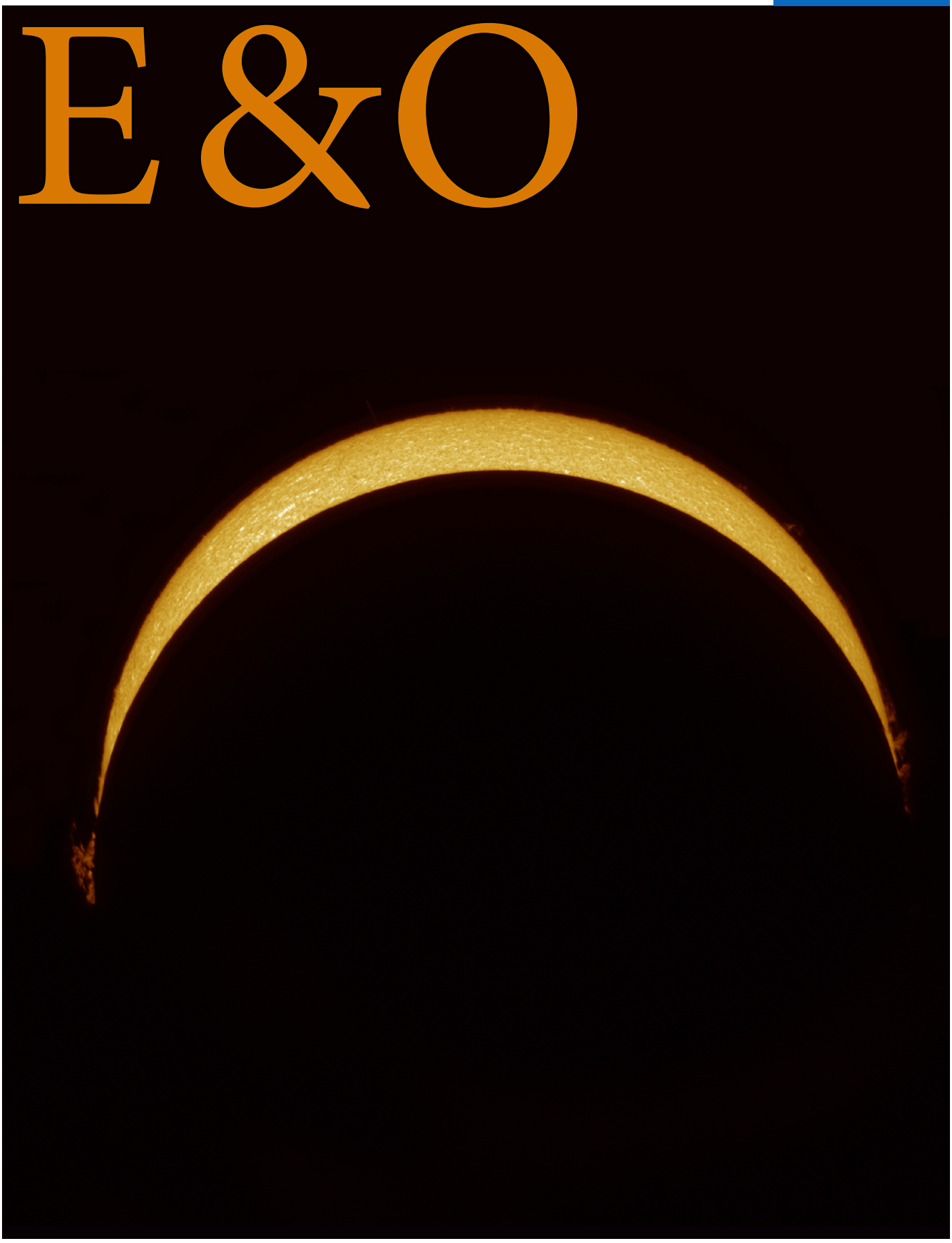
The Quarterly Newsletter of the Education and Outreach Section of the British Astronomical Association

Issue 8 2026 November

E&O



From the Editor

Alexandra Hart

Coming up in this edition of the newsletter, we have an incredible selection of articles showcasing everything you've been doing this summer and autumn.

It has been wonderful reading about what everyone has been up to, and I encourage you to keep sending in your updates. Please email EandO@britastro.org with "Newsletter" in the subject line before **31st January 2027** to be included in the next edition.

The newsletter not only helps us learn about each other's activities but also serves as a valuable record of our collective successes. If everyone wrote a short diary of the events they held, how many people attended, stories from the day—and submitted it to the newsletter, we'd have a fantastic archive of our work.

So please, write up your event diaries as you go, and submit them before the next deadline. That way, everyone can read about the joy you're spreading and feel inspired to keep going.

If you have any other articles you'd like to contribute, such as how-to guides, educational content, event advertisements, volunteer requests, or anything else others could benefit from; please send them in!

Coming up in this newsletter we have:

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On the cover: The hydrogen alpha Sun captured during maximum partial eclipse (A.Hart). Explore pages 15–41 to see the fantastic range of outreach activities we enjoyed during the partial eclipse!

Dates for your diaries:

E&O Section Zoom get together – 19:30 BST Thursday 21st January 2027

Next deadline for article inclusion in the winter newsletter **31st January 2027**

Enjoying the newsletter and being part of the Section, but not yet a BAA member?

Why not take the next step and join the British Astronomical Association.

As a member, you'll gain access to a vibrant community of observers, talks, and resources that help you deepen your interest in astronomy, education and outreach — and your support helps expand the work we do together.

Join today: https://britastro.org/join

Welcome from the Section Director



Helen Usher

Welcome to another edition of the E&O Section newsletter. Thank you again to all our contributors and Alexandra Hart for pulling it all together. We have a bumper edition for you this time, sharing all the excitement of the eclipses and more.

It was great to have an eclipse event with good weather across the country, and to see the huge level of engagement. The UKeclipse.com website (developed by First Light Optics, Go Stargazing and partners) proved a fantastic asset – making it easy to provide people with reliable information on where to get glasses, or, when too late for that, how to view the eclipse safely by other means. A particular advantage was being able to refer people to the site allowing them to find an event close by. The number of people attending events was huge, and later in the newsletter you can read about the different ways people connected with the spectacle and, as importantly, with each other. Our challenge is to build on that excitement and encourage further engagement – having another eclipse next year should help, along with reviewing this year's activities and learning what worked and what might be improved.

I had an opportunity to do that virtually at the Europlanet Science Congress (EPSC) held in the Hague. I was sad to miss the actual EPSC gathering as it is one of the few conferences which brings together professional and amateur astronomers and includes sessions on education and outreach activities. I was involved in managing a session entitled From wonder to understanding: communicating science through solar eclipses. It was an opportunity to share what we had done through the joint ukeclipse.com website, and what the lessons might be (the presentation is available https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23894998). The presentation highlighted that over 100,000 pairs of eclipse glasses had been sent out by First Light Optics (FLO) (a BIG thank you to the FLO staff for handling this huge demand on top of their commercial activities). There were over 310, 000 website visits and 2.6 million pages accessed! We've already got some ideas for how it can be improved for next year.

