STAR STUFF

Ford Amateur Astronomy Club Newsletter

Star Stuff

This newsletter is published eleven times per year by:

Ford Amateur Astronomy Club
P.O. Box 7527
Dearborn, MI 48121-7527

Officers

President:	Dan Smith
Vice President:	Sean Pickard
Secretary:	Cheri Grissom
Treasurer:	Arica Flores

Departments

Webmaster:	Liam Finn
Membership:	Doug Bauer
Newsletter:	Tim Campbell
Equipment:	Jeff Gorman
Speakers:	Sandra Macika

Club Information

The Ford Amateur Astronomy Club meets on the fourth Thursday of each month, except for the combined November/ December meeting which meets on the first Thursday of December – at Henry Ford College Administration Services and Conference Center in Dearborn.

President's Corner

by Dan Smith, President

Upcoming Events

Saturday April 25th at 8 pm -- is our first Observing night of the year. As of writing the weather is looking okay-ish. I'm hoping we end up with a clear night but either way I'm looking forward to setting up for my first time this year. Sunset is just before 8:30 so remember to get there plenty early if you would like a closer parking spot or to have extra time to set up before it starts to get dark!

Saturday May 2nd -- we have our banquet, 5pm at the South Lyon Hotel. These are the last few days to sign up. Saturday April 25th is the deadline. The more who show the better the event will be. We will have our annual game of Astro Jeopardy and I personally prefer to totally never cheat against a large group of people also totally not cheating. (Who would even think to use their phones? We all just have this information in our heads at all times... right?) I hope to see everyone there!

Secretary's Report

by Cheri Grissom, Secretary

FAAC General Meeting – March 26, 2026

Meeting called to order at 7:12 p.m. by President Dan Smith. Vice President Sean Pickard was absent. Secretary Cheri Grissom, and Treasurer Arica Flores present. We had a total of 25 in-person attendees. As this month's meeting was held inside the Hammond Planetarium due to the unavailability of our regular meeting location, we did not offer online attendance. Dan asked for member and guest introductions.

Continued on Page 5

Club Information

Refer to our website for a map and directions:

www.fordastronomyclub.com

Observing

The FAAC primary observing location is Spring Mill Pond located within the Island Lake State Recreation Area near Brighton, Michigan. The Club maintains an after-hours permit. Club members can contact any club officer for procedures to enter or exit the park when the main gate is locked.

The club also has use of a private observing site near Gregory Michigan. See the FAAC Groups.io Group for more information.

Inquiries can be directed to info@fordastronomyclub.com

Membership

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in amateur astronomy. The FAAC is an affiliate of the Ford Employees Recreation Association (FERA).

Fees

Annual - New Members: $30
Annual - Renewals: $25
($30 if not renewed by Jan 31)

