



# The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

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## RASC 150 IMAGINING THE SKIES CONTEST

**C**alling all astrophotographers, astro-sketchers and creative artists, novice or experienced! The RASC's 150th Anniversary Committee invites you to join in a celebration of our beautiful skies in 2018 by actively participating in a unique photography, sketching and creative works contest. What better way for RASC members to mark our 150th year than by submitting their own work and, in particular, by encouraging friends, neighbours and co-workers—indeed, everyone of all ages and levels of experience—to participate?

Plan to go out in 2018 to observe the skies around you, and if you can, ask a novice to join you. A passion for astronomy often starts with observing and then making sense of those observations by recording them in a diversity of ways. In our contest, various types of observations or inspired artistic creations can be submitted to be viewed and appreciated by others.

One section of our contest invites photographic observations, running the gamut from spontaneous images taken with a smartphone to those captured using sophisticated telescopes and cameras. Photographs ground us to a moment and recapture memories of what we saw. For instance, we can look back at our own images of the 2017 total solar eclipse and are instantly returned to the place we shared with friends and colleagues and the thrill of that special moment. Whether you are a budding novice or a seasoned expert, we want your images in our sesquicentennial contest.

But the entries should not be limited to the universe as seen through the photographic

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### CONTRIBUTORS

David Garner, Editor

Susan Dickinson, Copy Editor

Janice McLean, Design

*with contributions from:*

Lauri Roche and Jim Hesser,  
Victoria Centre

Dan Meek, Calgary Centre

Robyn Foret, Vice President, RASC

John Percy, University of Toronto

Charles Ennis, National Secretary, RASC

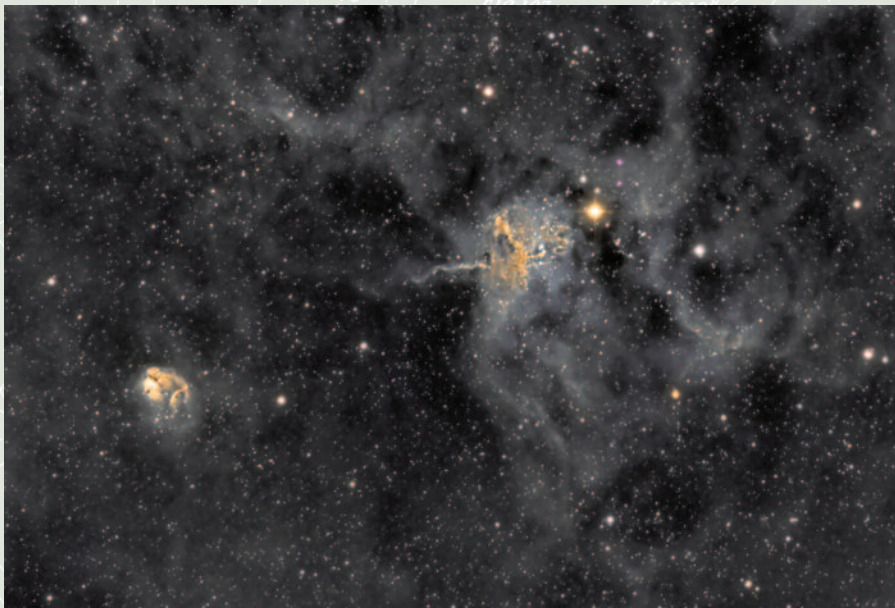
### CONTACT US

We invite all Centres to contribute articles about their latest activities. Have you had any public star parties, award ceremonies, special events or observatory activities? Photos are welcome. Please send articles and pictures to [newsletter@rasc.ca](mailto:newsletter@rasc.ca).

### WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOUR?

This 5½-hour narrowband image of IC417, the Spider Nebula (upper right), and NGC1931, the Fly Nebula (lower left), was taken with a Tele Vue NP127is telescope and a QSI 583wsg camera.

