

NCRAL blotter

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Monthly Tidbits from NCRAL Officers, A.L. Representative and Appointees

[Alan Sheidler](#), PAC, Chairman

[Eric Claeys](#), NAA, Vice Chairman

[Roy Gustafson](#), PAC, Secretary-Treasurer

[John Attewell](#), RAC, Regional Rep. to the A.L.

[Carl Wenning](#), TCAA, Publications Editor

[Josef Chlachula](#), RAC, Web Administrator

August 2025

- ★ **THIS WEEKEND: Titan Shadow transit on Aug 3rd.** Do you want to join us on August 3rd to view the Titan shadow transit on Zoom? Titan's shadow mid transit is at 3:52 a.m. (astronomical dawn ends ~3:59 a.m., civil dawn starts ~5:27 a.m., and sunrise is about ~5:59 a.m. – location dependent). Let's try this from around the region! Alan Sheidler (chair) and Josef Chlachula (webmaster) will lead this event. Josef will start the Zoom meeting on Sunday, August 3, at 3:30 a.m. CDT. The Zoom link will be [published here](#) on the NCRAL website.
- ★ **Astronomers at Work:** NCRAL Chair Alan Sheidler, a member of *Popular Astronomy Club*, took first place in the AstroCON 2025 astrophotography contest at Bryce Canyon, Utah, last month. The following image was taken at Ruby's Inn Bryce Canyon Overlook, on June 27. Al used a Nikon D7500 camera with a 10-24mm zoom lens set at F=10mm, f/3.5, with a 30-second exposure at ISO 8000. The camera was set up on an unguided tripod. The astronomers at work in the image are Jim Dole and Gary Gordon from the Planetary Studies Foundation, a NCRAL affiliate in Freeport, IL. Congratulations to Alan on his accomplishment. NCRAL Newsletter Editor, a member of the *Twin City Amateur Astronomers*, presented **an hour-long talk** about the use of image intensifiers in amateur astronomy. He illustrated the photographic work of TCAA members Patrick Connelly and Meredith Barkhurst. That talk is freely available to NCRAL affiliates through the **NCRAL Speakers Bureau**.

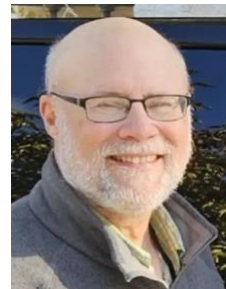


★ **NCRAL Speakers Bureau** has been *updated with new speakers and offerings*. We now have some 30 speakers and many more topics. New entries have been placed at the end of the document. Check it out on the [NCRAL website](#) and contact the folks there for high-quality talks.

★ **From AstroCON 2025 at Bryce Canyon:**

- Rising Senior Jericho Kuehl is a 2025 recipient of the Horkheimer - D'Auria Service Award and a member of the *Milwaukee Astronomical Society*.
- Master Observer Award: Jeff Moorhouse, *La Crosse Area Astronomical Society*, was unable to make it to Bryce Canyon to receive the award personally.
- The *Twin City Amateur Astronomers* have received the Region's sole Library Telescope from the Astronomical League for the year.

★ From the *Gemini* newsletter, July 2025; *Newsletter of the Minnesota Astronomical Society*, **Dr. David Tosteson**, a member of the Minnesota Astronomical Society who lived in Chisago City, Minnesota, passed away on May 5, 2025. David was well known for the numerous articles he wrote for *Reflector* magazine. [David's obituary is available online](#).



★ The NCRAL website now has a more convenient URL: <http://ncral.org/>. This new address no longer includes the term "WordPress." Thanks to former webmaster Jeff Setzer for suggesting it and to Josef Chlachula, our new webmaster, for making it happen.

★ **An updated version of the Summer 2025 issue of *Northern Lights*** has been added to the NCRAL [newsletter archive](#). This latest version includes a detailed listing for the **Noteworthy!** column that is regularly included. The information needed to update that column with AL observing program accomplishments did not arrive until after the newsletter editor departed for AstroCON 2025. Rather than overwhelming the column with too much information in the autumn issue, your editor decided to put out an updated version of the summer issue. Please share this information with your membership.

★ **A new comprehensive index for *Northern Lights*** (Summer 2016 – Summer 2025) has been posted to the NCRAL website's newsletter archive page. Check it out at <https://ncral.org/newsletter-archive/>

★ **Cedar Amateur Astronomers *Mission Possible*, NCRAL's Eastern Iowa Cosmic Conference for 2026**, May 15-17, at the DoubleTree by Hilton. Saturday will be filled with groundbreaking speakers, a business meeting, an awards banquet, an astro-photography contest, door prizes, and some social activities mixed in. The hosts are working on several astro-themed destinations for early arrivers on Friday or before attendees hit the road on Sunday. Mark your calendar for May 15 - 17, 2026, and look for updates in upcoming issues of ***Northern Lights***.

