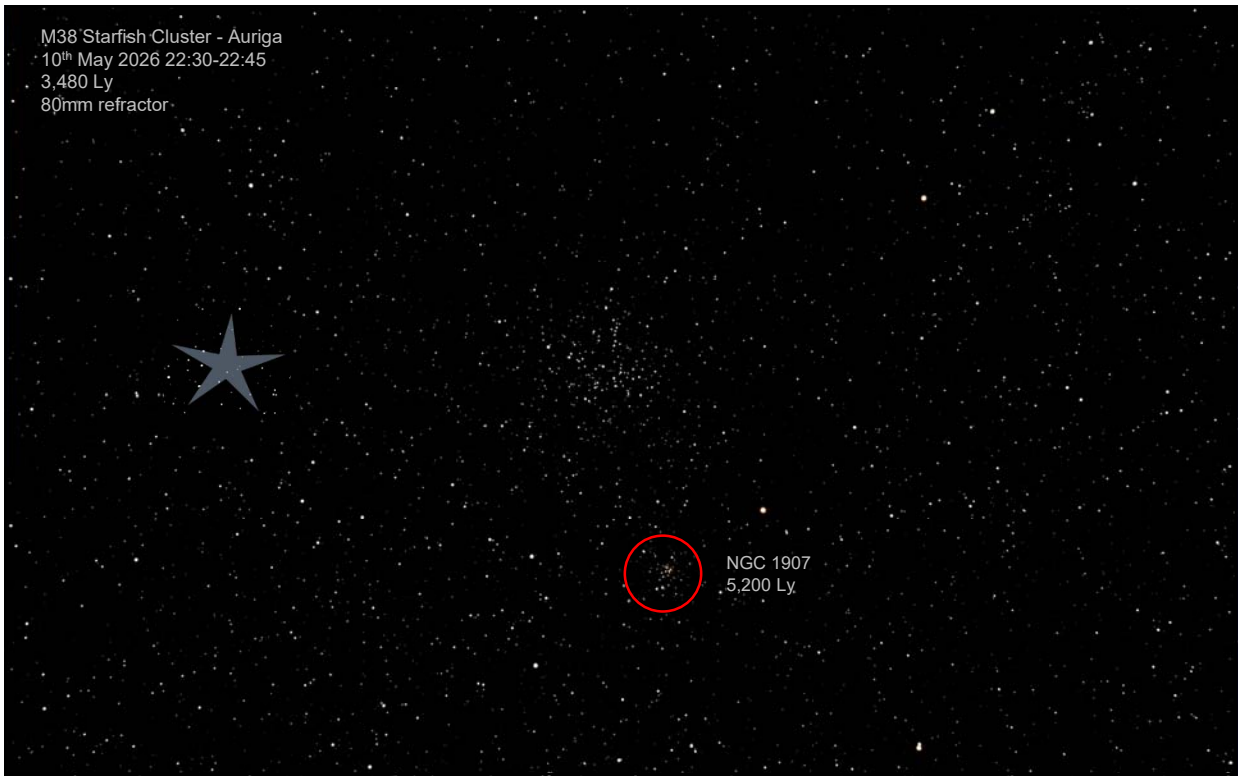
Via Mike Greig
Pinwheel Galaxy, M101
- from Dwarflab 3 and Mini FB Group

Mike Greig
Pinwheel Galaxy, M101 7th May
Garford using Dwarf Mini Telescope – before (L) and after (R) processing