—Dan Meek  
Calgary Centre





**NGC7380** The Wizard Nebula is located about 7,200 light-years away, in the constellation Cepheus. This 6-hour image was taken from Calgary in July 2017 using a Tele Vue NP127is telescope and a QSI 583wsg camera.

—Dan Meek, Calgary Centre

### Contest cont'd.

lens. The art of sketching at the eyepiece is alive and well, and we welcome such submissions. The immediacy of capturing the sky by drawing what you observe with the naked eye or through a telescope makes a direct connection with first-generation RASC members, who employed similar means. It is an art both ancient and modern. Make a resolution to try sketching this year, if you haven't already.

The other section of our contest is devoted to creative works based on observations not only of what you see but also of how it makes you feel. These artistic compositions could include paintings, printmaking, textile arts, collages, stained glass, sculptures, garden design or other mixed media. Tap into your creative side: Let your imagining of the skies, inspired by your observations, guide you here.

In addition to soliciting your submis-

sions, we invite you to vote for your favourites in each category throughout the year. Votes for the most popular submissions will be announced quarterly. Prizes? Please see the contest webpages. Check out the novice entries as well as those from more seasoned observers, and vote often at [www.imaginingtheskies.ca](http://www.imaginingtheskies.ca).

—Lauri Roche and Jim Hesser  
Victoria Centre

*Please note: Imagining the Skies is an RASC-sponsored contest. To submit entries or to vote on the submitted entries, please go to the Imagining the Skies website at [www.imaginingtheskies.ca](http://www.imaginingtheskies.ca). It is not affiliated with the SkyNews Photo of the Week contest. An entry for the RASC contest is not automatically an entry for the SkyNews contest—and vice versa. For more information on the SkyNews Photo of the Week contest, please see [www.skynews.ca/category/sky-photography/photo-of-the-week](http://www.skynews.ca/category/sky-photography/photo-of-the-week).*

## 2018 ELECTION OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS CALL FOR NOMINEES

Three Board of Director positions, each being a three-year term, are open for election at the 2018 General Assembly.

Nominations for the RASC Board of Directors are open through April 30, 2018, and we encourage all members in good standing to consider a role on the Board. The 2018 Board of Directors will be announced at this year's General Assembly in Calgary.

Candidates' requirements are stipulated in "Policy G9: Society Nominations and Elections" in the Policy Manual, which is available in the Members-only section of the RASC website: [www.rasc.ca/rasc-policy-manual](http://www.rasc.ca/rasc-policy-manual).

For more insight into the effort and commitment expected of Board members, feel free to reach out to Robyn Foret, the Nominating Committee Chair. Robyn can be reached at [arforet@shaw.ca](mailto:arforet@shaw.ca) or 403-803-1075.

### 2018 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The 2018 RASC General Assembly will be held in Calgary, Alberta, from June 28 through July 2. With the Society celebrating its 150th Anniversary and the Calgary Centre celebrating its 60th, 2018 will be a very special GA.

Accommodation is at the Hotel Alma on campus at the University of Calgary. An upscale, Euro-style hotel, the Alma offers two-bedroom student quarters, standard hotel rooms and one-bedroom suites. Overflow accommodation is in Student Housing,

so be sure to book early to secure your optimal room at the Alma.

A Western-style barbecue at the university's Rothney Astrophysical Observatory informally kicks off the GA on June 28. Captivating speakers, opportunities to take an Alan Dyer workshop or a tour of the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area, a social to meet RASC friends old and new, a big reveal on Friday night, a Stampede breakfast, incredible poster and paper presentations, the Hogg Lecture, the General Assembly itself, the RASC 150 celebrations, the banquet and optional visits to the K-T boundary, Dinosaur Provincial Park, the Royal Tyrrell Museum and a Martian landscape will all make this a very special GA that members and their families can enjoy.

In the spirit of the West and espousing our Western values and hospitality, you will be warmly welcomed. Airport pickup and drop-off, a comprehensive meal plan and comfortable accommodations are ready for you.

Registration is limited, so visit our website and register soon. You don't want to miss this GA.