A similar international project, called Eclipsing Borders, was led by INAF in Italy https://oae.inaf.it/projects/educational-resources/eclipsing-borders. That project is keen to gather experiences from across the whole region where the eclipses were visible. So why not add your experiences? You can do so here. Take a look at their gallery too and see how other experiences were similar or not similar to your own.

Other Section members also presented at EPSC. David Arditti and Sri Ramakrishnan attended the conference in person and presented the work that Stellar Inspire is doing running afterschool astronomy clubs in London. You can read their presentation, which includes many details of how the afterschool clubs run, their success and challenges, here https://zenodo.org/records/23895754.

Upcoming Events

The International Astronomical Union's Conference on Astronomy for Education 2026 will be held from the 17th of November 2026 to the 20th of November 2026 (UTC time). It will run virtually and is free to attend. The conference picks up where the Shaw-IAU Workshops left off. This year's online workshop will include a special science focus on radio astronomy in education and an education focus on inclusive astronomy education for blind & visually impaired students, deaf & hard of hearing students, and students with mobility issues. More details can be found at https://astro4edu.org/workshops/iau-oae-conference-2026/

The next BAA events are:

The Radio Astronomy Section Zoom – NASA's Solar Particle Alert Network on Friday 4th December at 19:30
More details here

Back to Basics – Aurora Special – Ipswich - Saturday 5th Dec 2026

This event (led by the E&O Section) is being organised in association with the Society for Popular Astronomy and Orwell Astronomical Society. We have put together a programme of talks and activities that we hope has something for everyone, whatever level (if any) of astronomical knowledge.

For many people seeing the Aurora/ Northern Lights is on their bucket list of things to do. Over the last few years, during higher levels of solar activity, there have been some spectacular solar storms leading to Aurora being visible even down to lower latitudes like the UK.

We'll be talking about: What causes Aurora? How to improve your chances of seeing them? How to observe and photograph them? And even How you can help the scientific study of Aurora?

Members of the partner organisations will be delivering accessible talks, hands-on activities, and (weather permitting) live observing of the Sun during the day and planets, galaxies, nebula and stars in the evening. There will be lots of opportunities to chat and ask questions to the friendly, knowledgeable speakers and organisation members.

Topics for talks in the morning include an introduction to the night sky, observing the solar system, taking pictures of the Moon, planets and other night sky objects, and choosing and using a telescope.

In the afternoon we'll explore more about our main topic, the Aurora, along with other elements of 'Space Weather' such as solar storms, and noctilucent clouds, including how you can contribute to the science through making and submitting visual observations, and how you can even make observations while its cloudy using radio equipment!

In the final session we'll look back at a huge solar storm – the Carrington Event – and look forward to the next Solar Eclipse in 2027 – the rare time when you can see the solar corona directly.

During lunch and breaks there will be a range of hands-on activities, including:

- trying out different telescopes (got one at home you are not sure how to use – bring it along!),
- handling space rocks,
- learning about radio astronomy,
- observing the Sun safely,
- scheduling observations with big remote telescopes to help observe comets.

There will be helpful experts on hand to discuss any questions you may have, advise you on equipment for astronomy, and to talk about how local and national astronomy societies can help you on your astronomical journey of discovery.

In the evening (from 8pm), there is an invitation to visit the society's observatory.

You can find the full programme and the link to get tickets here. There is a discount for BAA members, so log in to the website to see the discount code.

BAA Christmas Meeting – Saturday 12th December 14:30 - London

The BAA's Christmas meeting is always popular. More details here: https://britastro.org/event/baa-christmas-meeting-3

And if you are in London for the BAA meeting (or any other reasons!) then for something completely different why not check out the **Nightmaps exhibition** at the Warburg Institute, Woburn Square https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/news-events/events/night-maps The exhibition explores the visual and intellectual history and the real-world consequences of mapping the night sky. It runs until 17 April 2027. (If you go along then why not write up your experience for the next newsletter?).

Finally, there are a couple of news items from the Royal Astronomical Society. RAS is running a **photo competition** – more details at https://www.rastrophoto.ras.ac.uk/

RAS is also recruiting an **Education and Outreach officer** – sounds a perfect fit for Section members! Full details available here. The deadline is 11:59pm Monday 23rd November 2026. ❐

Foucault's Pendulum: Bringing the Earth's Rotation to Life in Bunbury, Cheshire



St. Boniface Church, Bunbury, Cheshire *(photo: Debbie Shears).*

Jeremy Shears

How do you demonstrate that the Earth is rotating? One answer is surprisingly simple: suspend a weight from a long wire, set it swinging, and watch. A Foucault pendulum provides a fascinating, visible demonstration of our planet's rotation—and a wonderful way to bring science to life for people of all ages.

First demonstrated by French physicist Léon Foucault at the Panthéon in Paris in 1851, the pendulum swings freely while the Earth rotates beneath it. Gradually, the direction of its swing appears to change. Today, Foucault pendulums are familiar attractions in science museums around the world, captivating visitors with a demonstration of a phenomenon that is otherwise difficult to see directly.

For this experiment, we were fortunate to have the expertise of BAA member **Andrew Bate**, from Waverton near Chester, who has made a particular study of Foucault pendulums. Andrew published a paper on his work in the BAA Journal in 2014: https://britastro.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/JBAA-124-4-Bate.pdf

Andrew's earlier experiments at St Peter's Church in Waverton had revealed an intriguing puzzle: the pendulum seemed to favour certain directions, something not ordinarily expected. The experiment at St Boniface Church offered an opportunity to investigate whether this behaviour could be reproduced in a different setting. With its impressive tower height, St Boniface provided a particularly suitable location.

Behind the apparently simple demonstration lay considerable preparation. With access to the bell-ringing chamber arranged, the pendulum was suspended from its floor. Several runs were carried out, with measuring equipment recording the movement of the swinging weight. The experiment itself took two days, but the detailed analysis is expected to take around two months. Only then will Andrew be able to establish whether the apparent anomalies were present in this new set of observations.

Meanwhile, the pendulum proved a powerful

attraction in its own right. Visitors to the church stopped to watch, ask questions and discover the science behind the swinging weight. Some were hikers passing through, others were diners from the Dysart Arms pub opposite. For some, it was their first encounter with a Foucault pendulum; others fondly recalled seeing one in their younger days. A few even returned later to see how the experiment was progressing. Members of the village youth club also had the chance to experience the demonstration.

This is science outreach at its best: a simple experiment that turns an abstract idea into something people can see, question and remember.

Sincere thanks go to Andrew Bate and his team of assistants. We wish him well with his analysis. Thanks also to bellringers David Riley and Barry Menzies for helping make the experiment possible, and to the Reverend Tim Hayward for granting permission to carry it out in his church.

