



Galloway Forest Astronomical Society

Newsletter #61, March 2026

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Long time no Newsletter

It's been a very long time since Newsletter #60, which appeared in July 2025! No excuses - we'll try to do better this year.

Simon Graham and the Seestar S50

Although cloud cover levels have been dreadful throughout the winter, there have been a few clear nights and GFAS member Simon has been making good use of them with his Seestar S50, a remarkable device that has a telescope, electric focuser, astronomical camera, ASIAIR intelligent controller, altazimuth mount, and filter-switching device all in one unit. It only weighs 3Kg and it lets you take images of deep-sky objects that would have been very difficult with more traditional equipment.

Here is Simon's shot of NGC7023, the Iris Nebula, a dramatic reflection nebula in the constellation Cepheus with plenty of dark interstellar dust in the area. The image has been heavily cropped to fit it into this newsletter, but the original image was produced from 82 minutes of exposure around midnight last August and takes up 2.0 Mbytes of file space. More of Simon's Seestar images are included on Page 2.



Upcoming Events

- **Wednesday 15 April, 7pm** (Newton Stewart Cinema scheduled screening): **The Hail Mary Project**, the new sci-fi and aliens film based on the book by Andy Weir, author of The Martian. GFAS members are encouraged to attend this screening, although there is an earlier screening on Saturday 11th April.
- **Thursday 30 April, 7pm:** Renowned amateur astronomer **Mary McIntyre** will be making a return visit, talking about **"What has the space programme ever done for us?"** – Venue: **Newton Stewart Golf Club**
- **Thursday 4 June, 7pm:** Dr **Caroline Harper**, head of science at the UK Space Agency, will talk about the **James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)** – Venue: **Newton Stewart Golf Club**
- **Thursday 2 July, 7pm:** – Dr **Christopher Berry**, lecturer at University of Glasgow, will talk about **Gravitational Waves** – Venue: **Newton Stewart Golf Club**
- **Thursday 22 October, 7pm:** Royal Observatory Greenwich senior curator and author **Dr Louise Devoy** will talk about the **history of the ROG**. Her recently-published book is quite marvellous! – Venue: **Newton Stewart Golf Club**

On the Loom

Other events to look out for (dates and venues still to be confirmed):

- Amateur astronomer **Katrin Raynor** will tell us about how the great story of space exploration has been told through philately!
- An evening of astrophotography. **Alistair Scobie**, GFAS member and a trustee of the Scottish Dark Sky Observatory being built at Clatteringhaws, will showcase and discuss his brilliant work.

The weather has been truly dreadful of late but we are working on a number of **solar and night sky observing sessions**, especially the near-total solar eclipse of **12 August**, when about 90% of the Sun will be obscured, as seen from Galloway!

Newsletter Articles Please send us your astro news! We consider all contributions to our newsletters and we always acknowledge the source of anything we use. Please email us any original astronomy items for consideration.

GFAS Membership: We always welcome new and returning members, especially juniors who join for free. Subs remain at £15.00 Adult, £25.00 Family, £0.00 Juniors or Students in full-time education. Just email members@gf-astro.org for a form or download a form from the website.



Galloway Forest Astronomical Society

Registered Scottish Charity SC035033.

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Fb page: [@GallowayForestAstronomicalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/GallowayForestAstronomicalSociety) / Fb Group: [@gfas chat](https://www.facebook.com/gfaschat)

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Simon and the Seestar

The Seestar S50 instrument is shown at the left.

It's cute, but it's remarkable. Having messed about with DSLR cameras, telescopes, finderscopes, heated lenses, equatorial tracking mounts, wide angle lenses, long-lenses, camera filters, long exposures, short exposures, post-editing on a laptop, praying for clear skies on your days off and/or planning to drive many miles away from your night-polluted back garden.. cursing as unable to find your desired object using the finder scope, only to have it knocked off centre, target never to be found again because a gust of wind and despite having one of your gym weights suspended underneath your kit.. coming back home hours later cursing, cold, and without any notable results.. if you know, you know.. well, the Seestar S50 changes all that.

A few more of Simon Graham's recent images are shown below, together with information about the deep-sky objects in the images. Remember, please, that they have all been cropped to fit the page. Enjoy!



M 97, the Owl Nebula

This is a young planetary nebula about 2,030 light years away in Ursa Major. It is nearly circular in cross-section with a faint internal structure. It was formed from the outflow of material from the stellar wind of the central star as it evolved along the asymptotic giant branch.

This image was generated from a 60 minute exposure.



IC 1805, the Heart Nebula

IC 1805, the Heart Nebula

The Heart Nebula is an emission nebula, a cloud of gas and dust that shines by reflecting the light of a nearby star rather than emitting its own, 7,500 light-years away from Earth and located in the Perseus Arm of the Galaxy in the constellation Cassiopeia. It was discovered by William Herschel on 3 November 1787. In 1958, it was identified as a radio source by Gart Westerhout. It displays glowing ionized hydrogen gas and darker dust lanes.

This was a 50 minute exposure.

NGC 281

This is another emission nebula, called the "Pacman" because of its appearance in optical images. The "mouth" of the Pacman character appears dark because of obscuration by dust and gas. It is about 6,500 light years from Earth and 1,000 light years above the plane of the galaxy

This was a 73 minute exposure.



NGC 281