

SPACEWATCH

the newsletter of the Abingdon Astronomical Society

MAIN Meeting

9th March 2026

Supernova observations seen with JWST

Professor Patrick Roche
University of Oxford

EDITORIAL

I hope you have been managing to keep your enthusiasm up despite the fact we seem to have had two solid months of cloud and rain with little if any astronomy to be done. Even the imagers who seem to go out in desperation whatever the conditions seem to have been able to have done little.

The society has a very busy March coming with 3 meetings and we will have a stand at the Abingdon Atom fair on Saturday the 14th March. The usual main meeting is on the 9th and then it is rapidly followed on the following Monday the 16th March by the beginners meeting and then a Moon and Jupiter observing session on the 23rd March. All these are at the usual venue. Unfortunately, I can't make the last two as I will be at what I hope is going to be a star party at Kelling Heath that week, although the long range still shows unsettled conditions through mid-March, i.e. rain! If you can give us an hour or so's help at the Atom event it would be good to allow people to get lunch. We are also going to have a stand at the Abingdon Societies day in April. I know this is stretching our limited resources quite a bit but hopefully we can get it to work.

I note that the predicted launch of Artemis II has been postponed now until at least April due to yet more issues with the rocket.

I would like to thank Themos, Gwyneth and Eduard for helping out at the Science Oxford session in Feb. This was partially supported by the Astronomy Group of the Marcham Society as well. I felt that if they were going to be there I did not need to do the 40 mile round trip to get there.

For those with money still to spend there is the Practical Astronomy Show at the beginning of March. I will be there on a Webb Soc stand and Robin will be there with SharpCap so there will be some Abingdon AS people there.

For those specifically interested in deep sky observing the British Astronomical Association Deep Sky Section is holding its annual meeting in Cheltenham at the end of March, see

<https://britastro.org/event/deep-sky-section-meeting-2026>

for details. I will be presenting there as well



We are now well into the year so are starting to plan for next seasons meetings. If you have any topics or speakers that you would like to see covered then please let Gwyneth know so we can see what we can do.

The editor of "SpaceWatch" is Owen Brazell, who would very much appreciate your stories & contributions. In particular whilst many fine images are being posted on the discussion group it would be nice to have some in the SpaceWatch. Please send any news, observations, photos, etc. to:

owenb1367@gmail.com

REPORT OF LAST MEETING

February's Meeting

Dr Bethan Gregory (Ox Uni) kindly stepped in when our planned speaker was unavailable. She studied Earth's atmosphere for her doctorate and her interests now reach further afield. Her talk: 'Mars' atmospheric evolution: water loss and lessons for planetary habitability.'

The evidence of water on Mars in the past, is incontrovertible. Our many space missions make that very clear. There is also evidence of impact craters that filled with water and then overflowed, leaving deltas. Conglomerates are impacted sediments with varying grain sizes and rounded by erosion in liquids.

Clays and sulphites/minerals have been found that would not have been able to form without liquid water. These have also been found in the polar ice caps, which are made of water and CO2 ice.

Opportunity found 'blueberries' - tiny round brownish spheres (3mm approx. Like those found in Utah). They are made of haematite, which forms in the subsurface and requires water to do so.

Solar activity causes the water molecules to split or evaporate. The Nasa MAVEN (Mars Atmosphere and Volatiles Evolution) mission had been monitoring the evaporation and ionisation and how much is escaping. (Arrived in 2014 but we lost contact with it in early December 2025.) Hydrogen, carbon and oxygen escape. Hydrogen, being the most volatile, escapes especially during Mars' perihelion and when there is dust storm activity.

A low cost (relatively!) mission is the Nasa 2x Escapade (Escape and Plasma Acceleration and Dynamics Explorers) mission. These are two craft which will orbit together initially and then one will

move to orbit the poles. Between them they will monitor the magnetosphere and the Sun's effect on the atmosphere. They were launched in November and are lurking around Earth's L2 point, waiting for a better Mars alignment later in the year so they can both head off towards Mars.

Check out the short but very informative YouTube video on the Nasa website.