It was a pleasure to welcome this scientific investigation to Bunbury. We look forward to hearing Andrew's findings—and to seeing what further questions this remarkable pendulum might inspire.



Andrew Bate preparing the pendulum experiment.

The white board with extensions is graduated to measure the precession of the pendulum's bob. This is recorded for later analysis using a CCTV camera shown at the bottom of the picture, attached to the board. The grey bob is just to the left of Andrew's right foot.



Andrew Bate preparing to release the bob.

He does this using a flame to melt a retaining nylon thread. This produces minimum interference with the bob's swing. The graduated scale on the ground board can be seen, along with a red spot from a laser which is used to track the precession of the bob. ❐

Liverpool Astronomical Society - Summer Twilight Event
22nd August 2026

David Galvin

Members of Liverpool Astronomical Society attended a special sunset event on August 22nd held at the Victoria Gardens Butterfly House in Widnes, Cheshire.

The main aim of the event was to highlight the increasing problem of light pollution and its adverse effects on the population of nocturnal wildlife, particularly moth numbers, and on many plants and insects that depend on a dark environment to survive. Possible methods of controlling or reducing the use of bright lights were discussed with the public, but the demands of our 24-hour society make this challenging.

There was also an opportunity to view the Moon with a variety of telescopes which despite being low down in the sky, provided a beautiful subject for young and old alike.

With much appreciation to staff and volunteers of the Victoria Gardens Butterfly House, and to society members Dave, Richard, Geoff, Ali, and Gabriel who were able to attend. It is hoped the event can be repeated in September to coincide with the late autumnal solstice.

Images with thanks to Liverpool AS members.







1 – Butterfly House staff discuss the adverse effects of light pollution on the local moth population.
2- Young environmentalists use Lego™ to construct flowers and models of insects.
3- Members of Liverpool Astronomical Society use a variety of telescopes to view the Moon. ❐

NAKED EYE: making stargazing easier for real people

REAL SKIES BIGHTER LIVES

Colin Davis - Creator of the NAKED EYE app

Built on Sark to help beginners know what is worth seeing, when to look and where to look.



Colin Davis, creator of NAKED EYE, at work as a chef on Sark. A love of the night sky - and a desire to make it accessible to everyone - inspired the app.

I am a chef living on Sark, and over the last few years I kept finding out about amazing sky events after they had already happened — an ISS pass, a meteor shower, a glimpse of aurora or a bright planet. I realised I was not alone. Many people are interested in the night sky but miss the best moments simply because they don't know what to look for, when to go outside or which direction to face.

I am not a professional astronomer or software developer. I started building NAKED EYE because I had the same problem as everyone else: I wanted simple, clear answers.

An app for real people

NAKED EYE grew out of a beginner's questions. What is worth looking at tonight? Will the weather let me see it? Which direction should I face?

The app brings together your location, local viewing conditions and reliable sky information, and presents it in plain language. It covers the Moon, visible planets, meteor showers, aurora possibilities, ISS passes, Starlink and other notable events. Weather is part of the decision too — there is little value in telling somebody to go outside if heavy cloud means they are unlikely to see anything. Sometimes the most useful answer is simply: not tonight.

"The phone is there to help somebody look in the right place — then the real sky takes over."

COLIN DAVIS

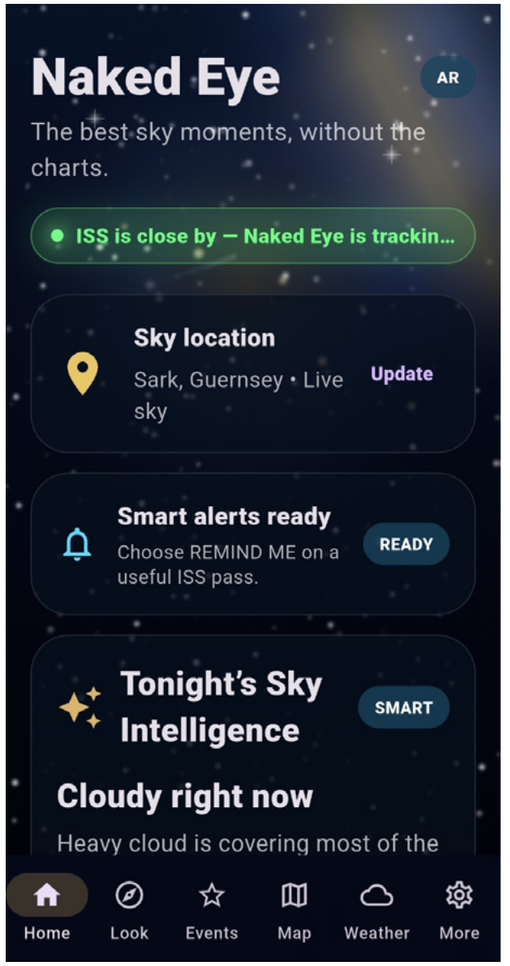


Figure 1. The NAKED EYE home screen combines sky conditions, alerts and a simple summary of tonight's best opportunities.

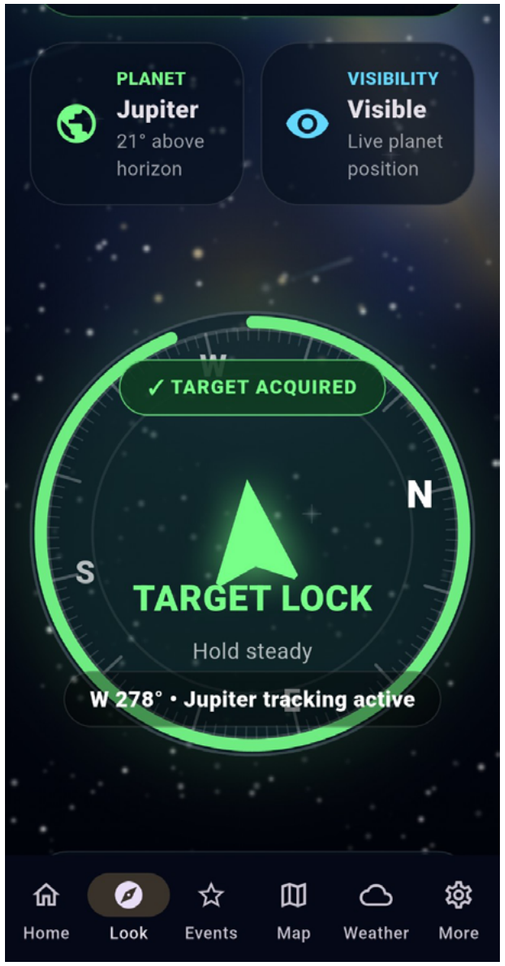


Figure 2. Target Lock gives simple direction guidance so beginners can find objects such as Jupiter more easily.