P.S. If you're planning an extended trip, the Calgary Stampede begins on July 6. Imagine a wonderful GA followed by a visit to Banff and Lake Louise, horseback riding on Moose Mountain, then yahoo at the Calgary Stampede.

—Robyn Foret  
Vice President, RASC

# RASC NEWSLETTER



## WHAT USE IS ASTRONOMY TO YOU?

In the previous Newsletter, I gave a long list of reasons why astronomy is useful to society and should, for instance, be part of the school curriculum. But as a recreational astronomer with an organization like the RASC, you'll find that there are many benefits to you personally.

By joining and supporting the RASC, you receive tangible benefits, such as publications. You also gain intangible benefits: an opportunity to "take a break" from work and to do something other than watch TV in the evening; a source of engagement and excitement; new interests and challenges; and social activity. Hobbies have been shown to have positive health benefits, and intellectual and social activity are as good at staving off dementia as any pill. And observing outdoors brings the

additional benefits of exercise and fresh air.

There's an annual "world happiness survey." Most recently, Canada ranked eighth out of 156. Denmark usually ranks first or second. That's partly because, like us, Denmark has strong education, health and welfare systems. But it also ranks at the top in the number of people who join groups or have hobbies. Residents of Denmark are famous for *hygge*—the ability to feel warm and cozy by enjoying life's little pleasures.

Stargazing doesn't have to be an expensive hobby. Binoculars or unaided eyes can be sufficient. And "the stars belong to everyone"—for free! (For younger readers, that's a line from a song in the 1927 musical *Good News*. It's also the title of a wonderful book by Helen Sawyer Hogg, Canada's best-known and most-beloved astron-

omer and a former President of the RASC.)

You can also be proud to support an organization of volunteers who have made award-winning contributions to science education and outreach. Some have made notable contributions to astronomical research, such as discovering comets, novae and supernovae. In my own field of research on "variable stars," Canadian amateur astronomers made and archived over 100,000 measurements last year. The RASC, in turn, supports the profession of astronomy in Canada, which ranks among the best in the world. So you should feel a warm glow of pride—just as you do when Canada wins a medal in Olympic hockey!

The RASC celebrates its 150th birthday this year, and there will be special activities across the country. This is the ideal time for you to participate in or even organize one of these activities. The range of RASC activities is remarkable in its quality, quantity, variety and creativity. No matter what your interests, abilities and experiences, there's a way for you to connect them to astronomy. It could be through your connections with youth or church or seniors groups, through music or art, through history or heritage—the list is endless.

This is more likely to be true, of course, if the RASC and its Centres are welcoming and inclusive to people of all ages, backgrounds, genders and interests. Let's make that one of our special goals for the sesquicentennial year.

—John Percy, University of Toronto,  
RASC member since 1961

## RASC OBSERVING NEWS

### RASC Observing Certificates Earned in August-December 2017

Dozens of active RASC members have distinguished themselves by earning observing certificates. For more details, see [www.rasc.ca/certificate-programs](http://www.rasc.ca/certificate-programs).

**Explore the Universe:** Shane Grassing (unattached, Pilot Butte, Saskatchewan), Jeff Hiscock (St. John's), George Pucula (Kitchener-Waterloo)

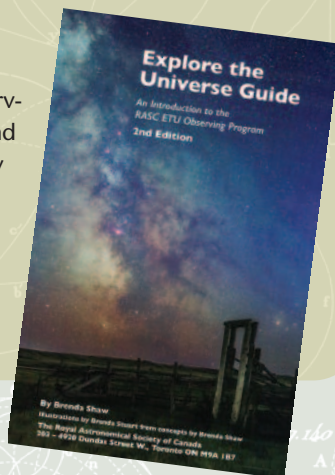
**Explore the Moon (Telescope):** Shane Grassing (unattached, Pilot Butte, Saskatchewan)

### Follow Us on Twitter!

The RASC Observing Committee now has a Twitter account: @RASCobserving. Follow us to be notified when observing certificates are earned and to find out about noteworthy observing opportunities.