We were also treated to a very good after tea talk on meteor storms, thanks to Dan Larkins, which blended historical evidence going back at least 2,500 years. Some names he threw out are Ernst Chladni (1756-1827), who suspected that some meteors were so massive that they must have come from outside Earth's atmosphere. Devison Olmstead (1789-1851) saw that the Leonids radiated from a particular area in the sky (the radiant), and Heinrich Olbers (1791-1859) who identified the Leonids as having had bright returns in November, 1766, 1799 and 1833. The parent comet Tempel-Tuttle was seen at the beginning of 1866, and another Leonid storm returned in 1866. Dan looked ahead to the next possible storm. Put 17/11/32 into your diaries for a Leonid show. Please give us a reminder and another run through before then, Dan.

What's Up – March 2026

February has been even worse than January weather wise, with some places in the South West having rain for over fifty days straight!

We were lucky enough to get away for some of it, going to stay with friends that live in Dubai for a week and then travelling on to Sri Lanka for ten days. Alas we didn't get to do any astronomy there either, Dubai had too much dust in the atmosphere and Sri Lanka had too much moisture (cloud). It was interesting though, on the few occasions we did get to see the stars, as we were staying on the south coast of Sri Lanka, which isn't too far away from the equator, so seeing the constellations, and especially Orion, rising in the East and then later passing almost directly overhead was quite a sight.

Hopefully we have some better weather this month, probably best not buy anything at the Practical Astronomy Show on the 7th March, just in case!

The Planets

Mercury - is quite challenging. Starts the month as an evening object and then it becomes a morning object but very low and not easy to see. Spring orientation of the ecliptic, so a shallow angle.

Venus - is visible in the evening, moving away from the sun, so easier to see, magnitude -3.8 and near Mercury. Very low for a few months. On the 20th March Venus is very near a thin crescent moon.

Mars - is a morning planet but too low to be seen. In a couple of months, it will come up.

Jupiter - visible in the evening and night sky, south of Castor and Pollux, with the moon nearby on March 25. Dominant planet high in the evening sky. 60 Degrees at the beginning of March.

Saturn - is closing its observation window as it goes closer to the sun. It will reach conjunction with the sun on the 25th March but it will be visible with Mercury and Mars low in the eastern sky before sunrise by the end of March. Saturn and Neptune will also be very close to Venus on the 7th of March.

Uranus - is in a high position at the beginning of the month but as the evening twilight progresses it will swallow it. On 20th March it will form an almost perfect triangle with 14 Tauri and 13 Tauri and they all will have the same magnitude.

Neptune - is too close to the sun, 22nd March has a conjunction with the sun.

Meteor showers

There are no major meteor showers this month.

Comets

There are no bright comets this month although 29P has been undergoing some of its outbursts and has reached 11th magnitude on occasion. The one thing to beware of is possible hype in the media over comet C/2026 A1 (MAPS). This is part of the Kreutz sungrazer group and with its perihelion at the beginning of April has the potential to get very bright. However as with most Kreutz sungrazers it will be best seen from

the southern hemisphere and there will be little or no opportunity for northern observers to see it. There is more information on this on the BAA site at https://britastro.org/section_news_item/c-2026-a1-maps-a-kreutz-group-sungrazer.

There is also the possibility of C/2025 R3 (PanSTARRS) becoming bright as it approaches the Sun in late March, early April

Deep Sky Objects

M100 – is a grand design intermediate spiral galaxy, 55 million lightyears away, in the southern part of the Coma Berenices constellation.

The Leo Triplet – M65, M66 and NGC 3628 – A small group of three spiral galaxies, around 35 million light years away in the constellation of Leo.

M96 – An intermediate spiral galaxy, 31 million light years away in Leo.

NGC 4216 – An intermediate spiral galaxy, 55 million lightyears away in the constellation of Virgo. In the same field of view you will also see two neighbouring edge on spiral galaxies **NGC 4222** and **NGC 4206**. If you look hard enough you may also see the much fainter **IC 771**, however this may only be manageable for 20" plus scopes or those with longer focal length imaging setups.

NGC 2775 – A spiral Galaxy, 67 million light years away in Cancer.

NGC 2835 – An intermediate spiral Galaxy, seen face on, 35 million light years away in Hydra.

NGC 3521 – Is a flocculant intermediate spiral Galaxy, 26 million lightyears away in Leo.

M97 The Owl Nebula – A Planetary Nebula, 2030 light years away in the constellation of Ursa Major.