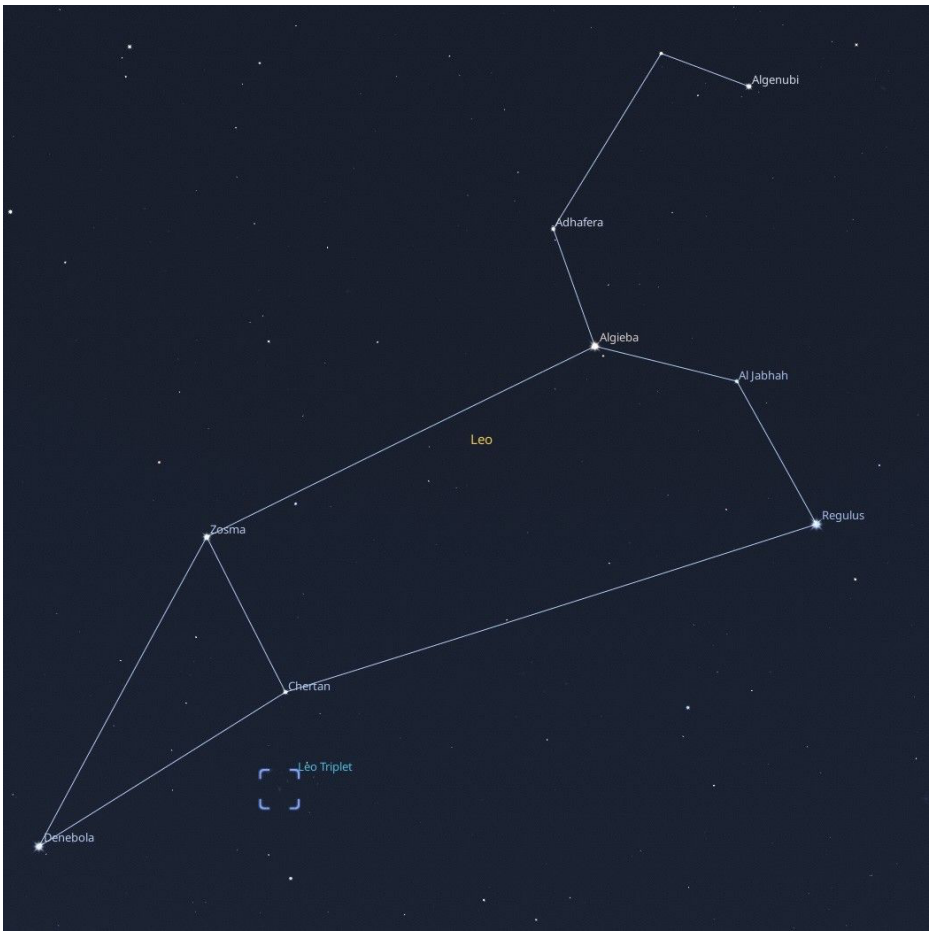
Benefits

Membership includes the Star Stuff newsletter, discounts on magazines, discounts at selected

Celestial Wonders in Leo

by Kat Troche

Leo is a prominent sight for stargazers in April. Its famous sickle, punctuated by the bright star Regulus, draws many a beginning stargazer's eyes, inviting deeper looks into some of Leo's celestial delights, including a great double star and a famous galactic trio.



The constellation, Leo. You can find this constellation in the springtime skies. Stellarium

Leo's distinctive forward sickle, or "reverse question mark," is easy to spot as it climbs the skies in the southeast after sunset. If you are having a difficult time spotting the sickle, look for bright Sirius and Procyon in Canis Major and Canis Minor. Complete a triangle by drawing two lines to the east, joining at the bright star Regulus, the "period" in the reverse question mark. Trailing them is a trio of bright stars forming an isosceles triangle, the brightest star in that formation named Denebola. Connecting these two patterns together forms the constellation of Leo

area equipment retailers, and after-hours access to the Island Lake observing site and private observing sites.

Astronomy or Sky & Telescope magazine discounts are available by contacting the FAAC club treasurer treasurer@fordastronomyclub.com for the discount form. The form should be sent to the respective publisher with your subscription request and payment. Do not send money directly to FAAC.

The FAAC has a pool of equipment including telescopes, cameras, and other gear used for outreach. Much of the gear can be borrowed for personal use in the interest of furthering your knowledge and experience in astronomy.

Please see the equipment list for further information.

Club Wear

Club logo-wear (embroidered with club logo) can be ordered directly through LLBeanBusiness.com

See the groups.io files section for ordering information and instructions on how to request the correct logo.