Finding things in the sky

Telling a beginner that Jupiter is visible does not necessarily help them find it. That is where Target Lock comes in.

Once you select an object, the app gives simple, clear directional guidance. Move your phone until the target is acquired, then look up. It can be used for planets, the Moon and ISS passes.

The phone is not meant to be the main part of the experience. It is there to help somebody look in the right place — then the real sky takes over.

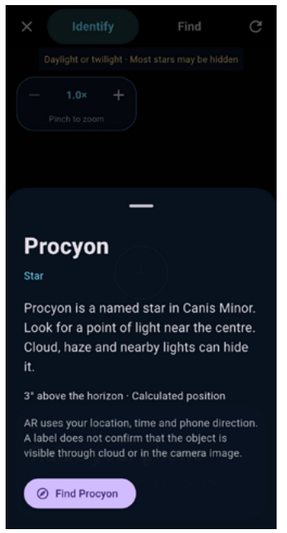


Figure 3. NAKED EYE's Identify view provides a plain-language introduction to Procyon, its calculated position and an option to open finding guidance. The app also explains that a calculated position does not guarantee visibility.

From alerts to real moments in the sky

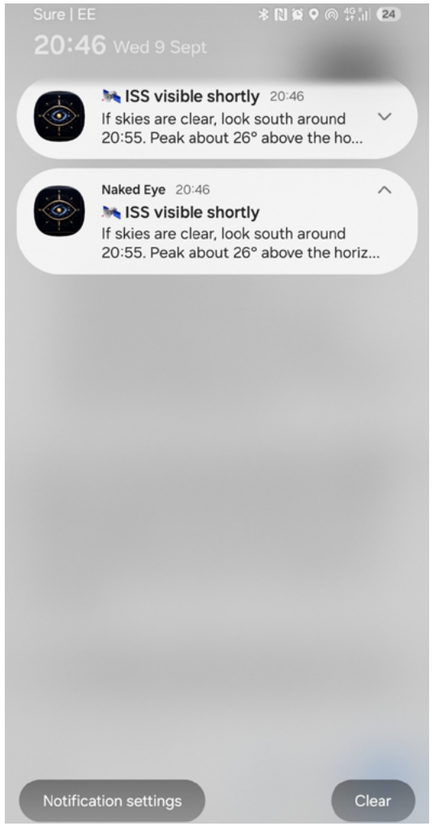


Figure 4. An ISS alert from NAKED EYE, received shortly before a visible pass, with clear guidance on when and where to look.

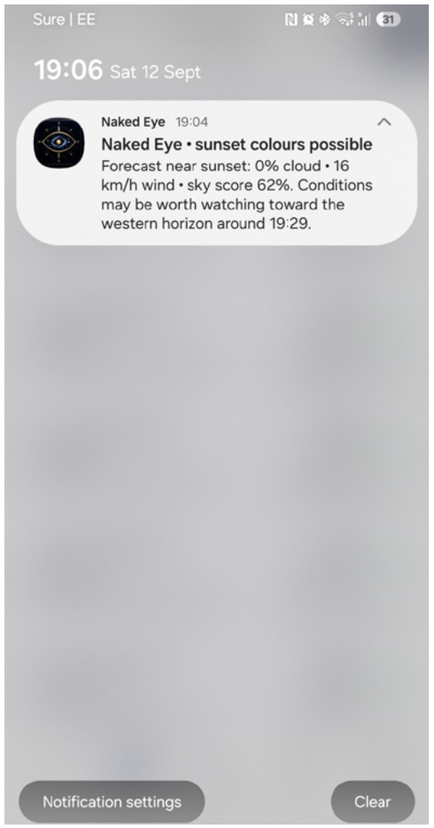


Figure 5. A sunset-colour alert, giving advance notice of potentially good conditions so there's time to head outside.

Alerts that lead to observations

One of the most satisfying tests was receiving an ISS alert over Sark. At the suggested time, I went outside and, sure enough, the ISS appeared, moving steadily across the sky just as predicted. It was a short moment, but a brilliant reminder of what the app can do — turn a notification into a real experience.

Sunset-colour alerts work on the same principle. They give somebody enough warning to step outside and catch a brief window of beautiful colours, like the one I saw on Sark. These moments are easy to miss, but with a timely nudge, they're within reach.

Why I think this matters

Astronomy can feel exciting but intimidating, especially for beginners who are not sure where to start. NAKED EYE is meant to lower that first barrier by giving simple answers in plain language, instead of charts, tables and jargon.

The goal is not to replace more advanced astronomy tools, but to help people take that first step — get outside, look up and build confidence through real experiences. Once that happens, the sky becomes less daunting and a lot more personal.

Built around long shifts

NAKED EYE has largely been built around my long chef shifts on Sark, fitting development into spare moments and learning Android development and astronomy at the same time.

NAKED EYE Beyond extends the same idea, helping people plan the best nights ahead with smarter alerts and more detailed night information. It's designed to fit real life — for people with busy schedules who still want to experience the night sky whenever they can.

NAKED EYE is currently available for Android on Google Play.

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.colindavis.nakedeye

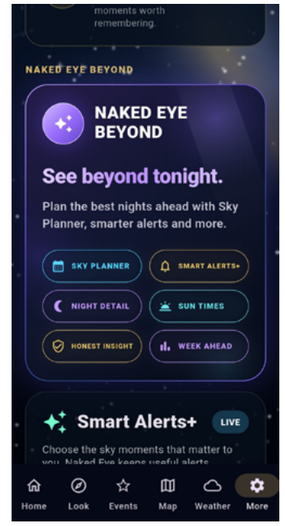


Figure 6. NAKED EYE Beyond helps people plan ahead with smarter alerts and a week-ahead view of the best opportunities.

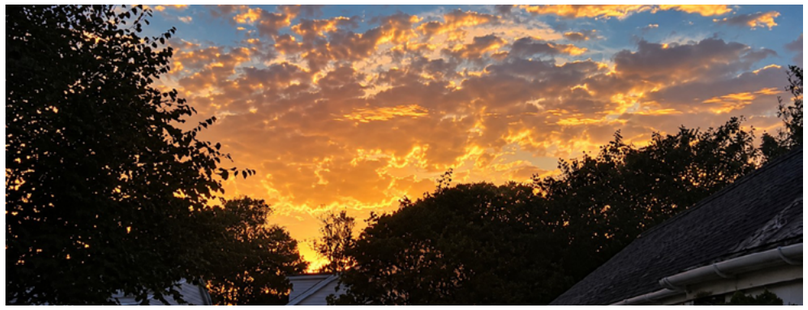


Figure 7. A colourful Sark sunset after a timely alert. ☐

"The sky is there. Sometimes all it takes is a timely nudge."

COLIN DAVIS

NAKED EYE is currently available for Android on Google Play.

