

The May meeting was, as usual, our “Ask the Panel” session where all sorts of questions from members are answered by the “expert” panel (as well as they can anyway :-). This year’s panel was Bud, Ian and Terry and they were given subjects ranging from favourite objects observed to the very edge of the universe.

Jim started off matters with asking what blind astrophysicist Wanda Diaz-Merced’s experiments in sonification of objects sound like. Despite lots of internet searches, it doesn’t look like there are many examples of what she uses to hear astrophysical objects. However, the panel was sure that time dependent data, like the “pop” of gravitational waves when two black holes collide, was very amenable to sonification. Indeed, it was probably that we can hear variations better than we can see them from a graph.

We also had a few questions on human space travel. Would it ever happen? What would be the effect of humans living their lives on the Moon or Mars? Would people born on Mars or the Moon ever be able to come to Earth? Would deaf or blind people be able to adapt to space better than fully able bodied people? The panel felt that it was inevitable that people would go to other planets eventually but that there were huge obstacles to overcome. It’s probably (still) an area for Science Fiction for a little while yet.

The most “philosophical” question related to whether there was an “edge” to the universe and what happened to energy released there. The panel felt that there was no real edge to the universe (“infinite but bounded” like the surface of a sphere) but that the question still related to things like Hawking radiation from Black Holes.

We finished up with “What’s the best thing you’ve ever observed?” in response to this, Bud regaled us with the tale of his first (of many!) home built telescope made of spectacle lenses and cardboard tube which transformed the moon from a plain disk to a world of craters and mountains – something that he’s still observing to this day.

Many thanks to everyone for their questions and to the panel for coming up with answers (however inaccurate :-).

After the break, Ken showed a number of his (as usual) excellent images of nebulae and spiral galaxy M101. Terry did his usual Upcoming Events (see below) which includes the 2026 programme for our “sister” society at Somerset Levels Stargazers. He also asked if we wanted to do something on August 12th for the 94% partial solar eclipse (and the Perseids later) and how we should try to celebrate the society’s 25th birthday in 2027. He also had some images of Uranus near the Pleiades (see last month’s Upcoming Events) and some from his Australian telescopes, including one of (now fading) comet 2025 R3 showing some very nice tail detail.

Next month’s meeting is on Wednesday June 17th and the speaker will be Hugh Allen of the Wells and Mendip Astronomical Society who will talk about the spectroscopist William Huggins. We hope to see you then.

Upcoming Events

Planets

Venus is bright in the west after sunset and doesn't set until nearly midnight BST (which is nearly 3 hours after the sun). Between 24th May and 16th June it will actually set after midnight. It's moving towards Jupiter and will have a close conjunction on 9th June though they will be quite low down by the time it gets dark at 23:20 BST. A thin crescent moon will be very close on 17th June.

Mercury will have its best evening apparition for 2026 at the end of May and the start of June. It will be at its brightest at the start of the apparition so the best time to find it is probably the week around 1st June at around 22:15 BST. You should be able to see Venus and Jupiter with the naked eye, both just north of due west. Take a straight line from Jupiter, through Venus and follow down about twice the distance between Jupiter and Venus. You may need binoculars to start but you should be able to pick it up with the naked eye once you know where it is.

Mars is too close to the sun to be observed but will start to appear in the morning sky by the next meeting in mid June.

Jupiter is moving rapidly into the twilight and will be lost by the end of June.

Saturn is currently too close to the Sun but it will start to appear low in the morning sky by early June and be reasonably visible by the next meeting.

Uranus is currently in conjunction with the sun.

Neptune rises before Saturn but is still low when it starts to get light (and you would need a telescope to see it).

Comets

Comet C/2005 R3 PANSTARRS has been visible in the Southern Hemisphere but only just visible to the naked eye (and not like the pictures!). It's starting to fade but still has a nice tail in long exposures.

Constellations

The winter constellations set before it gets dark in the evening (23:00 BST) with only Gemini (and Jupiter) lingering on and they will be gone by the next meeting in mid June.

The spring constellations dominate the evening sky with Spica in Virgo and Arcturus in Boötes on the meridian and Leo starting to sink in the west. Corvus is below Virgo and the cup shaped Corona Borealis is to the east of Boötes. Vega is well up and nearly due east with Hercules between it and Corona Borealis.

By midnight BST, the summer triangle stars of Vega, Deneb and Altair are visible with Scorpius reaching the meridian by 2am. By the next meeting Scorpius will be on the meridian at midnight and the summer triangle will be very prominent in the eastern sky.

It won't get properly dark from 25th May until 18th July as the sun will always be above 18° below the horizon during that time.

Upcoming Meetings

Jun 17 Hugh Allen *Reaching Across the Gulf of Space: The life and work of Sir William Huggins*

Jul 22 James Palmer *Approaching the Stars - single image shots to short exposure astrophotography*

Aug 19 Mark Hardaker *Astronomical Planning and Recording - How to Get the Most Out of your Hobby*

Sep 16 Gadgets and Gizmos Evening followed by Observing Session

Events

Redstart School Thursday 11th February 2027

Somerset Levels Stargazers

The monthly meetings of the Somerset Levels Stargazers take place on the last Wednesday of each month at 7.30 p.m at Othery Village Hall, Fore Street, Othery TA7 0QU

May 27th Bud Budzenski. Galileo

June 24th Nick O'donnell Space-Walk Scientific Dimensions

July 29th Mark Radice Visual Astronomy

August 24th Josh Dury Astroarchaeology

September 30th Hugh Allen Astrochemistry

October 28th Simon Toogood Jupiters Atmosphere From J.W.S.T. Data

November 25th Jo Richardson Astro-Tourism

2026 Programme



2026

Jan 21 Bud Budzynski Albert Einstein

Feb 18 Brian Fraser Exploration of Mars

Mar 18 John Stapleton Amateur Astronomy: Why do we do it?

Apr 15 David Strange Norman Lockyer

May 20 Ask the Panel

Jun 17 Hugh Allen Reaching Across the Gulf of Space: The life and work of Sir William Huggins

Jul 22 James Palmer Approaching the Stars - single image shots to short exposure astrophotography

**Aug 19 Mark Hardaker Astronomical Planning and Recording
- How to Get the Most Out of your Hobby**

Sep 16 Gadgets and Gizmos Evening followed by Observing Session

Oct 21

Nov 18

Dec 16 Christmas Social and members' short talks

CADAS meetings start at 7:30pm and last about 2 hours including a break for tea/coffee and cake. We meet at the Village Hall in Norton-sub-Hamdon, TA14 6SF. See <http://www.cadas.net/> for further details.