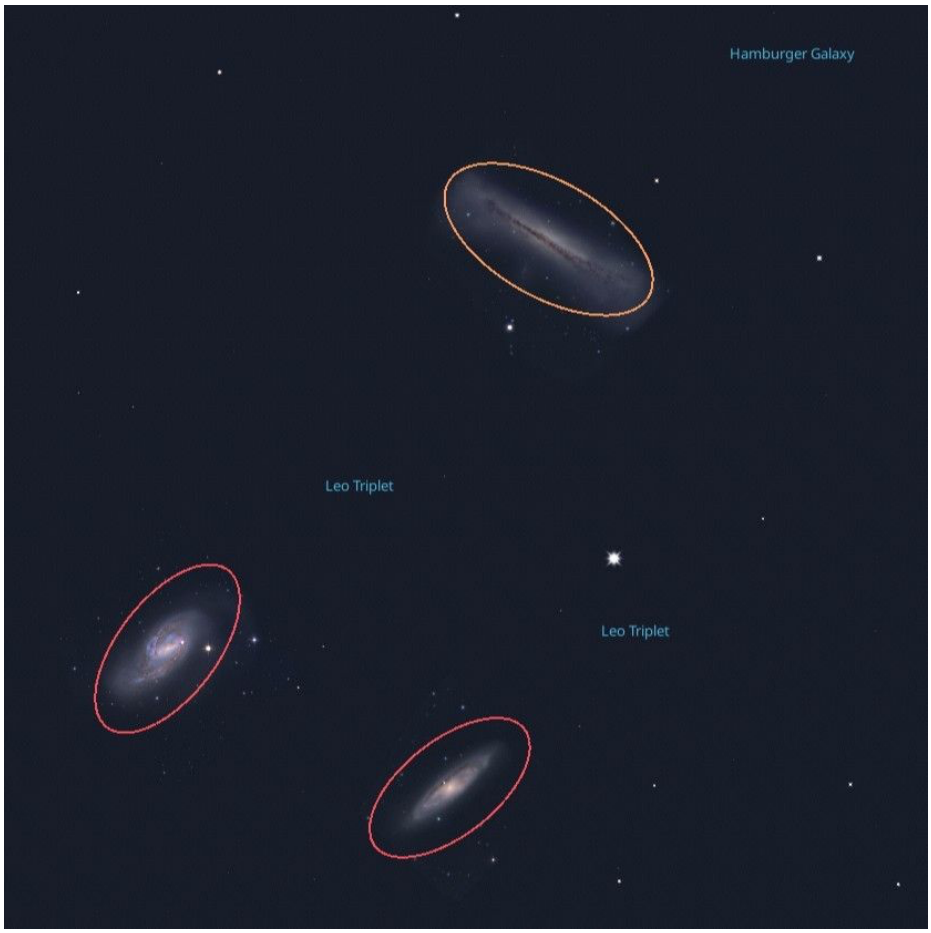
Communication

The FAAC uses Groups.io for our email distribution list (both formal and informal discussion.)

Observing nights & locations (scheduled and unscheduled as weather permits), equipment

the Lion, with the forward-facing sickle being the lion's head and mane, and the rear triangle its hindquarters. Can you see this mighty feline? It might help to imagine Leo proudly sitting up and staring straight ahead, like a celestial Sphinx. To help find these objects, you can use online tools like Stellarium Web.

If you peer deeper into Leo with a small telescope or binoculars, you'll find a notable double star! Look in the sickle of Leo for its second-brightest star, Algieba, also called Gamma Leonis. This star splits into two bright yellow stars even with a small magnification. You can make this "split" with binoculars, but it's more apparent with a telescope. Compare the color and intensity of these two stars: do you notice any differences? There are other multiple-star systems in Leo; spend a few minutes scanning with your instrument of choice, and see what you discover.



The Leo Triplet - three galaxies that appear to be close together under the star Chertan in the Leo constellation. Stellarium

Continued on Page 9

questions, events, outreaches, etc. are normally discussed via this list.

Join by visiting https://groups.io/g/FordAstronomyClub to request membership.

Articles & Submissions

Your submissions to Star Stuff are welcome! Send your story and/or images to the editor at: starstuff@fordastronomyclub.com

Observatory

The FAAC maintains and operates the Hector J Robinson Observatory (HJRO) at Lincoln Park Schools.

The observatory houses a 14" Celestron C14 Schmidt Cassegrain Telescope as well as other instruments and can be used by club members.

The observatory is adjacent to the athletic field situated between the Lincoln Park Middle School and High School buildings near

1701 Champaign Rd.
Lincoln Park, MI 48146

The school system has designated four "key-holders" within the club who have the ability to open the observatory.

Call (313) 444-5850 to learn when the observatory is opening (or request an opening).

Scheduled Club Events

Month	Date	Sunset	Location
April	25th	8:26pm	Observing (Spring Mill Pond)
May	23rd	8:55pm	Observing (Spring Mill Pond)
June	20th	9:13pm	Observing (Spring Mill Pond)
July	18th	9:05pm	Observing (Spring Mill Pond)

Hammond Planetarium

Date	Time	Topic
April 22nd	7:30pm	Spring Planetarium Show
April 27th	7:30pm	Spring Planetarium Show

Club Meeting Topics & Speakers

Meeting	Speaker	Topic
April 23rd	Bill Keel	Light Echos and Feeding Habits of Supermassive Black Holes
May 28th	Erika Hammerstein	Hungry Black Holes and Stellar Snacks: Exploring Shredded Stars

April Meeting

Light Echoes and the Feeding Habits of Supermassive Black Holes

Bill Keel

Professor Emeritus, Physics & Astronomy, University of Alabama

Description:

Most large, luminous galaxies have been shown to have enormously massive central black holes. These are often quiescent, detected only by their gravitational effects on surrounding stars. However, if they are surrounded by infalling gas, the resulting radiation can be spectacular, producing active galaxies and their brightest variety, quasars. Sky surveys and citizen science programs such as Galaxy Zoo led to the detection of enormous clouds of gas around many such galaxies (the best-known being Hanny's Voorwerp near IC 2497), whose properties show that the nucleus was much brighter as seen from the clouds than we see it directly. As

Continued on Page 7

Planetarium

FAAC members are volunteer operators for the Hammond Planetarium at Henry Ford College.

Planetarium shows are free and open to the public.

Four seasonal planetarium shows are offered per year with the stars and constellations of the current season as well as a multi-media presentation featuring select planets.

Public planetarium shows are normally the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm. Please see the planetarium schedule for specific times. It is posted here:

fordastronomyclub.com/hfc-planetarium

Social Media

The FAAC has several social media accounts. Members are encouraged to join and follow them.

Facebook

facebook.com/FordAstronomyClub

Twitter

twitter.com/Ford_Astro

Discord

https://discord.gg/RH6rhAPWb8

Secretary's Report (Con't from Page 1)

Member Observing: After a winter that has seemed filled with endless cloudy nights, Tim Campbell was happy to report that he actually saw Jupiter one recent evening. Milton French observed a nice quarter moon recently. Gordon Hansen has been doing some solar imaging this past month. Mike Bruno took a trip to the Florida Keys to get away from the Michigan weather. He took his Seestar and a couple other telescopes and had a very nice time. Vahan Kazandjian went out to Cavanaugh Lake in hopes of seeing the aurora borealis. Skies were not cooperative, but he was able to get some photos through breaks in the clouds. Colors were hard to see naked eye, but the photos brought out the color. Sandra Macika attended the Planets on Parade event put on by the Farmington Stargazers. She brought her meteorites and had a great time showing them to a large group of kids who were there.

A few reminders: Tomorrow night is an event at Milford Parks. They are having a lantern walk and have asked if we could bring telescopes for afterwards. The forecast is for plenty of clouds, but maybe a few breaks. Any club member is welcome to attend. Keep an eye on Groups.io for times and directions.

Our annual Swap Meet and Conference is this Saturday, March 28, at the HFC.

The deadline for submitting nominees for the Sirius Award will be March 30.

April 25 will be our first Beginners' Night at Spring Mill Pond.

Our Banquet will be May 2, at the South Lyon Hotel.

Club Business:

Secretary's Report: In "Star Stuff."

Treasurer's Report: Arica provided our current balance.

Social Media/Website: No report.

Membership: No report.

Club Equipment: No report.

What's Up in the Night Sky: Sean was absent, so Tim gave the presentation tonight. Since we were already in the planetarium, Tim gave

Continued on Page 8

Equipment

The FAAC maintain an equipment pool of telescopes, binoculars, cameras, and other equipment used for special events. Much of this equipment is available to members.

Each piece of equipment is either stored by a club volunteer who offers to be the caretaker of the item, or by the person who last borrowed the item.

Most equipment can be borrowed for one-month durations. At the end of the month, the borrower can extend the loan if no other members have requested it.

Some items are reserved for special events use and are not normally available to be borrowed.

If you are interested in borrowing an item, please contact either the current holder of the equipment, or contact the club equipment manager, Jeff Gorman, at equipment@fordastronomyclub.com

Item	Held by
Telescopes	
TK1 Coronado Personal Solar Telescope (Doublestack) w/Meade Autostar Goto Mount	Kristie Whittington
TK5 4.5" Reflector on Fitz GEM mount	Bob MacFarland
TK6 8" Orion XT8i Dobsonian	Dan Smith
TK7 TPO 8" f/4 Newtownian Astrograph (OTA Only - no mount)	Scott Smith
TK8 20" f/5 Obsession Dob, Ladder & EP Kit	Liam Finn
TKn Celestron 6" Refractor & AGT Mount	
TKn Meade 8" f/5 Newtonian & LX-70 Mount	
Zhumell 20x80 Binoculars	
Presentation Tools	
Projector (older)	Jim Frisbie
Projector (newer)	Gordon Hansen
Projection Screen 8'	John McGill
Bullhorn	Liam Finn
Speaker System w/Wireless Mic	Liam Finn
Logo Tablecloth (x2)	Gordon Hansen