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.colindavis.nakedeye

KNOW WHEN TO LOOK UP

Education materials

Other educational links were also brought to our attention this quarter. Please note that none of these websites have been checked for accuracy or are endorsed by the BAA. Users should therefore exercise their own discretion when deciding whether or not to use them.

If you find any of these resources helpful, please consider writing a short review for the newsletter.

Xenorbis, an independent educational platform featuring more than 100 interactive 3D simulations and visualizations covering astronomy https://xenorbis.com/interactive-map-of-the-universe-in-3d-cosmic-simulation/. The entire platform is free to use directly in a modern web browser, with no downloads or registration required.

Atlas Solar, an interactive 3D website for exploring the Solar System: https://systeme-solaire-3d.fr/en. Visitors can explore the planets, use the immersive view, and discover moons and human-made spacecraft. It may be useful as a visual resource for astronomy activities or science education.

Gravitational Lensing Lab, the free browser activity lets learners change foreground galaxy alignment and mass to explore multiple images, magnification, parity and relative arrival times. It includes student tasks and educator notes for grades 9–12 and introductory college, with no student account required.

Glasses On, Glasses Off

What eclipse day taught us about public curiosity, and how to plan for 2027

Mark Williams
Founder and architect of [OrbitalRadar.com]

At 18:48 BST on 12 August, a small badge on Orbital Radar's eclipse page changed colour. Over Reykjavík, the Moon had just covered the last sliver of the Sun, and the site's live view switched from "glasses on" to "glasses off". I took two screenshots that evening, seven seconds apart, and between them sits most of what the day taught me about how the public follows an eclipse.

In the last newsletter I wrote about using Orbital Radar, the live satellite-tracking and orbital-awareness website I built, for outreach, observing and learning. Shortly before the eclipse I added an eclipse tracker: a page for every eclipse and for individual towns, and a live view that follows the Moon's shadow from wherever you are, in your own local time. On 12 August it became, by a long way, the busiest part of the site.

The numbers were striking. On 12 August, Google alone sent the site 106,546 visits, about fifteen times as many as the day before, and the next day the figure fell back to around 6,000. Almost all of that interest arrived on the day itself rather than in the days before, which is worth remembering when planning publicity for the next one.

What people searched for was just as telling. Nearly nine in ten visits from eclipse searches came from people asking to track it or watch it live: "solar eclipse tracker", "eclipse tracker", "solar eclipse live map". Very few searched for times.

People wanted to watch it happen, and from their own town. London's page was the most visited town page of all, followed in the UK by Belfast, Cardiff, Manchester and Edinburgh.

The busiest moment came at 18:14 BST, just as the Moon began to cover the Sun across the UK, with thousands of people on the site at once. Many of them, I suspect, were standing outside with a phone in one hand and eclipse glasses in the other. While many of you were at outreach events with telescopes and pinhole viewers, a large part of the public was following the same sky on a screen.

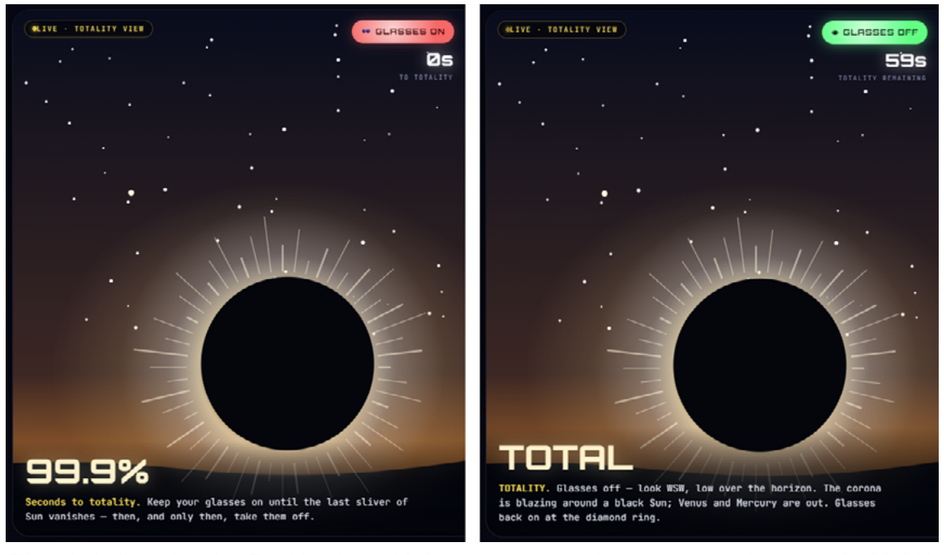


Figure 1. The site's live view for Reykjavík on 12 August, captured seven seconds apart. At 99.9% the badge still reads "glasses on"; when totality began it switched to "glasses off", and back again at the diamond ring.

The most useful lesson for outreach was about safety. Over the summer, Google showed the site's guide to watching an eclipse safely nearly 80,000 times, yet searchers clicked through to it only about 500 times. Almost none of the searches that brought people to the site mentioned safety at all. People came to watch rather than to read safety advice, so the advice had to go to where they were.

That is why the live view carries its own badge. It reads "glasses on" throughout the partial phases and switches to "glasses off" only while the Sun is completely covered, so for every town in the UK it never switched at all. It is the principle behind so much outreach on the day: taking glasses, filters and projection to where the public already was, rather than waiting for people to come looking for advice.

A fortnight later came the partial lunar eclipse of 28 August, and the contrast could hardly have been greater. It needed no protection at all, yet it drew roughly one search visit for every hundred the solar eclipse had. From the UK the Moon was low in the west at dawn, which did not help, but lunar eclipses are safe for everyone and seen from half the planet at once, so for outreach they are an opportunity the public is still largely missing.

The next solar eclipse seen from the UK is on Monday 2 August 2027, and it will be a very different event. From London about 42% of the Sun will be covered at 10:00 BST, with the Sun already 40° up in the morning sky. Cardiff sees much the same, Manchester about 35%, Belfast 31% and Edinburgh 27%.

Totality crosses southern Spain, Gibraltar and North Africa, and lasts more than six minutes near Luxor, so I expect a good number of members will be travelling. The times, coverage and durations on the eclipse pages are worked out for the place you choose, and the durations of totality agree with published eclipse tables to within a second, which matters when people are deciding where to go.

For outreach at home, a modest partial eclipse is in some ways harder work than a deep one. At 42% the daylight hardly changes, so most people will not notice anything unless someone tells them, and the temptation to glance at the Sun to see what is going on is very real.

It falls on a weekday morning in the school holidays, which suits family events in parks and town centres. The lesson from 12 August applies even more strongly: people will look for it on the day, they will want to watch it live, and the safety message needs to be wherever they are looking.