M81 & M82 Bode's Galaxy and the Cigar Galaxy, a spiral galaxy and a Starburst galaxy, 12 million lightyears away in Ursa Major.

NGC 2146 – A Barred Spiral Star Burst galaxy, 70 million lightyears away in Camelopardalis

Clear skies

Steve and Cristina

BORROWING THE SEESTAR

As many of you will know, the Society now owns a Seestar 50 telescope, which is available for members to borrow.

It is small, extremely portable, easy to store, and easy to use via a free downloadable app on your smart phone.

Unlike traditional telescopes, you cannot look through the Seestar. It is used to take digital images that are downloaded to your phone (which you can then download to a PC, etc. for image processing if you so desire).

Apart from an off/on button physically on the telescope, all commands and instructions go through the phone app.

Apart from needing your own smart phone, everything you require is supplied.

You need no experience of either using a telescope or image processing to use the Seestar as it does virtually all the work for you automatically. However, there are plenty of user options if you want to play around with it.

There are two main requirements if you want to borrow the Seestar.

The first is you have to have been a member of the society for the past 18 months, and the second is you have to leave a deposit of £50. The money is fully refundable as long as you return the Seestar in the same condition as you received it.

You can borrow the Seestar for two calendar months (longer if nobody else has asked to borrow it) so you get plenty of time to take lots of images.

If you are interested in borrowing the equipment contact me at bobdryden@ntlworld.com

Bob

Upcoming Meeting Notes

Observing evening: Observing evening: There will be no virtual observing sessions this season unless we can find someone to take over running them if we continue them next session.

Beginners' meetings: The March Beginners meeting is on Monday 16th March 2026 at 20:00 at the usual venue. Talks will include Observing Planetary moons and weather apps

Observing Session/Workshop: We will be holding an observing session/telescope workshop at our normal venue on Monday 23rd March 2026 at 20:00 at the usual venue.

Practical Astronomy Show 7th March 2026
Information at <https://practicalastroshow.com/>

Mailing List: we have now moved to a new mailing list on groups.io called

abingdonas@groups.io

The new Groups.io group mailing list has been created and Groups.io are sending out invitations to 89 addresses

The old list on its homepage said:

1. This mailing list is a public mailing list - anyone may join or leave, at any time.

This mailing list requires approval from the List Owner, before subscriptions are finalized.

...

This mailing list is for email discussions of astronomical topics and the exchange of messages, notices of meetings and events organised by Abingdon Astronomical Society and others, and astronomical news between members of Abingdon Astronomical Society.

On the new list homepage (at <https://groups.io/g/abingdonas/>),

This Groups.io Group and mailing list is for email discussions of astronomical topics and the exchange of messages, notices of meetings and events organised by Abingdon Astronomical

Society and others, and astronomical news between members of Abingdon Astronomical Society.

Group membership is primarily for current and/or recent members of Abingdon Astronomical Society. Those who are permitted to join the Group but do not become members of Abingdon Astronomical Society nor have been recent members may, in due course, be removed from this Group.

