

NCRAL SEASONAL MESSIER MARATHON OBSERVING PROGRAM

~ by Carl Wenning, NCRAL Chair (2017-2021) ~

At NCRAL 2019 in Moline, IL, a proposal for NCRAL Seasonal Messier Marathon was brought up at the annual business meeting. The purpose of the proposed observing program was to promote observing among the Region's members, many of whom had never completed an Astronomical League observing program. The membership at the meeting unanimously approved the creation of the mini marathons to be operated by NCRAL that would include both pins and certificates. The observing program would be administered in much the same way as the Astronomical League's Messier Observing Award program but would not be related to it.

NCRAL's Seasonal Messier Marathon observing program is NOT designed to qualify observers for the Astronomical League's Messier Observing program; the two programs are unrelated and observing requirements are quite different. In the NCRAL program, the main requirement is to quickly observe and essentially check off items from one of four seasonal lists of Messier objects as noted in the section to follow.

NCRAL recognition will consist a suitable printed certificate and a ¾-inch enameled star pin (a different color for each season). There will be no direct cost to the membership for participating in the award program; the cost of the program (pins, certificates, mailers, postage) will be borne by the Region as a benefit of affiliation.

OBSERVING PROGRAM OBJECTS:

Naturally dispersed, the highest concentration of Messier objects is located in the spring sky due to the abundance of galaxies in the Virgo-Coma region. The lowest concentration just happens to be in the autumn sky. As a result, a certain amount of liberty has been taken to roughly equalize the number of celestial objects to observe each season into four groups of 27 or 28 objects.



Autumn: M55, M69, M70, M75, M11, M26, M56, M57, M71, M27, M29, M39, M2, M72, M73, M15, M30, M52, M103, M31, M32, M110, M33, M74, M77, M34, and M76. (27 objects)



Winter: M1, M45, M36, M37, M38, M42, M43, M78, M79, M35, M41, M50, M46, M47, M93, M48, M44, M67, M40, M81, M82, M97, M101, M108, M109, M65, M66. (27 objects)



Spring: M95, M96, M105, M53, M64, M85, M88, M91, M98, M99, M100, M49, M58, M59, M60, M61, M84, M86, M87, M89, M90, M104, M3, M51, M63, M94, M106, and M68 (28 objects)



Summer: M83, M102, M5, M13, M92, M9, M10, M12, M14, M19, M62, M107, M4, M6, M7, M80, M16, M8, M17, M18, M20, M21, M22, M23, M24, M25, M28, and M54. (28 objects)

OBSERVING PROGRAM RULES:

1. Award recipients must be either members of an NCRAL affiliated club or an AL member-at-large living with the boundaries of NCRAL.
2. All required observations for a given season must be made during a single night, dusk to dawn; no substitutions or prior observations are permitted.
3. Observations must be completed during the season indicated – from the dates of an equinox to a solstice or vice versa.
4. Observations made on the dates of the equinoxes and solstices, either before or after the exact moment of the equinox or solstice, will be accepted.
5. Observers must find, observe, and record each object using a telescope (not binoculars); merely viewing an object through someone else's telescope after they find the object does not qualify an observation.
6. Assistive devices are permitted (e.g., setting circles, goto telescopes, etc.) to find objects, but observers may choose to forego the use of assistive devices.
7. Observers must indicate on their observing record if observations were made "assisted" or "unassisted." Assisted observations are those whose objects are found with the use of setting circles, "goto" mounts, and other devices. Unassisted observation are those objects found with the use of a finder (scopes, Telrad, reflex sights, etc.), laser pointer, star hopping, sweeping, etc. Recognition certificates will bear the either of the words "assisted" or "unassisted." Only if all observations are made unassisted will a recognition certificate be marked "unassisted."

8. Observer name, NCRAL affiliation (give club name or indicate AL membership-at-large), date(s) of observations, location, type and size of telescope(s) used, eyepiece(s) used, magnification(s) used, true field of view of eyepiece(s) used, seeing, transparency, limiting magnitude, and moon phase must be recorded. A summary statement is sufficient for all observations unless there are significant changes during the course of the observing run.
9. For individual observations, provide a record consisting of sequence number (1, 2, 3, etc.), Messier number, common name of object (if applicable), type of object (OCI, GCI, PIN, Gal, Neb, Dbl, etc.), constellation, and time of observation. See the sample observing record below.
10. The use of a prepared observing record is permitted (such as those provided by Terry Defek of Popular Astronomy Club and found on the NCRAL website awards page).
11. Observational records must be confirmed by and submitted through an affiliate's ALCor. In the event that the ALCor has made the observations, then any affiliate club officer may confirm and forward the observations. Members-at-large may send in their observations without confirmation.
12. Requests for recognition (certificate and pin) must include the name, email, and mailing address of observer and/or ALCor for sending the certificate and pin.

NCRAL Secretary-Treasurer Roy Gustafson currently serves as program manager. Electronic submissions are preferred and may be emailed to astroy46@gmail.com. Be certain to include "Seasonal Messier Marathon" in the subject line. Alternatively, send a physical copy of observing record to Mr. Roy Gustafson, NCRAL Secretary-Treasurer; 11 Deer Run Rd, Orion, Illinois 61273.

SAMPLE RECORD:

The following sample observing record was created using Excel.

AUTUMN 2019 SEASONAL MESSIER MARATHON

Observer: Dalilah Grover

NCRAL Affiliation: Twin Bay Astronomy Club

Date(s) of Observations: September 23-24, 2019

Location: Olive Grove Nature Center, Oil City, IL

Telescope(s) used: Celestron CPC 11" goto

Eyepiece(s) used: 28mm Plössl

Magnification(s) used: 100X

True field(s) of view: 0.65°

Moon phase: waning crescent (~27.5 days)

Seeing: 3/5

Transparency: 4/5

Assisted? (Yes/No): Yes

Sequence	Messier No.	Object Type	Common Name	Constellation	Time Observed
1	55	GCI	none	Sagittarius	8:22 PM
2	69	GCI	none	Sagittarius	8:30 PM
3	70	GCL	none	Sagittarius	8:37 PM
4	57	PIN	Ring Nebula	Lyra	8:43 PM
5	11	OCI	Wild Duck	Scutum	8:50 PM
6	31	Gal	Andromeda Galaxy	Andromeda	9:02 PM
7	27	PIN	Dumbbell Nebula		
8	26				

For details about the objects to be observed, see Messier Object list, ordered by season, in the *RASC Observer's Handbook* and available online at the following URL: <http://www.messier.seds.org/xtra/similar/dataRASC.html>