After that comes a useful run of events for anyone planning:

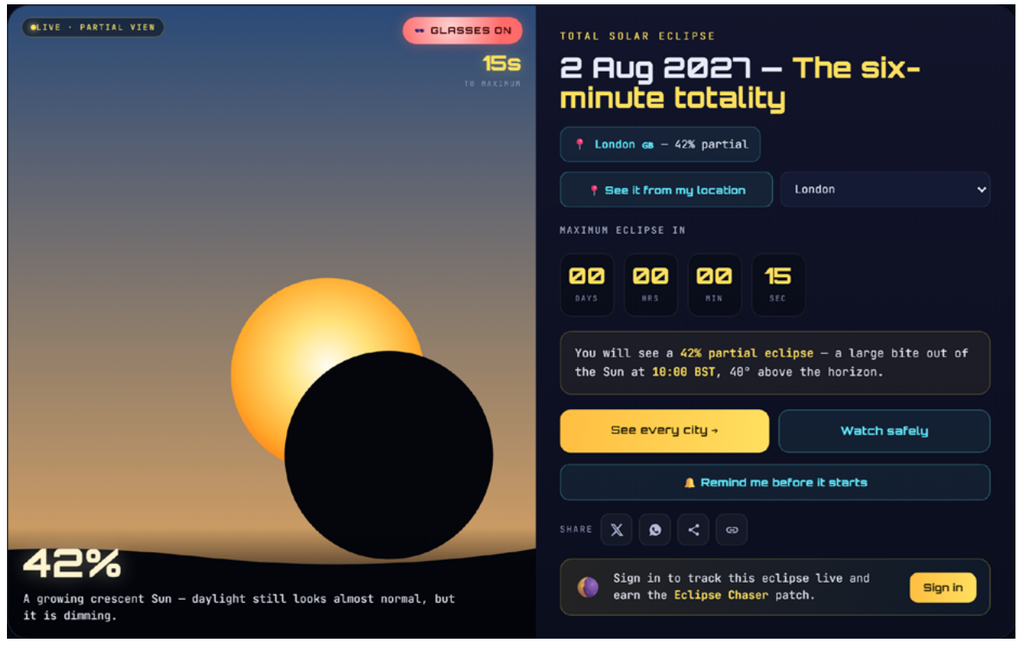


Figure 2. The live view for London, seconds before maximum on 2 August 2027: 42% of the Sun covered at 10:00 BST.

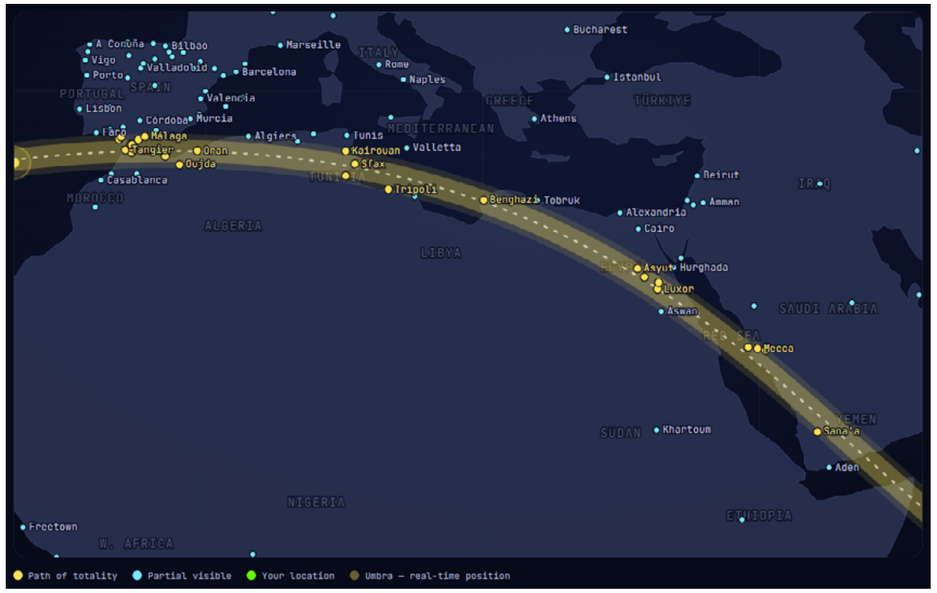


Figure 3. The path of totality on 2 August 2027, from the Atlantic through southern Spain and North Africa to Egypt and Arabia.

- 26 January 2028: a partial solar eclipse at sunset, with the Sun setting while still partly covered.
- 31 December 2028: a total lunar eclipse at moonrise on New Year's Eve.
- 20 December 2029: a total lunar eclipse high in the evening sky, with almost an hour of totality.
- 1 June 2030: a partial solar eclipse in the early morning.

The tracker already carries the first three, with times for your own location.

As last time, a few simple projects can be built around the eclipse pages.

One is to compare your own town across the eclipses. London went from 91% last August to 42% next year, with the same Moon and the same Sun, and working out why leads naturally into how the Moon's shadow falls across a curved, turning Earth.

Another is to replay 12 August. The eclipse page can still play the whole eclipse back in about 30 seconds, so a group that was clouded out can pick the nearest town on the list, or use its own location, and see what happened above the clouds.

A third is to use the two August eclipses together. A solar eclipse followed a fortnight later by a lunar one is a neat way to explain eclipse seasons, and why we do not get an eclipse every month.

A fourth is to plan for 2 August 2027 now. The Sun will be in the east-south-east and well clear of the horizon, so most open spaces will do; check the times on the page for your own town and set a reminder so the site tells you before it starts.

Between eclipses: catching the ISS

The International Space Station makes tiny "eclipses" of its own. When it crosses the face of the Sun or the Moon, its silhouette passes in about a second, and it can only be seen from a narrow strip on the ground, often just a few kilometres wide. Orbital Radar's transit tracker predicts these strips for any location, and I would love to hear from anyone who tries to catch one; as with any solar observing, a proper solar filter is essential.