Mike Greig
Whirlpool Galaxy, M51 10th May
Garford using Dwarf Mini Telescope


M35 Shoebuckle Cluster - Gemini
10th May 2026 22:20
2,970 Ly
80mm refractor

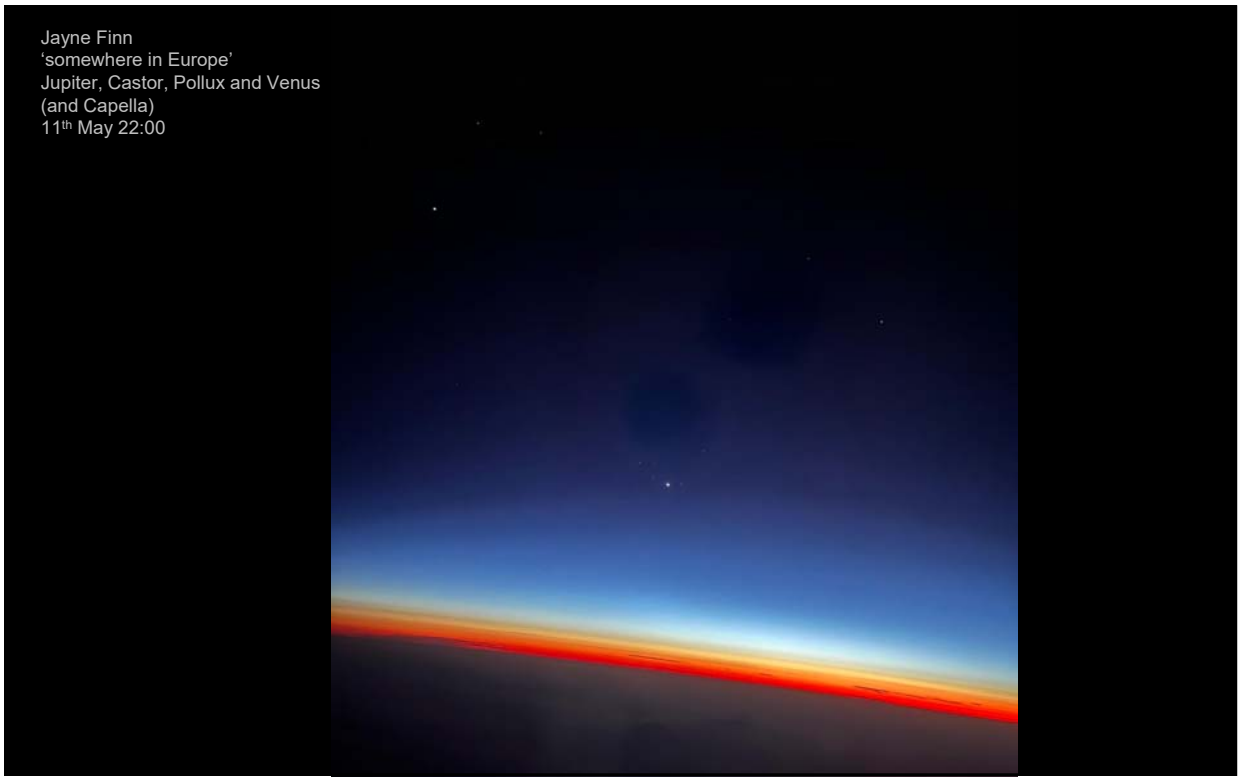

M35 Shoebuckle Cluster - Gemini
10th May 2026 22:14-22:22
2,970 Ly
80mm refractor
NGC 2158
11,000 Ly


M38 Starfish Cluster - Auriga
10th May 2026 22:30-22:45
3,480 Ly
80mm refractor
NGC 1907
5,200 Ly

Simon Blackmore

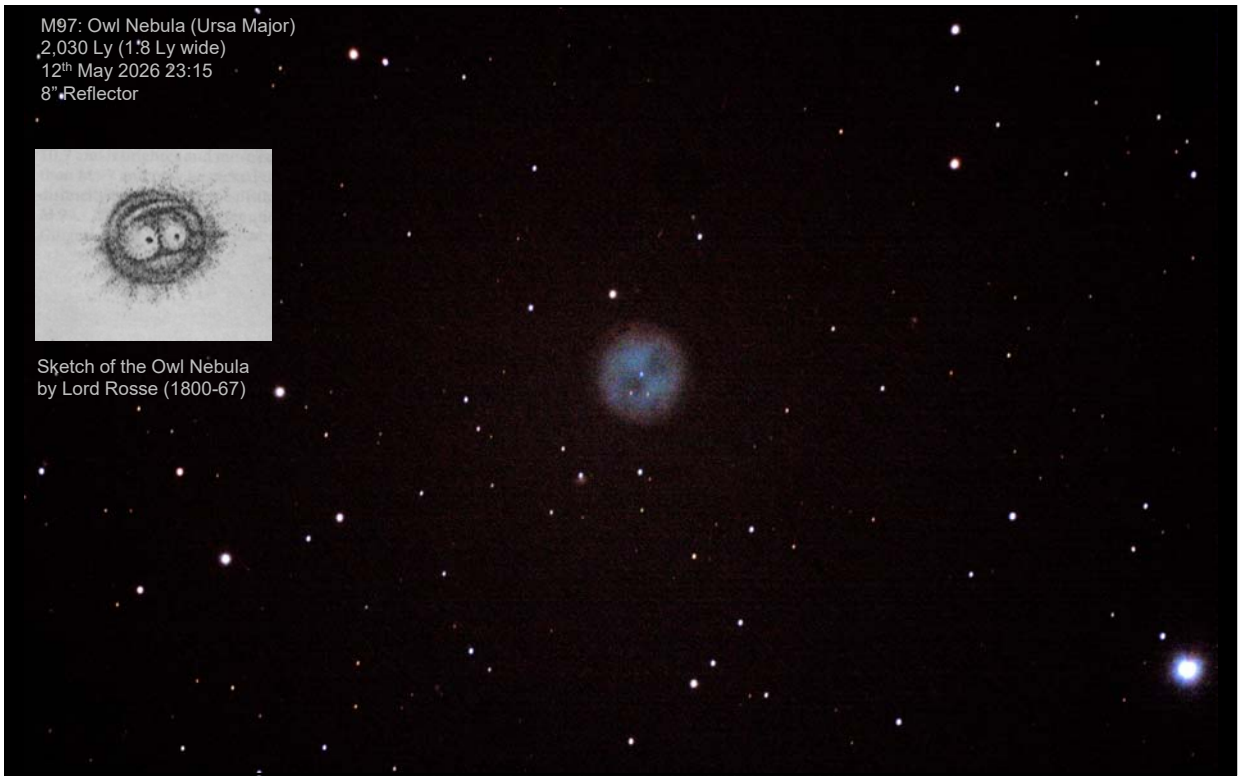
Alison Campbell (S Devon)
Jupiter, Venus
and the Gemini twins
11th May 22:10