Item	Held by
Display Items	
Astronomy Event Sign (3' x 6')	Gordon Hansen
Astronomy Event Signs 18x24" (x8)	Liam Finn
PVC Display Board - Folding	Sandra Macika
Banner - Small (24" x 32")	Sandra Macika
Banner - Medium (24" x 72")	Sandra Macika
Banner - Large (32" x 16')	Sandra Macika
Tri-Fold Presentation Boards	Sandra Macika
Other	
Canopy (10' x 10')	Liam Finn
Pop Cooler	Sean Pickard
TA Sky Quality Meter	Liam Finn
36" Flat-Top Griddle	Gordon Hansen
Demonstration Tools	
Weigh on Planets Scale	Liam Finn
Lunar Phase Kit	Bob MacFarland
100' Scale Model Solar System Kit	Bob MacFarland
NSN Meteorite (Outreach) kit	Sandra Macika

Item	Held by
Imaging Cameras	
C2 Meade Deep Sky Imager Pro III w/Autostar Suite	Gordon Hansen
C6 Canon 60Da Astrophotography DSLR and accessories	Tim Dey
Other Imaging Equipment	
CA1 Rigel Systems Spectrascope	Gordon Hansen
C7 Canon EOS EF 70-200mm f/1.4L IS USM lens & tripod mounting ring (for Canon EOS cameras)	Gordon Hansen
Rokinon 8mm f/3.5 Fish-Eye Lens (Canon EOS Mount)	John McGill
Special Event Items - Not available for Loan Out	
BK2 Zhumell 25x100 Binoculars, hard case, & Zhumell TRH-16 tripod w/soft fabric bag	Sandra Macika
TAK1 Night Vision Image Intensifier for telescopes (2" barrel size)	Tim Dey
Lunt 100mm H-alpha Solar Telescope with Celestron CG-5 equatorial mount	Tim Campbell

Speaker (Con't from Page 4)

volunteers around the world continue to identify these clouds, we are piecing together the growth history of these black holes on timescales otherwise inaccessible to us - hundreds of thousands of years. Processes involving whole galaxies unfold over hundreds of millions of years, but the compact and dynamic regions near their central black hole can flare and fade so fast that we can watch it happen. And if we missed the flare, sometimes the surroundings will show us the ghost of quasars past.

Bio:

Bill Keel started as an amateur with a 6" Criterion reflector in his back yard and pursued a Ph.D. at the University of California working at Lick Observatory. This was followed by stints at Kitt Peak National Observatory and the University of Leiden, plus 35 years at the University of Alabama hoping to infect students with an appreciation of the Universe. Along the way he wrote two books, edited two more, and participated in a whole bunch of research papers. Enabled by the enormous body of archival data now available, he continues to do galaxy research and has returned to some of his roots with a Celestron Origin in his front yard.

Secretary's Report (Con't from Page 5)

us an overview (literally!) of the favorite spring constellations we will all want to look out for. He also showed us the upcoming Jovian moon and shadow transits.

Planetarium presentation: We did not have a guest speaker this evening, but Tim put on a very nice short planetarium show taking us to the center of the galaxy as seen from the large telescopes in the Atacama Desert in Chile. He then talked about Messier Marathon season coming up, and answered a question about what the Messier Marathon is.

Tim took a few other questions from our membership, and that wrapped up the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

April 2, 2026 Board Meeting Summary

(Videoconference meeting.) All board members present. Five other members present.

Club Business: Secretary's Report. Cheri has suggested that she start sending out the Secretary's Report (aka General Meeting Minutes) as soon as possible after our meeting to all members via Groups.io. It has been our habit to publish the Secretary's Report in the following month's "Star Stuff," and this will not change, but the problem is if there are soon-to-be-upcoming events mentioned at the meeting, members who did not attend might not learn about them until after they have already passed. We had brief discussion, everyone seemed to think this was a good idea, so it will start with April's general meeting.

Treasurer's Report: Arica gave our current balance. She still needs to be reimbursed for her payment to renew our Quicken software. This was previously approved.

