Nene Valley Astronomical Society

STARGAZER

FEBRUARY 2026

NGC 1792 – Stellar Formation Galaxy

Imaged By The Hubble Space Telescope

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 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.

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

Monday 16th March
Guest Speaker Meeting
Dr Nick Hewitt
Subject TBA
Admission £6.

Committee Members

Chair
Vacant

Vice Chair
Steve Williams

Secretary
Kevin Burton
enquiries@neneastro.org.uk

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 Evenings

At a recent meeting of the Committee, we agreed that we would try a new approach to managing our Observing Evenings. It will work like this, each Friday morning Paul Jamieson will look at the weather forecast for that evening and if it looks like it will be clear, he will message the Committee members via Whats App to see if they wish to run an Observing Evening. If he gets to go-ahead, he will then send out another message to everyone who wishes to be included in the group. This will tell everyone that the evening will go ahead so they can attend should they wish. The timings etc. will remain as before ie meet up at 8pm in the paddock by the village hall. We are also looking at extending the Observing Evenings to a Monday evening as well when normally we would have a club night. This almost doubles our chances of getting a clear night and we would welcome your feedback on this idea. Again this would be done via Whats App.

If you would like to be included in the group and there is no obligation to do so, please forward your mobile number to Paul Jamieson. Obviously you will need Whats App installed on your mobile which is easy to download from Apple Store for example and is free of charge. If you experience any problems with this, please bring your phone to the next meeting and someone will hopefully be able to help.

Paul J's mobile number is xxxxx xxxxx just send him a message saying you would like to join with your full name and he will do the rest.

Meeting Preview – Monday 16th February

Dr Ben Ryder-Stokes is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at The Open University, specialising in planetary materials and asteroid science. His current research integrates laboratory spectroscopy with meteorite microanalysis to interpret the mineralogy of asteroids, providing ground truth for astronomical observations and supporting ongoing and future space missions. He focuses on linking differentiated planetesimals with implications for planetary formation, dynamical models, resource utilisation, and the evolution of the early Solar System.

Dr Ryder-Stokes has published five papers in 2025 linking meteorites to asteroids and planets and also refining the timing of planet formation in the outer Solar System. His work has been mentioned in news articles across CNN, New Scientist and he enjoys presenting at local Astronomical Societies.

The Solar System This Month

Full Moon	1st February
New Moon	17th February

The Sun has seen a good amount of activity over the last few weeks with a number of sunspot groups visible as January drew to a close. As the Sun starts to slowly climb higher in the daytime sky, hopefully this activity continues. We are now past solar maximum, although activity is expected to remain at a high rate throughout this year.

Mercury pulls out following its Superior Conjunction passage last month into this months early evening sky. Look low down towards the west during twilight (to the lower right of Saturn) from the 12th to the end of the month. Mercury reaches Greatest Eastern Elongation on 19th February when it will be at magnitude -0.4.

Venus is also emerging into the western evening sky this month. It is very low down, but being at magnitude -4, if you have an unobstructed western horizon then you should be able to spot it, particularly towards the end of the month.

Mars past Superior Conjunction last month, but remains too close to the Sun in the sky to be seen. It will be the summer until keen Mars observers will next be able to view our planetary neighbour.

Jupiter remains the main planet on view this month. Visible amongst the stars of Gemini, it lies high in the East as twilight fades. Being just past opposition last month, it remains visible for most of the hours of darkness and reaches it's highest due South by mid-evening. The Moon is nearby on the nights of 26th & 27th February.

Saturn remains visible in the early evening in the south-western part of the sky, setting just after 8pm mid-month. Saturn is in conjunction with the Sun next month, so now is the time for your last evening views for a while.

Uranus is visible just to the south of the Pleiades star cluster in Taurus. At magnitude 5.7.

The Evening Sky This Month

The above chart from Stellarium shows how the evening sky looks on February 1st at 10pm, February 15th at 9pm and February 28th at 8pm. Planetary positions are shown for mid-month.

The changing of the season starts to be noticed this month, as the nights of mid-winter begin to give way. At the time of our chart, the great celestial hunter has already passed across the meridian, however still lies high up and well placed for observation. Lower down and due South is the bright star Sirius in the constellation of Canis Major.

Higher up and crossing the meridian is the zodiacal constellation of Gemini with it's temporary resident Jupiter. Gemini is home to some fine deep sky objects, including the famed NGC 2392 a magnitude nine planetary nebula known as the Eskimo Nebula. A rather more challenging planetary nebula for imagers, the Medusa Nebula (Abell 21) is also in Gemini. This is a very low surface brightness object, needing dark skies and a moderate sized telescope to capture.

To the East of Gemini is the faint constellation of Cancer the Crab. Two famed open star clusters can be found here – M44 the beehive and M67, both nice objects through a pair of binoculars.

To the south-east lies Leo, while galaxy hunters will be pleased with Ursa Major high up to the north-east by mid-evening with M81 and M82. Canes Venatici follows, bringing the rather nice M51 Whirlpool galaxy.

Round to the west, Pegasus is now setting with Andromeda getting low, although Perseus remains reasonably high.

Neptune, like Saturn is also now nearing the end of its current apparition. Visible low down towards the south-west in the early evening, its low altitude and relative faintness make it a bit harder to spot.

Meteor Showers – no major meteor showers are active during February.

Comet 24P/Schaumause is our brightest comet at present, although it is now fading. It was at magnitude 9 at the end of January and heading through the constellation of Bootes.

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

Introducing the NVAS Bi-Annual Journal

As a way of increasing membership services and benefits, the committee has recently agreed to the introduction of a bi-annual society journal.

This will be a professionally printed, A4 sized journal and be available for collection only by members at our meetings.

It is envisaged that the Journal will include articles and observations from members and friends and serve as a more permanent record of our activities.

The Stargazer Newsletter will continue to be produced on a monthly basis, but this will have an emphasis on society announcements and events, sky notes and timely news.

It is hoped that the first journal will be available in either March or April and contributions are invited from all. The deadline for the inaugural issue is 28th February and can be sent to newsletter@neneastro.org.uk

Members Observations

Jupiter as imaged on 3rd January 2026 by Steve Williams using a Skywatcher Skymax 180. (South is at the top)

The Open Star Cluster M38 in the constellation of Auriga. Imaged by Steve Williams using a Seestar S30 on 27th January 2026.