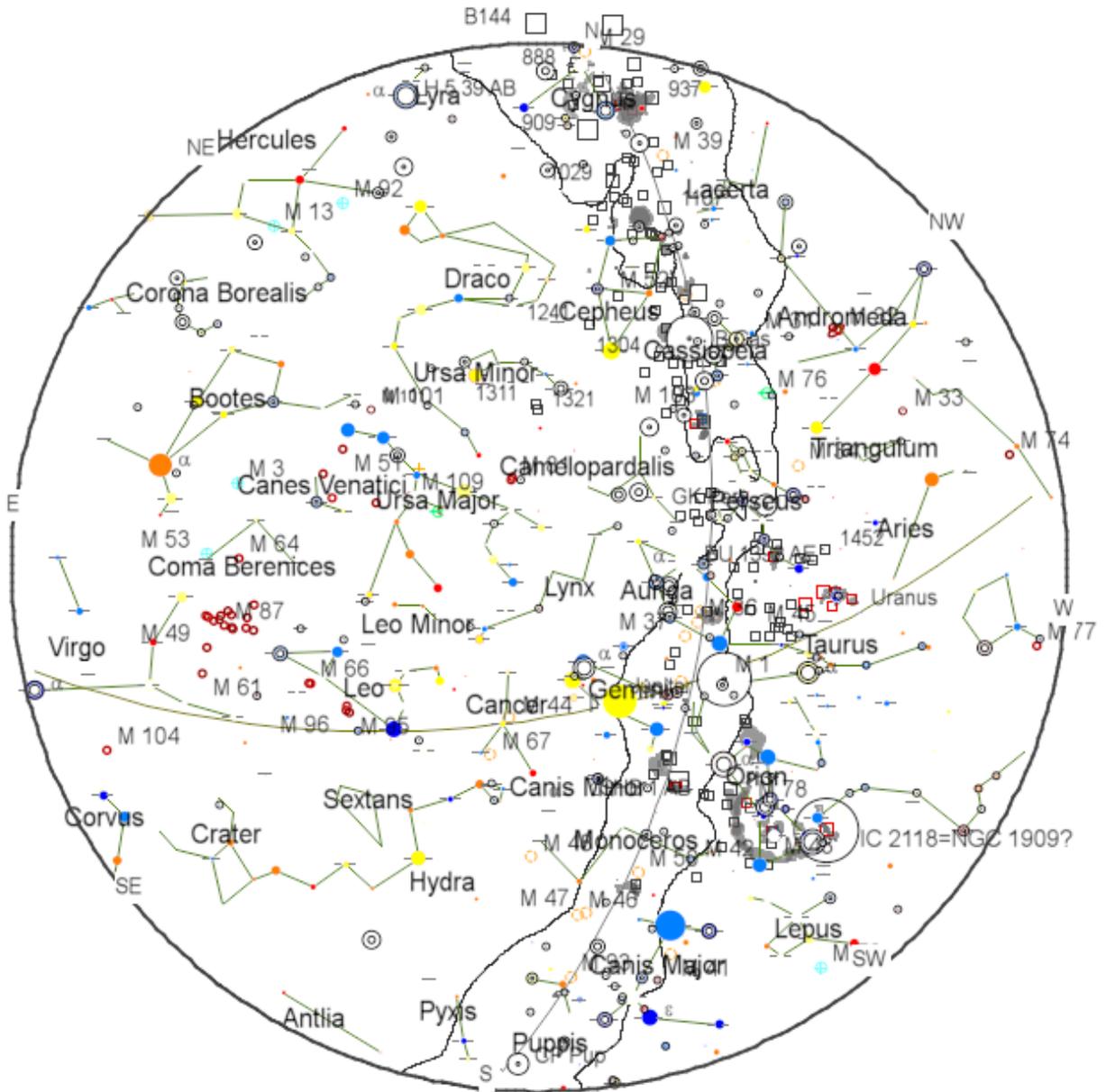
The Group is not listed in the Groups.io directory but, currently, once found the archived messages will be visible publicly.

We also operate two Facebook groups so you can also keep in touch with the society through those.

We have also setup a new WhatsApp group for real time announcements of astronomical/meteorological (NLC, Auroral) phenomena. The group is open to all members of the society. To join leave your mobile number with any member of the committee and you will receive an invite to join