Arica gave a report on how the Swap Meet and Conference went. Table rentals and paid admissions were quite low this year, as was our profit. We discussed various reasons that may have contributed to this. Some things were totally out of our control; others can be worked on. In addition to low public attendance, the overall feeling was we did not have enough membership participation and we need to figure out how we can change that.

The deadline for nominations for our annual Sirius Award are now closed, and Dan will be contacting the board members soon and asking for their vote. We will then let Jim Frisbie know so he can order the plaque in time for the Banquet.

Membership Report: Doug Bauer advises we have recently gotten two new memberships, one at our recent planetarium meeting and one at the Swap Meet. We need to emphasize to new members the importance of signing up for Groups.io. That is our only official inter-member communication platform. They do automatically get an invitation when they join, but perhaps a couple of reminders are needed. We have a number of members who never sign up for Groups.io.

Banquet: Sean has a few different people in mind for guest speaker and will be making contact soon. Gordon will do Astro Jeopardy. Ticket sales are coming in steadily. The banquet is May 2, at the South Lyon Hotel.

Tim Campbell wanted to let us know that we will probably not see any more NASA articles in "Star Stuff." There hasn't been one since last October. They are no longer making them available. Tim is asking for article submissions from our members. He will bring it up at our next General Meeting as well as sending out a request through Groups.io.

We continued a discussion that was started at the Swap Meet between a number of members there, concerning the advertising of our upcoming Beginners'

Nights at Island Lake. It was suggested by several members that perhaps a more appropriate name for our events would be Public Observing Night. That term has already been used for a while on our events calendar. We want to emphasize on Facebook, etc., that these events are indeed open to the public, that one does not have to be a FAAC member to attend, and of course still let people know we are willing to help them if they are a beginner with a new telescope. Attendance at these events by members of the public has dropped off significantly since pre-Covid, and we would like to improve the numbers. It was agreed that we will try using the term Public Observing Night instead of Beginners' Night and see how it goes.

We also had a discussion about making an interactive pay-online membership application available on our website, fordastronomyclub.com. Right now, the only way to join is to either come to a meeting or event and pay in person, or print off an application from our site and mail it in with a check. There are other improvements and updates that need to be made to our website, and now that Dan has access to the site, he will see what needs to be done. Cheri offered to help with proofreading and correcting spelling/grammatical/punctuation errors, etc.

Leo (Con't from Page 3)

One of the most famous sights in Leo is the "Leo Triplet": three galaxies that appear to be close together. They are indeed gravitationally bound to one another, around 30 million light-years away! You'll need a telescope to spot them, and use an eyepiece with a wide field of view to see all three galaxies at once! Look below the star Chertan to find galaxies M65, M66, and NGC 3628 – The Hamburger Galaxy. Compare and contrast the appearance of each galaxy – while they are all spiral galaxies, each one is tilted at different angles to our point of view! Do they all look like spiral galaxies to you?

April is Citizen Science Month, and there are some fun Leo-related activities you can participate in! If you enjoy
comparing the Triplets, the Galaxy Zoo project could use your eyes to help classify different galaxies from sky survey data! Looking at Leo itself can even help measure light pollution: the Globe at Night project uses Leo as their target constellation for sky quality observations from the Northern Hemisphere. Find and participate in many more NASA community science programs at NASA Citizen Science. Happy observing!

