Nene Valley Astronomical Society

STARGAZER

JANUARY 2026

M42 – The Orion Nebula

Imaged By Steve Williams Using A Seestar S30

www.neneastro.org.uk

Forthcoming Meetings

All meetings held at Chelveston Village Hall, Caldecott Road, Chelveston NN9 5AT at start at 8pm. Doors open from 7.45pm. Please use the entrance doors at the rear of the building (the front door is locked for security purposes).

Monday 5th January
No Meeting

Monday 19th January
Guest Speaker Meeting
Martin Lunn
'The Star of Bethlehem From An Astronomers Viewpoint'.
Admission £6.

Monday 2nd February
Club Night Meeting.
Admission £3.

Monday 16th February
Guest Speaker Meeting
Dr Ben Ryder-Stokes
'Meteorites & Their Relationship With The Outer Planets'
Admission £6.

Committee Members

Chair
Vacant

Vice Chair
Steve Williams

Secretary
Kevin Burton
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Events Co-Ordinator
John Wynn-Wernick

Membership Secretary
Paul Blackman
members@neneastro.org.uk

Treasurer
David Jones

Newsletter/Website
Steve Williams
newsletter@neneastro.org.uk

Committee Member
Paul Jamison

Observing Sessions

Our observing evenings will be held on clear Friday evenings (excepting 2nd January) at Chelveston Village Hall and commence at 8pm. Please check our website (neneastro.org.uk) after 6pm to confirm that conditions are expected to permit observing. Sessions will take place where there is a 'reasonable' chance of observing.

Please note that we do not have the use of the facilities inside of the village hall during observing evenings, therefore you may wish to bring your own refreshments.

Meeting Preview – Monday 19th January

Martin Lunn will be speaking to the society on the 19th January about 'The Star Of Bethlehem – An Astronomer's Viewpoint'

Martin studied for his degree in astrophysics whilst working as a guard on British Rail in the 1970s. From 1989 until 2011 he was Curator of Astronomy at the Yorkshire Museum in York.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and currently sits on the council. He presents lectures on cruise ships all over the world, and to various clubs and societies at home. He has his own weekly Astronomy Show on a community radio station called Drystone Radio, which can be heard on line. He also writes a monthly 'What's in the night sky?' feature for the Craven Herald newspaper which covers the Yorkshire Dales.

In 2020 he was a guest on an episode of the BBC's Antiques Road Trip, talking about Thomas Cooke, Instrument Maker of York.

His talk on the Star of Bethlehem tries to sort out the reality from myth, legend and fact from fiction… according to an astronomer!

The Solar System This Month

Full Moon	3rd January
New Moon	18th January

The Sun continues at a high level of activity, with a number of significant sunspots visible over recent weeks. We are now thought to be on the slow decline from solar maximum, although it is expected that a good level of activity will continue to be seen through 2026. Keep an eye out for the possibility of auroral activity as we go through the next few months.

Earth reaches it's closest point to the Sun (perihelion) on 3rd January as we close to 147 million km from our star.

Mercury is lost from view throughout January. Superior Conjunction is reached on 21st January.

Venus is also unavailable for observation this month as it passes through Superior Conjunction on 6th January.

Mars is also not observable this month as it passes through Superior Conjunction on 9th January. It will not be until the summer before we get the chance to spot the red planet again.

Jupiter in contrast to the 'terrestrial planets' is visible all night long amongst the stars of Gemini. The brightest object in the night sky (apart from the Moon) at present, the largest planet reaches opposition on the 10th January. Binoculars will show the steady night by night movement of the Galilean satellites, whilst a telescope reveals the major cloud belts, spots and other features visible.

Saturn is visible in the early south-western evening sky as it's current apparition begins to draw to a close. The rings remain near edge on to our line of sight. The Moon passes nearby on the evening of 23rd January.

Uranus is visible just to the south of the Pleiades star cluster in Taurus. At magnitude 5.7, this distant world will require a pair of binoculars or a small telescope to spot it.

The Evening Sky This Month

The above chart from Stellarium shows how the evening sky looks on January 1st at 10pm, January 15th at 9pm and January 30th at 8pm. Planetary positions are shown for mid-month.

Orion dominates the mid-winter evening sky with the celestial hunters bright stars making it one of the easiest constellations for newcomers to pick out in the sky. Home to the famous nebula M42, this is our nearest star formation region and a popular target for astro-imagers.

Above Orion lies the constellation of Taurus the Bull. M45 the Pleiades star cluster can be found in the upper right of this constellation. A sky showpiece that is best observed through a pair of binoculars. Also in Taurus is M1, the Crab Nebula, the remnants of a star that exploded as a supernova back in the year 1054. Visually M1 is best observed through a medium to large telescope on a night without moonlight interference.

High overhead is the bright star Capella in the constellation of Auriga. Ranked as the sixth brightest star in our night sky it lies 43 light years distant. The Milky Way runs through Auriga along with the neighbouring constellations of Gemini and Perseus.