### Explore the Universe Guide, 2nd Edition

This novice guide to the Explore the Universe observing program has been fully revised and updated and is available from the RASC shop. Centres (especially those running beginner astronomy courses) should contact the Society office for significant discounts on bulk orders.



## A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

The RASC was pleased to welcome 988 new members in 2017. For a list of our new members, including our 2018 new membership, please visit us at [www.rasc.ca/new-members](http://www.rasc.ca/new-members).

Your support is appreciated!



# RASC NEWSLETTER

## NAIRN'S STAR

In August of 2015, the Sunshine Coast Centre received a phone call from Tina Robertson. She told us that her 19-year-old son Nairn had just been given a telescope by Make-A-Wish Canada. "Would you teach him how to use it?" she asked. At the time of that call, Nairn had not eaten in five years: He'd been fed through an intravenous drip. Ever since he was five years old, his insides had been overproducing things that were damaging his innards.

I met Nairn for the first time a few days later. He was the most impressive young man. Always positive and motivated. Never a word of complaint, even though he was constantly in pain. Always a smile on his face. His family had been told that he would not live beyond his fifth year. But Nairn wasn't going down without a fight. He was an accomplished pianist and poet, and he was the best volunteer that the local animal rescue centre ever had. He was ardent about astronomy. I immediately contacted the Society's Board, and the RASC gave Nairn a membership.

I'd imagined that the telescope I was about to find when I visited the Robertsons would be a very basic starter scope. Not at all. When I arrived at the Robertson home, I discovered that Make-A-Wish Canada had given Nairn a Meade LX90 10-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope with all the accessories—about \$4,000 worth of observing gear.

Not only did Nairn learn to use that telescope, but he became qualified to observe with the main telescope at the Sunshine Coast Centre Observatory—a Celestron EdgeHD 16-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain. He was absolutely thrilled to be searching the skies on his own.

But a few months later, Nairn was admitted to Sechelt Hospital. We all thought, "It's just a setback. We'll get him back."

Every month, we invited an astrophysicist or a cosmologist to the Sunshine Coast Centre to speak to our members and the public, and we told every one of them, "You're not leaving the Coast until you've seen Nairn." We took them to the hospital where they did presentations and discussions in his room. Months passed. Nairn was released and tried to build up his strength to return to observing the skies.

Then Nairn went back in, and we received the news that he was being sent to the University of Calgary to undergo a transplant. The doctors were going to replace his entire intestines, his pancreas and his spleen. We all held our breath. He survived the operation. However, the surgery, along with years of fighting this chronic condition, finally proved too much. A few weeks later—exactly two weeks past Nairn's 20th birthday—he passed away.

We were honoured to attend the family's First Nations memorial service. I had the privilege of holding the eagle feather and addressing the two First Nations in attendance, telling them of Nairn's passion



Nairn Robertson: An animal rescue centre volunteer, a poet, a pianist and an astronomy buff. He is missed by the Sunshine Coast Centre.

for astronomy and our desolation at the loss of such a fine young man.

Nairn's family donated his telescope to the Sunshine Coast Centre. This telescope, bearing a memorial plaque, is available to youth visiting our observatory so that they can explore the skies and experience Nairn's passion.

Now, on the anniversary of his passing, we've learned that Nairn's Uncle Dean just had a star named for him. The star "Nairn" can be found at:

- RA 1h 21m 19.09s
- Dec +58° 19' 54.8"

We can't think of a better tribute to an RASC member. We were all honoured to have known Nairn.

—Charles Ennis, National Secretary, RASC

NATIONAL OFFICE  
The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada  
203-4920 Dundas Street West  
Toronto, ON M9A 1B7  
Telephone: 416-924-7973  
Toll-free: 1-888-924-7272  
Web: [www.rasc.ca](http://www.rasc.ca)  
E-mail: [mempub@rasc.ca](mailto:mempub@rasc.ca)



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