Originally posted by Dave Prosper: April 2021

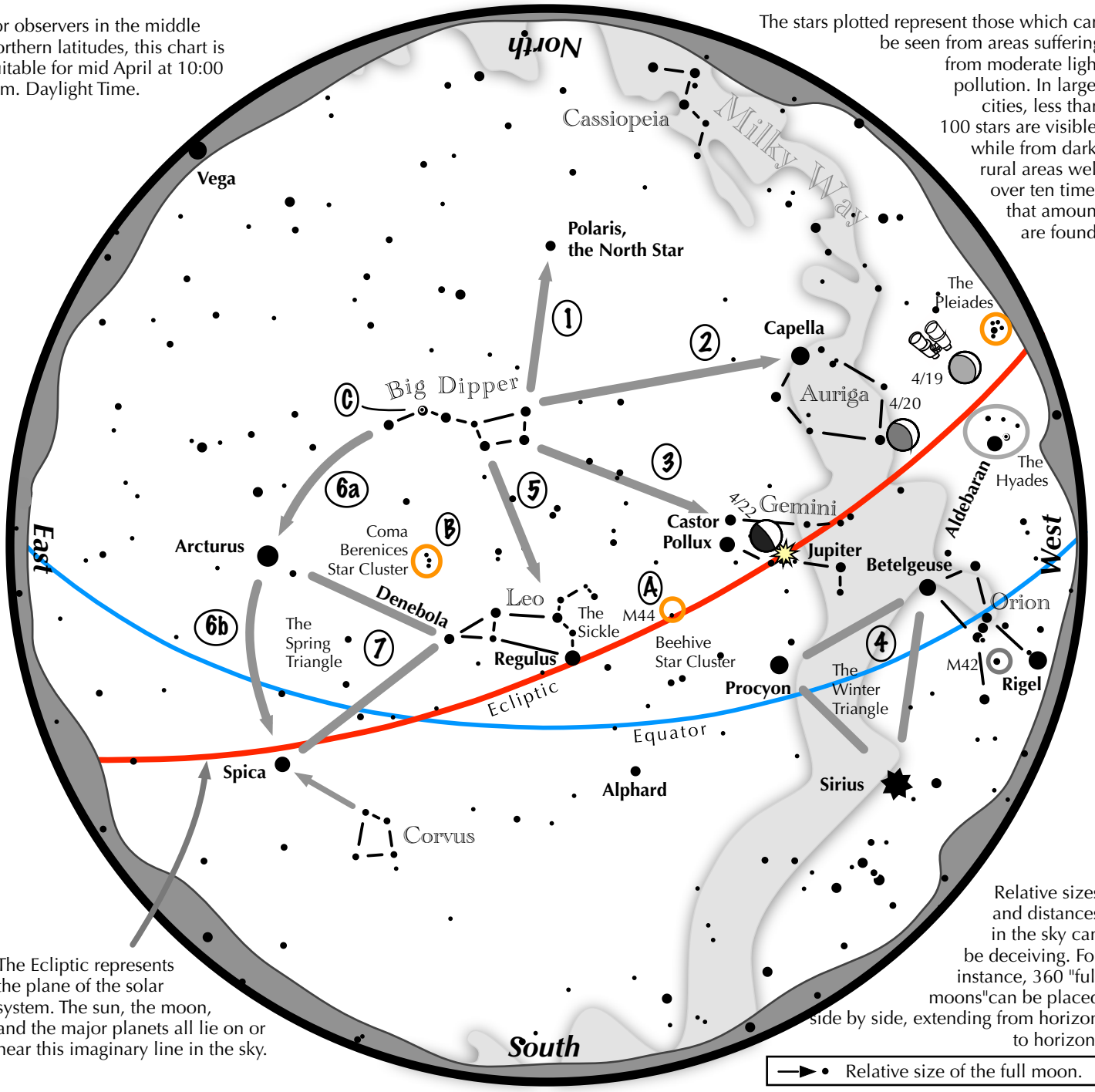
Last Updated by Kat Troche: April 2026

Navigating the mid–April Night Sky

2026

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid April at 10:00 p.m. Daylight Time.

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.



The Ecliptic represents the plane of the solar system. The sun, the moon, and the major planets all lie on or near this imaginary line in the sky.

Relative sizes and distances in the sky can be deceiving. For instance, 360 "full moons"can be placed side by side, extending from horizon to horizon.

Relative size of the full moon.

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

1. Extend an imaginary line north from the two stars at the tip of the Big Dipper's bowl. It passes Polaris, the North Star.
2. Draw another imaginary line west across the top two stars of the Dipper's bowl. It strikes Capella low in the northwest.
3. Through the two diagonal stars of the Dipper's bowl, draw a line pointing to the twin stars of Castor and Pollux in Gemini.
4. Look in the west-southwest for the bright Winter Triangle stars of Sirius, Procyon, and Betelgeuse.
5. Directly below the Dipper's bowl reclines the constellation Leo with its primary star, Regulus.
6. Follow the arc of the Dipper's handle. It first intersects Arcturus, then continues to Spica.
7. Arcturus, Spica, and Denebola form the Spring Triangle, a large equilateral triangle.

Binocular Highlights

A: M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies to the southeast of Pollux.
B: Look nearly overhead for the loose star cluster of Coma Berenices.
C: In the Big Dipper's handle shines Mizar next to a dimmer star, Alcor.

Astronomical League
www.astroleague.org