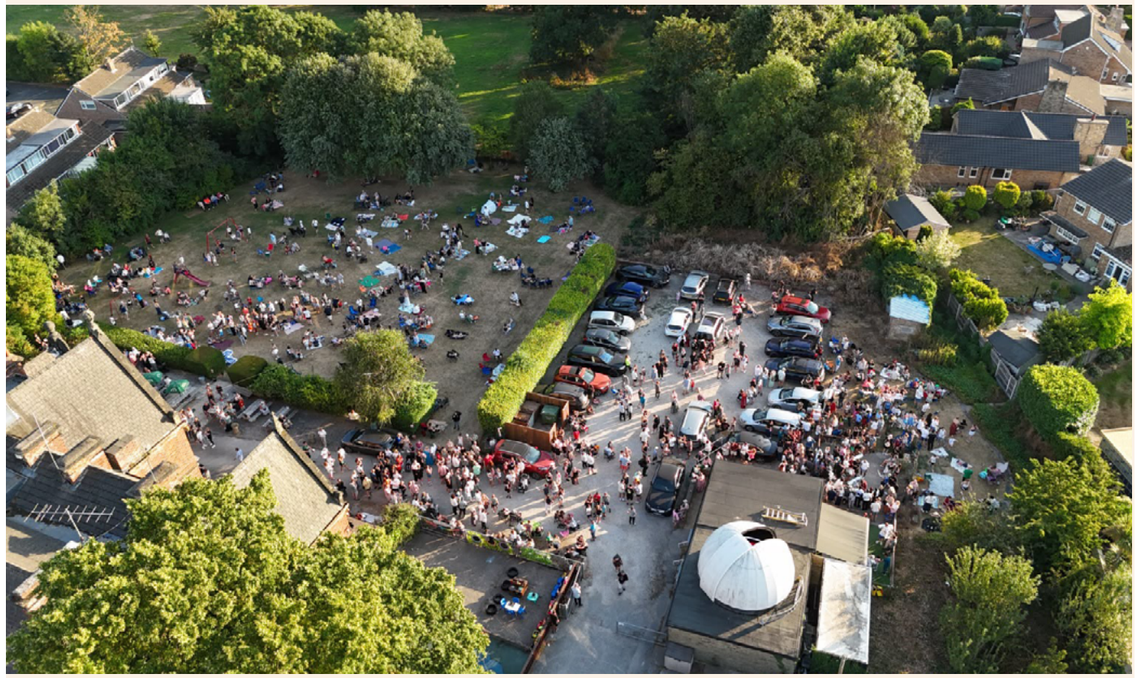
For me, the eclipse was a reminder of how much curiosity there is about the sky, and how quickly it fades if nobody is there to meet it. A website can help on the day, but the real work is done by the people standing in car parks and village halls with glasses, filters and a great deal of patience.

I would be very interested to hear what would make the eclipse pages more useful for your events in 2027, whether that is printable times for a venue, a simple display for a big screen, or something I have not thought of. The site is continually evolving, and feedback from this section has already shaped it.

Orbital Radar's eclipse tracker can be found at: https://orbitalradar.com/eclipses ❐

Solar Eclipse Special





West Yorkshire Astronomical Society

We expected a couple of hundred people based on the enquiries we had so everyone was shocked when over 1000 people turned up.

We had 120 pairs of Solar glasses, nowhere near enough for everyone but people shared them around and generally had a good time thanks to our fabulous volunteers. ❐

Liverpool Astronomical Society (LAS)

Member Phil Williams organised an eclipse event for friends and neighbours. Some LAS young astronomers took part and demonstrated the workings of an eclipse to a large audience.

With thanks to Phil Williams for images. ❐









Rousay Dark Skies - Partial Solar Eclipse – We Saw It!

Callum Potter

For the Partial Solar Eclipse of 12th August 2026, Rousay residents and visitors to the island managed to get glimpses of the Moon passing over the Sun.

After a warm sunny day, clouds set in from around 17:00, with the partial solar eclipse due to start at 18:00 it did not look optimistic that we would see anything. A crowd of about 45 people gathered at the observing site, Midhowe car park, and eclipse viewers were handed out to all. Although not clear the weather was mild enough. Cloud thinned and tantalising rays of Sun played out over the water. At times the gaps were big enough to get a hint of the eclipse in progress and then around 19:10 just after maximum eclipse gaps were big enough to see the Moon passing over the Sun with the viewers. More glimpses were had but by around 19:45 the observers dispersed happy to have seen something.

Much thanks goes to:

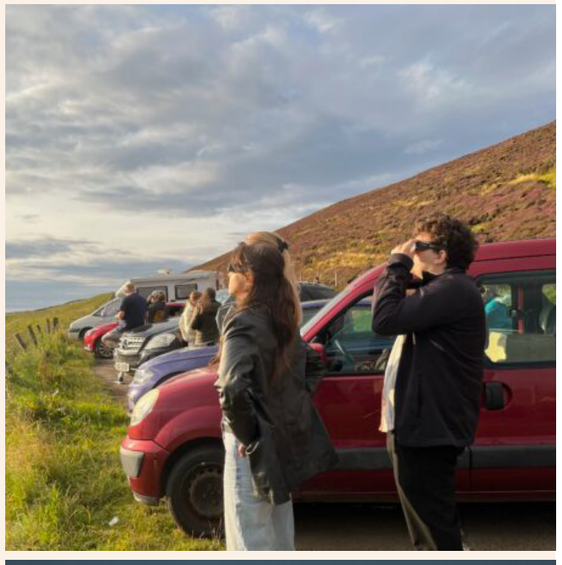
UK Eclipse https://ukeclipse.com/

Go Stargazing https://gostargazing.co.uk/

First Light Optics https://www.firstlightoptics.com/

for providing information and eclipse viewers. ❐









Towpath Tales

Alexandra Hart

Wednesday 12th August 2026 – Partial Solar Eclipse
Bridge 5A, Middlewich Branch Shropshire Union Canal
Eclipse: 18:14 – 20:03 BST | Maximum: 19:07 (92%)

After seeing all the wonderful images appearing from the total solar eclipse, I have to admit I was feeling a little envious. I found myself wishing I had made the effort to travel to Spain. But as it turned out, I had an amazing eclipse experience right here at home, one that I will never forget.

I had been stressed all week. The weather forecast was predicting cloud for Wednesday evening, while the other evenings were supposed to be clear. As it turned out, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday were all cloudy, while Wednesday, eclipse day, was beautifully clear. So much for weather forecasting!

Everyone at work knew how excited I was about the eclipse, and I don't think I managed to sit still all day. I had handed out around 15 pairs of eclipse glasses, and word soon spread. People were even coming from upstairs looking for them, and eventually I ran out. I really should have brought more in! I didn't anticipate the demand on the day.

I left work early and made my escape, cursing the slow drivers all the way home. Eventually I arrived, got myself up to the boat and, thankfully, we were moored exactly where we wanted to be by 5pm.





Stress over. Now the fun could begin. Many wonderful boaters joined us for the evening. Our next-door neighbour came over, very curious about what we were setting up, he hadn't been listening to the news and had no idea there was going to be an eclipse!

Several other boaters from Barbridge also came along after I advertised the event in the Shropshire Union Canal Users Group. It was turning into quite an evening.

I had plenty of equipment to keep everyone entertained.The Skywatcher Heliostar 76 was set up with the computer, giving us all a live view of the Sun on the monitor. My new eclipse travelling mount was paired with the Technosky 65 and Canon EOS 700D, set up for white-light imaging, and also giving me some useful practice for next year's eclipse.



And, of course, there was the little Seestar S50, which I was trying in timelapse mode for the first time. I soon discovered that as the Seestar mount is so small, having people wandering around in front of the telescope isn't particularly helpful for the timelapse! But honestly, who cares? We were having far too much fun.

We also had plenty of solar glasses, kindly gifted by First Light Optics, so everyone could safely enjoy the view for themselves.

