

## President's Report

by Jon Stewart-Taylor

The "Delta" variant of COVID-19 is now the dominant strain. It is much more contagious than previous strains. Combined with low vaccination rate and people's resistance to masking it has caused an increase in cases greater than at the height of the previous "wave". After an e-mailing list poll, it seem clear we should at least temporarily revert to Zoom-only meetings. Although it was not explicit in the email exchange, we should also put "gAstronomy" on pause until the pandemic at least recedes again.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has now received full FDA approval. If the "emergency authorization" was preventing you from receiving the vaccination, please reconsider now.

Everyone, please take all precautions and make sure you stay safe.

The proposal to transfer the observatory site at Starfields to Cape Fear Astro has been discussed at a meeting and posted via the e-mailing list. At the September meeting, we will vote to accept or reject the proposal.

Cape Fear Astro had an observing session at Starfields on 28 August, with Rick Jennings and Skip Hager joining me and 4 of my relatives under excellent (for SE NC summer) skies. Although the skies were a little fuzzy, they were very steady. We had good views of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. Our guests were impressed with the overall darkness of the skies, and with the objects in the eyepieces.

So far, the evidence shows that gatherings outside are still safe. Bonus points to our hobby. Although the current temperatures are beastly hot, we can expect some cooling as the year slides into fall. I hope everyone can make it to our next observing session on the 3rd/4th, and (at least virtually) the meeting on the 12th.

## Calendar

**Due to the COVID-19 pandemic upsurge  
 Meetings will be via ZOOM.**

**Observing events, being outside,  
 shall continue at this time.**

**Please watch your email for the  
 most up to date information.**

### September 2021

Date – Event – Time

**03 Club Observing at Starfields; Shiloh Road  
 Ivanhoe NC; 08:00 PM**

**04 Club Observing at Starfields; Shiloh Road  
 Ivanhoe NC; 08:00 PM**

05 Venus 2 degrees from Spica; 41 deg from the Sun  
 in the evening sky

06 New Moon

**11 Public Observing; 7:20-10:30 PM; Carolina  
 Beach State Park**

**★ 12 Cape Fear Astro Monthly  
 Meeting ★ ★**

**7:00pm VIA ZOOM**

13 First Quarter Moon

14 Mercury at easternmost elongation: 27 deg from  
 sun in evening sky

14 Neptune at opposition

21 Full Moon

22 01:32 PM - September Equinox

24 Uranus 1.25 degrees from moon; 138 deg from sun  
 in morning sky

**24 Club Observing – Location TBD; 08:30 PM**

**25 Club Observing – Location TBD; 08:30 PM**

28 Last Quarter Moon

Astro phenomena from

<https://www.universalworkshop.com/astronomical-calendar-any-year/>

## Summer's End

While September 22 marks the Autumnal Equinox, which technically ends Summer, I always figured it is over when daytime temperature don't hit the 70 degree mark. Here, that is about a month later. YAY!

In September, 9 PM it is dark enough, if you are someplace dark, to start your deep sky observing and/or imaging.

When I first came to North Carolina 34 years ago, that could have been the Oak Island Beach. Now, with so many ocean front houses it is not nearly so dark.

The forecast for the other night was "poor transparency" but, demonstrating the difficulty in astro weather forecasting, it was actually decent – for a while. That's a good "small scope night" or "binoculars night" because by the time a large scope is moved to the yard and set up, it would have been too late.

So on a clear night, go someplace dark, like Starfields, and you will find the Milky Way rising out of the south-southwest and continuing high overhead past Altair and on to Deneb with Vega almost directly above us. It would be a good time to go after what I call "fuzzy favorites" and Jon calls "tourist traps". You know what they are: Messiers 13, 27, 57, 16, 17, 8, etc.

"What to do first?" That is often the question and it's best to know the answer beforehand. If I intend to image, it is easier because I know I only have time for a few targets at most. If I intend to observe, then it depends on my goal: Quantity or Quality?

I might, since I haven't done much visually lately, want quantity – see as many of my favorites as I can before my eyes won't stay open. Or, if the skies are very good, pick some favorites and see if I can see more detail or fainter stars than I have before. Which eyepiece shows me the most stars in M13? What detail can I see in M27? M8?