STAR CHART

The night sky at 21:00 (UT) Sunday 15th March 2026



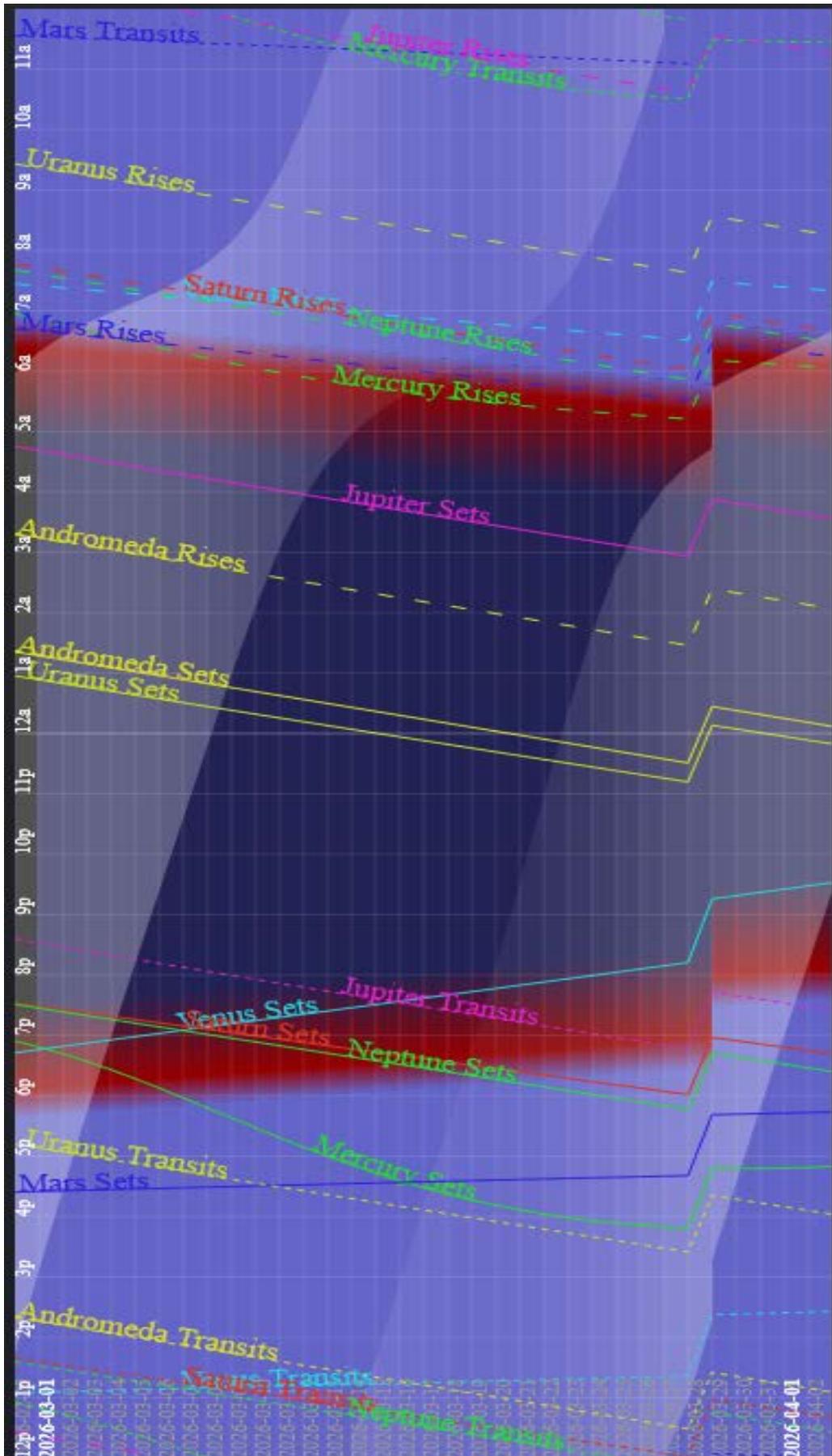
MOON PHASES MARCH 2026

Moon phases and solar and lunar rise and set times for March 2026						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 ↑ 15:20 ↓ 06:17 ↑ 06:58 ↓ 05:00 ↓ 17:40 ↑ 19:38	2 ↑ 16:45 ↓ 06:34 ↑ 06:56 ↓ 04:58 ↓ 17:42 ↑ 19:40	3 ↑ 18:06 ↓ 06:47 ↑ 06:54 ↓ 04:56 ↓ 17:43 ↑ 19:42	4 ↑ 19:24 ↓ 06:58 ↑ 06:51 ↓ 04:54 ↓ 17:45 ↑ 19:43	5 ↑ 20:40 ↓ 07:08 ↑ 06:49 ↓ 04:51 ↓ 17:47 ↑ 19:45	6 ↑ 21:56 ↓ 07:20 ↑ 06:47 ↓ 04:49 ↓ 17:49 ↑ 19:47	7 ↑ 23:12 ↓ 07:32 ↑ 06:45 ↓ 04:47 ↓ 17:50 ↑ 19:49
8 ↑ --- ↓ 07:47 ↑ 06:42 ↓ 04:44 ↓ 17:52 ↑ 19:51	9 ↑ 00:27 ↓ 08:07 ↑ 06:40 ↓ 04:42 ↓ 17:54 ↑ 19:52	10 ↑ 01:40 ↓ 08:35 ↑ 06:38 ↓ 04:40 ↓ 17:56 ↑ 19:54	11 ↑ 02:45 ↓ 09:14 ↑ 06:35 ↓ 04:37 ↓ 17:57 ↑ 19:56	12 ↑ 03:40 ↓ 10:07 ↑ 06:33 ↓ 04:35 ↓ 17:59 ↑ 19:58	13 ↑ 04:22 ↓ 11:12 ↑ 06:31 ↓ 04:32 ↓ 18:01 ↑ 20:00	14 ↑ 04:53 ↓ 12:26 ↑ 06:29 ↓ 04:30 ↓ 18:03 ↑ 20:02
15 ↑ 05:15 ↓ 13:45 ↑ 06:26 ↓ 04:27 ↓ 18:04 ↑ 20:04	16 ↑ 05:32 ↓ 15:06 ↑ 06:24 ↓ 04:25 ↓ 18:06 ↑ 20:06	17 ↑ 05:46 ↓ 16:28 ↑ 06:22 ↓ 04:22 ↓ 18:08 ↑ 20:08	18 ↑ 05:58 ↓ 17:51 ↑ 06:19 ↓ 04:20 ↓ 18:09 ↑ 20:09	19 ↑ 06:09 ↓ 19:15 ↑ 06:17 ↓ 04:17 ↓ 18:11 ↑ 20:11	20 ↑ 06:21 ↓ 20:42 ↑ 06:15 ↓ 04:15 ↓ 18:13 ↑ 20:13	21 ↑ 06:36 ↓ 22:12 ↑ 06:13 ↓ 04:12 ↓ 18:14 ↑ 20:15