Elsewhere in the sky, the constellations of Pegasus and Andromeda continue their descent in the west, whilst on the opposite side of the sky Cancer and Leo are rising which bring their own celestial treasures to explore either later in the night or in a few weeks time.

The Great Bear, Ursa Major, stands on it's tail as it climbs in the north-east, whilst our closest night time star in the northern hemisphere, shines like a searchlight low down towards the south-east.

Neptune is located just above Saturn and is visible in the early part of the evening towards the south-west. At magnitude 7.8, it is a little fainter than Uranus, however can still be seen in binoculars (particularly if they are mounted on a tripod).

The Quadrantid Meteor Shower reaches it's short maximum on the night of 3rd/4th January. Unfortunately, the Moon is also Full at the same time, therefore it's bright light will drown out all but the brightest meteors. Nevertheless, as the Quadrantids have been known to produce very bright meteors (even fireballs), a patient observer may hit lucky.

Comet 24P/Schaumause is our brightest comet at present. Predicted to be at about magnitude 8 through January tracking through Bootes in the pre-dawn sky.

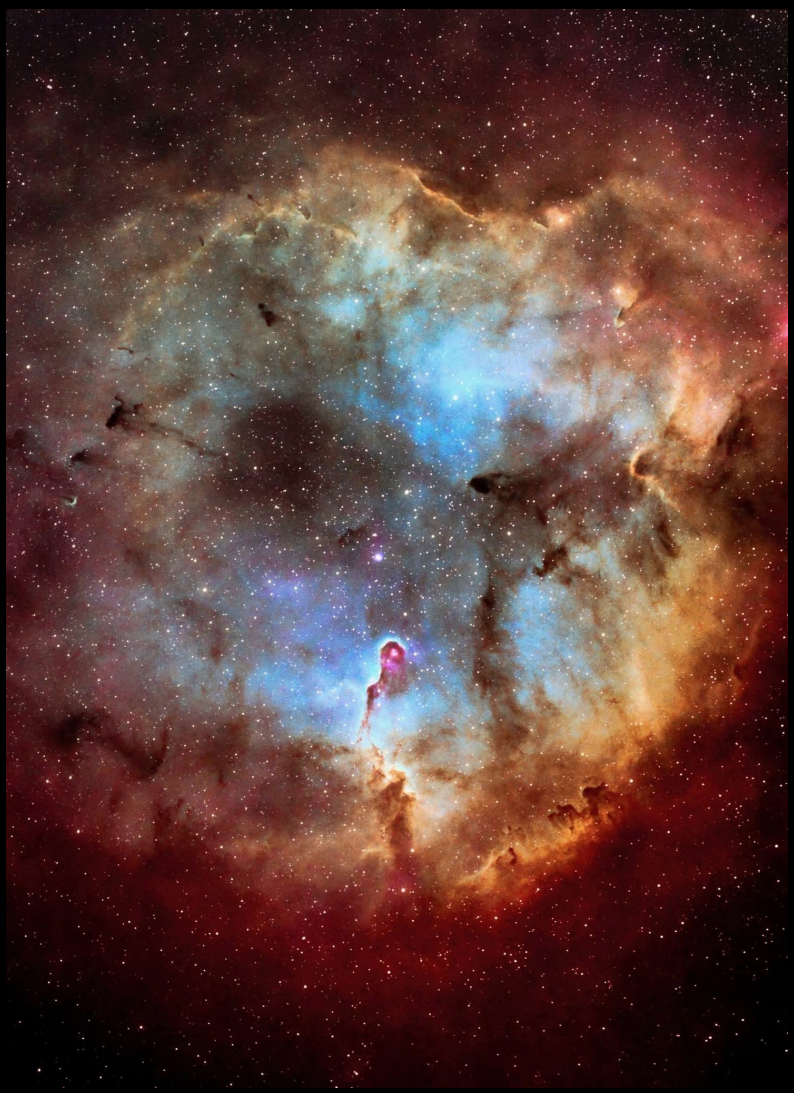
Lunar Happenings – This month the Moon gets close up and personal to both the Beehive (M44) and Pleiades (M45) star clusters. On the night of 4th/5th January the Moon comes to within the same binocular field of view of M44, whilst on the night of 27th/28th January it closes in on M45. The latter is particularly worth observing as the Moon will occult a number of the stars of the Pleiades from just after 9pm.

Observing Challenge – Many will be familiar with the transits of the Galilean satellites across the disc of Jupiter which occur quite regularly. But have you managed to see Titan do the same across Saturn? With the small tilt of Saturn to our line of sight at present, you have the chance to do this during January. Look on the evenings of the 9th and 25th January to see if you can spot Titan.

Contributions for the next edition of Stargazer are welcome from all members and can be sent to Steve Williams via newsletter@neneastro.org.uk

Members Observations

Jupiter as imaged on 19th December 2025 by Paul Blackman using a Celeston 9.25 inch telescope.



IC1396 an ionized gas region in Cepheus imaged by David Bryant. 7.5 hour exposure time. Ha/OIII & SII filters. Siril/GIMP processing