Jayne Finn
'somewhere in Europe'
Jupiter, Castor, Pollux and Venus
(and Capella)
11th May 22:00



Waning crescent Moon
12th May 2026 04:41


M29: Cooling Tower Cluster (Little Sisters) – Cygnus
5,240 Ly
12th May 2026 22:55
8” Reflector


M97: Owl Nebula (Ursa Major)
2,030 Ly (1.8 Ly wide)
12th May 2026 23:15
8” Reflector
Sketch of the Owl Nebula
by Lord Rosse (1800-67)

Tonight's Feature

"Challenges, Triumphs and Disasters"
– Dr Eric Dunford

Looking forward…

What to see in the coming months

May

- 20th, 21st : Venus near M35 cluster (‘*Shoebuckle Cluster*’)
- 19th: Crescent Moon between Jupiter and Venus

Planets visible: (Me), V, J, U Moon: Full: 1st May New: 16th May

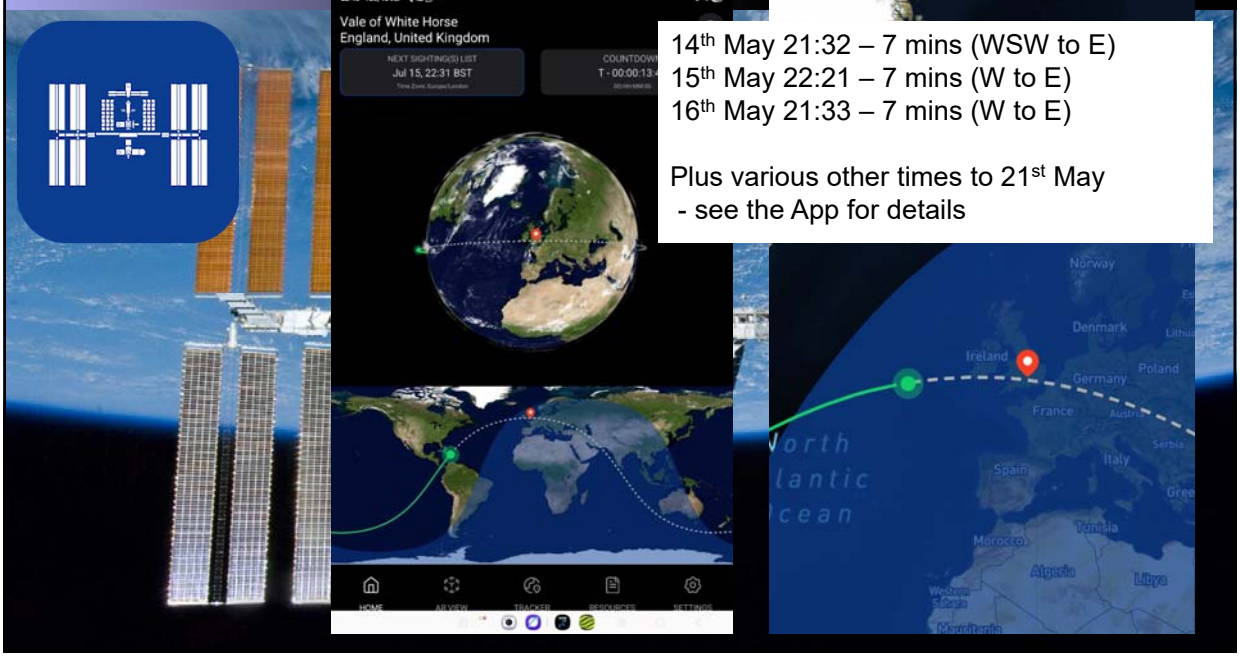
June-September

- 17th July: Moon and Venus in conjunction (twilight ~22:00)
- 12th Aug: **Partial Solar eclipse** (18:16-20:06 max (93%): 19:13)