22 ↑ 06:56 ↓ 23:44 ↑ 06:10 ↓ 04:09 ↓ 18:16 ↑ 20:18	23 ↑ 07:23 ↓ --- ↑ 06:08 ↓ 04:07 ↓ 18:18 ↑ 20:20	24 ↑ 08:02 ↓ 01:11 ↑ 06:06 ↓ 04:04 ↓ 18:19 ↑ 20:22	25 ↑ 08:59 ↓ 02:25 ↑ 06:04 ↓ 04:02 ↓ 18:21 ↑ 20:24	26 ↑ 10:13 ↓ 03:20 ↑ 06:01 ↓ 03:59 ↓ 18:23 ↑ 20:26	27 ↑ 11:37 ↓ 03:58 ↑ 05:59 ↓ 03:56 ↓ 18:25 ↑ 20:28	28 ↑ 13:03 ↓ 04:22 ↑ 05:57 ↓ 03:54 ↓ 18:26 ↑ 20:30
29 ↑ 15:27 ↓ 05:41 ↑ 06:54 ↓ 04:51 ↓ 19:28 ↑ 21:33	30 ↑ 16:47 ↓ 05:54 ↑ 06:52 ↓ 04:48 ↓ 19:30 ↑ 21:35	31 ↑ 18:05 ↓ 06:06 ↑ 06:50 ↓ 04:45 ↓ 19:32 ↑ 21:37				

Times in BST from 29th

Beginners Meeting Talks 2025/26

Date	Long Talk	Speaker	Long Talk	Speaker
SEP 29th	Whats Up	Dan	Eyepieces -	Owen
OCT 27th	Jupiter	Ian	NEO	Bob
NOV 24th	Xmas Meal			
DEC 1st	First Telescope	Ian	Orion	Owen
JAN 26th	Brown Dwarfs	Dan	Intro. to Solar System Imaging	Chris Pickford
FEB 23rd	The Science in Space films	Cristina	Messier Marathon	Owen
MAR 16th	Observing Planetary Moons	Bob	Weather Apps & websites	Chris
APR 27th	TBC	Cristina	Naming Astronomical Objects	Dan
MAY 18th	Local Galaxies	Owen	Setting Up an Equatorial Mount	Chris
JUN 15th	Solar Eclipses	Bob	Putting Together a Mobile Imaging rig	Ian



Planet rise and set times for March 2026



Sun installation at Winchester Cathedral - Gwyneth

Recent images from Members



M101 – Roland Gooday



C/2025 R2 2025-11-17 – Ian Smith



M42 – Seestar processed – Ian Smith



M42 – Seestar raw – Ian Smith