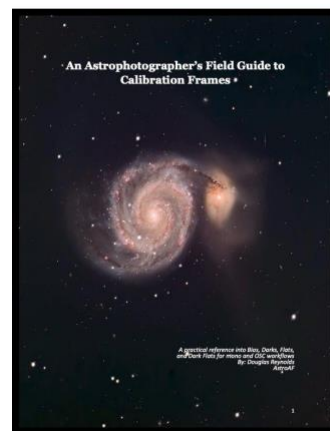
★ The *Quad Cities Astronomical Society* (QCAS) and the *Popular Astronomy Club* invite you to the 40th **Eastern Iowa Star Party**. The event is scheduled for August 22-24 and will be held at the Wapsi River Education Center, located about five miles north of Dixon, IA. There is no star party fee or formal registration, but if you plan to attend, please email John Baker at johnbsys@aol.com. The star party site can be reached from Interstate 80. Proceed on Interstate 80 to the Walcott, IA, exit. At this exit, proceed north on County Road Y40 for eight miles to Dixon, IA. County Road Y40 comes to a T intersection in Dixon with County Road Y4E. When you reach this intersection, proceed left (west) and go approximately one and a half miles until you come to a sign directing you to WREEC.

★ The **Northern Lights Star Fest** will be August 20-25 at the Long Lake Conservation Center near McGregor, Minnesota. Visit the *Minnesota Astronomical Society* [website](#) for more information.

★ **Sangamon Astronomical Society's Illinois Dark Skies Star Party** will be held September 18-20, 2025, at Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish & Wildlife Area. The site is 25 miles northwest of Springfield, Illinois. The group campgrounds at Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish & Wildlife Area are the host location. There is plenty of room, covered pavilions, and restrooms. There is also an adjacent family campground, should you wish to stay there and walk or drive over to the start party site. Details at www.sas-sky.org. To familiarize yourself with the site, check out the maps at our club website: <http://sas-sky.org/maps/>

★ Affiliate leaders and members-at-large should keep abreast of **What's Happening** in the Astronomical League. Each month, updates are posted on the [landing page of the A.L. website](#). ALCors should check this page for regular updates to share with their affiliates' members. The most recent issue focuses attention on the 80th anniversary of the MSRAL. (Recently, *What's Happening* has been sent out to the AL membership.)

★ The TCAA's Doug Reynolds has produced a new ebook for astrophotographers. *An Astrophotographer's Field Guide to Calibration Frames* is a practical reference designed to help amateur astronomers understand, capture, and apply calibration frames for deep sky astrophotography using both one-shot color (OSC) and monochrome cameras. Whether amateur astronomers are just getting started or refining an advanced workflow, calibration frames are essential to producing clean, accurate, and artifact-free images. This guide walks readers through how to master calibration frames — and, more importantly, how to reuse them confidently session after session. More than a one-time read, this guide is designed to be a field-ready reference — something owners can keep close and refer to whenever they need a refresher or a deeper understanding during their imaging projects. To learn more about this new publication, click on the image of the ebook, and it will take you to Doug's [AstroAF website](#).



★ A host of NCRAL-affiliated amateur astronomers (mostly from Illinois) presented **Astro Camp at YMCA Camp Eberhart** near Three Rivers, Michigan, July 21-25. Participating as teachers were Illinois amateur astronomers Darren Drake, Carl Wenning, Sam Springer, Joshua W. Burton, Michael Amburg (a University of Illinois undergraduate in astronomy), and Signe Mason (a recent University of Illinois astronomy graduate). Three others living outside the NCRAL region also participated as teachers — Joe Comiskey (Michigan, but a native Illinoisian), Ryan Ehlers (Michigan), and Earl Todd (Alabama). Based on several years of experience with Astro Camp, the TCAA is now considering the launch a parent-child Astro Camp at Funks Grove Nature Spaces near Shirley, Illinois, in late summer or early autumn 2026. See the September issue of **Northern Lights** for details.

★ **Barlow Planetarium Update** — The [Barlow Planetarium](#) at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh is now entirely owned by Winnebago County. In June, the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors voted to amend their 2025 budget and fund the campus planetarium through the end of the year, including transitioning the Barlow staff to county employment. Funding for 2026 will be done through the county's normal budgeting process later this fall. The planetarium staff needs to demonstrate to its supervisors that it can be self-sustaining through ticket sales, memberships, and donations.

★ **Astronomy and Cataracts?** An important article came to the attention of your editor recently that deals with streaking of stellar images caused by cataract surgery. Joe Comiskey of the Kalamazoo Astronomical Society pointed it out. Check it out at https://www.jerryoltion.com/Cataracts_and_Astronomers.pdf

★ **Cedar Amateur Astronomers** have released a video about **NCRAL 2026**. You may view it by going to this link: [Mission Possible - For Public Release 2025-07-26.mp4](#). Note: When you click on the link, the video will start in your browser, but you probably will not hear the audio. Just click on the video twice as it is playing, and the audio will then be heard.

★ The North Central Region has a convention host for NCRAL 2026 and a tentative host for NCRAL 2027. We are now looking for **convention hosts for NCRAL 2028 and beyond**. The leadership of both NCRAL and GLRAL (Great Lakes Region Astronomical League) is particularly interested in a joint convention near the border between our two regions. It's never too early to plan to host a regional or joint-region convention. Planning at least two years in advance provides an opportunity to learn from other affiliates' planning and hosting experiences. If your affiliate is interested in hosting (and reaping the many benefits of doing so, be sure to contact NCRAL's Chair, Alan Sheidler.