No matter what I am doing on a given night, when the Milky Way is up it is a showpiece. I look up and stare; follow it across the sky, noting the bright areas and the dark areas. Any size binoculars will show countless numbers of stars. Just staring at one of those fields of stars is a pleasant way to spend some time.

Bee-beep. Time to check the camera. The object is still centered and, zooming in, it's still in focus and no bad star trails. Start the timer for another run gathering photons.

I should check Saturn and Jupiter. Once I called Saturn "Everyone's Favorite Planet" when a person who shall remain nameless (I forgot their name) says "Not mine. Jupiter is my favorite!" Really? I've had many people react with "Wow!" when they see the Ringed Planet. I don't remember any for Jupiter. I rest my case.

If it's time for a break from looking at objects in the Milky Way, take a look at her sister galaxy! The Andromeda Galaxy is observable in the northeast but will be better in an hour or two. The galaxy is a bit over  $3^\circ$  across so if you have a  $60^\circ$  field of view eyepiece, you only need a little less than 20 power to see the whole galaxy. Big telescopes are too big to see the whole thing.

Doing an all-niter? Look to the east about 3 AM and you will see The Hunter Orion rising, the three stars in his belt toward the zenith.

As a kid, summer's end was sad but as an amateur astronomer I welcome the earlier end of twilight.



## Astronomical League Update

by Hank Lyon

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ALCON 2021 Virtual is one for the history books! I sincerely hope you were able to virtually attend at least one or more of the 12 sessions offered over August 19-21. Conference registration was in excess of 800 and many more are likely to have attended as registration was not required.

Having to postpone last year's ALCON in Albuquerque due to the COVID pandemic and being faced with similar circumstances this year, the AL convention planners decided to hold the AL's annual conference virtually via Zoom and have it streamed through YouTube, Facebook and their partnering organization's website, Explore Scientific. I tried all three outlets and each worked great, although it did take a little trial and error to assure success.

The speaker lineup unfolded on queue and included quite a variety of speakers and topics, essentially something for everyone. Among these were Keynote speaker Dr. Jocelyn Bell Burnell, who delivered an excellent account of her discovery of pulsars; Dr. Richard Gott, who provided an interesting walk through astronomical history and his role in resolving the architecture of the universe; Dr. Larry Crumpler, a member of the Perseverance rover team, who provided a detailed recap of the first 180 sols on the Martian surface (and in the "air"); Kelly Beatty, Senior Editor of Sky & Telescope magazine, who gave a very interesting talk titled "Darkness in Distress" and many other excellent speakers and topics, 18 in all. Dr. David Levy also provided some heartwarming insight regarding his professional relationship with the late Carolyn Shoemaker.

If you were not able to attend virtually you're still in luck as each session was recorded and is now posted on YouTube. Perhaps the easiest approach to locating the recorded sessions is to simply search either Google or YouTube for "The 2021 Astronomical League Convention." You'll discover six recordings, two for each of the three days of the convention. The AL has the schedule of events posted at the ALCON 2021 Virtual website <https://www.alconvirtual.org> so you can look at the speaker lineup and determine pretty quickly on which day a particular speaker presented. Please note that for each day, the recordings were split between afternoon and evening programs, which started at 3pm and 8pm, respectively.

I encourage you to set aside some time to review these recordings. You will not only hear from several people who have made or are destined to make significant impacts on astronomy, but you'll gain additional insight about the AL's plans for future conferences, pending upgrades to the AL website and hear from many of the 300 member societies who sponsored over \$10,000 in door prizes.

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Editor's Note: Used in this Newsletter, "Cape Fear Astronomical Society" may be abbreviated "CFAS" or "CFAstro".

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Members are welcome and encouraged to submit articles or other input for "CAPE FEAR SKIES". Submit any and all interesting items for publication to Karl Adlon, Editor (email [kmja79@yahoo.com](mailto:kmja79@yahoo.com)).

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**Dues:** Dues for 2021 are \$25 for Individual and \$32 for Family Membership. Students dues are \$5 per year.

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