- 14th Aug: Venus at greatest E elongation
- 28th Aug: **Partial Lunar eclipse** (02:23-06:20 max (93%): 05:12)
- 8th Sept: Waxing crescent Moon passes through Beehive Cluster (~04:30-05:30)

Planets visible: Me, (V), (Ma), (J), S New Moons: 16 May, 15 Jun, 14 Jul, 12 Aug, 11 Sep

ISS visible from Marcham

From SpotTheStation NASA App

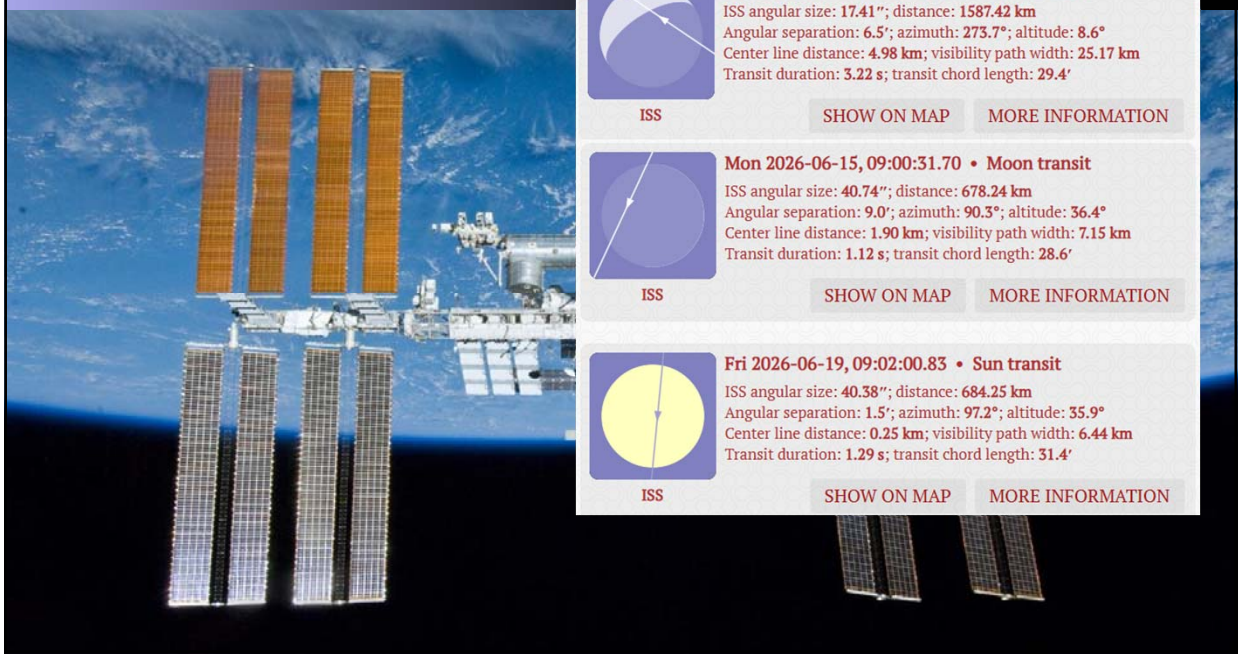


14th May 21:32 – 7 mins (WSW to E)
15th May 22:21 – 7 mins (W to E)
16th May 21:33 – 7 mins (W to E)

Plus various other times to 21st May
- see the App for details

ISS transits visible from Marcham

transit-finder.com



Future meetings…

We resume with a new programme on 16th September

Wednesdays at 7:30pm

Marcham Star Gazers
– 21 members

- Sharing images with other group members
- Alerts: what's happening now
- Notify last-minute telescope sessions

Marcham Star Gazers
WhatsApp group

Marcham ASTRONOMY