And the traditional tin hat, actually a colander, was brought out for solar projection. It stayed in use throughout the evening.

One of the best things about the evening wasn't the equipment or the







photographs. It was the people. We made new friends that evening, and seeing their excitement as they looked at the Sun brought me just as much joy as observing the eclipse myself.

One lady was almost in tears of joy at being able to see the eclipse. She simply sat there with her eclipse glasses on, staring at the Sun for much of the evening.

Moments like that are what sharing astronomy is all about. It isn't just about collecting images or having the latest equipment. It's about sharing the sky and giving someone the chance to see something they might otherwise never experience.

With the Heliostar I took 58 images during the eclipse, although I've only processed the one from maximum eclipse so far. There was a fantastic prominence visible, and I knew immediately that something like that would make the total eclipse particularly spectacular. Everyone enjoyed being able to see the Sun in H-alpha between my imaging sessions, and the live view on the monitor meant that nobody had to miss out while I was busy with the camera.

But perhaps the eclipse had saved the best until last. We were treated to an absolutely amazing sunset.

After all the worry about the weather forecast, the clouds had waited until almost the very end before making an appearance. I really couldn't have asked for a better evening.

The following morning, we discovered a rather wonderful thank-you gift left on the back deck, some fish from our neighbour. It was such a lovely gesture and a fitting end to an unforgettable experience. So long, and thanks for all the fish! I hope we see you again some day out there! ❐

Flamsteed Astronomy Society
Hairbrushes, Colanders and a 91% Eclipse

Partial Solar Eclipse at the Royal Observatory Greenwich - Wednesday 12th August 2026

Mike Meynell

This was the big one.

We had known for a long time that the partial solar eclipse on Wednesday 12th August was going to be the major event of our solar observing season. What we perhaps hadn't anticipated was quite how big it would become.

There had been plenty to worry about beforehand. Would the weather cooperate? Would strike action affect the opening of the Royal Observatory? Would we have enough volunteers? Would the queues become completely unmanageable? We even had a contingency plan to move everything to Blackheath if the Observatory couldn't open.

In the end, none of that mattered. The Observatory opened, the weather behaved and our volunteers turned out in force. The day started ridiculously early for Bobby and me, arriving at the Royal Observatory at around 6am for BBC Breakfast. We expected an interview or two. Instead, we were on site for nearly four hours as the BBC broadcast several live segments from Greenwich.

This produced one of the more unexpected moments of my astronomy career. I had been demonstrating the Sunspotter and needed something to represent the Moon moving across the projected image of the Sun. The BBC reporter's hairbrush happened to be close at hand and, before I really knew what was happening, I was slowly moving it underneath the projection lens to demonstrate the eclipse. Hairbrush-gate had begun.





Hairbrushes and colanders. The BBC Breakfast team interview Bobby and Mike. Screengrabs by Eddie Cantello and Jane Bezant. Photos by Bobby Manoo.

At one point the reporter actually had to ask me to put the hairbrush down. Meanwhile, the Flamsteed WhatsApp groups were providing a running commentary. Apparently, of all the things people thought I might be doing that morning, waving a hairbrush around on BBC Breakfast wasn't high on anybody's list. Neither was it on mine.

The other household object making an early appearance was the humble kitchen colander. I demonstrated how the holes act as multiple pinhole projectors during an eclipse, creating dozens of images of the crescent Sun. The resulting BBC clip subsequently seemed to appear all over the internet.

By this stage, I was beginning to think the Flamsteed should establish the Order of the Brush and Colander (OBC), awarded for outstanding services to astronomy using household objects.

After a short break for breakfast, it was back to the Observatory. Tim and Frederik had arrived and preparations for the main event were beginning. Tim soon had his Calcium K rig operating and was already producing excellent views of active regions on the Sun.

ITV arrived next, with Rags Martel interviewing Tim and me about the eclipse and the various ways in which it could be observed safely. Times Radio followed later, along with NBC from the United States, more BBC crews and further ITV coverage.





Tim and Mike on ITV News.

For much of the day, the Royal Observatory resembled a broadcasting studio. Which, for a few hours at least, it pretty much was.

The media interest continued right through the afternoon. Bobby was later interviewed by Sophie Raworth for the BBC News. This provided another entertaining moment when Frederik, who doesn't watch much television, initially failed to recognise her and told her to join the back of the telescope queue. Only when other visitors started asking for selfies did he realise that perhaps an exception could be made.





Bobby being interviewed on BBC News by Sophie Raworth, and all is forgiven for Frederik. Pictures by Eddie Cantello, Frederik Botha and Jane Bezant.

In fairness, Sophie apparently took it extremely well and was genuinely interested in what we were doing. She even noted the Flamsteed website and expressed an interest in joining us at one of our Blackheath observing sessions in the autumn - as a visitor rather than a journalist.

While all this was going on, we still had an eclipse event to organise. Gradually the remaining Flamsteed volunteers began arriving and the equipment multiplied around the Dolphin Sundial

courtyard.

We had five specialist solar telescopes: the museum's Coronado 60mm hydrogen-alpha telescope, Clive's Sky-Watcher 76mm hydrogen-alpha telescope, which I had borrowed while Clive was away, my 40mm Lunt, Frederik's Lunt imaging set-up with camera and screen, and Tim's Calcium K rig.









H-alpha scopes, Smart scopes, Sunspotters, all set up in readiness for the eclipse. Pictures by Jane Bezant and Eddie Cantello.

Alongside those were several smart telescopes, including Seestars, a DWARF 3 and a Vaonis Vespera, three Sunspotters, hundreds of pairs of solar observing glasses and an increasingly impressive collection of pinhole projectors. And colanders. Lots of colanders. One cereal box had also been pressed into service as a pinhole projector, proving that sophisticated astronomical equipment is not always required. Sometimes breakfast packaging will do.

By the official start of our observing session at 4pm, people were already gathering around the equipment. From there, numbers simply continued to build.

By around 6pm, the site was packed. We had spent a lot of time beforehand thinking about how to manage the queues. With potentially around 1,000 people on site at any one time, there was simply no possibility of allowing several minutes at each telescope. People needed to

view, enjoy the sight, and then move on so that somebody else could have their turn. Les later described his role near the sundial as being rather like a beachmaster:

"Close up, move along, keep the queue moving..." Repeated approximately forever. It was relentless.

The strategy with the solar glasses also evolved during the evening. We had hundreds available, but they were not giveaways and needed to keep circulating. Bobby came up with a very effective solution - give the glasses to people while they were queuing for the telescopes, then collect them again after they had finished viewing.









Watching the eclipse around the observatory. Pictures by Jane Bezant and Ed Fosbrook.

That meant people could watch the eclipse developing while they waited, rather than simply standing in a queue. It also reinforced one of the main messages we had given our volunteers before the event: there was no single "best" way to view the eclipse.The Sunspotters, solar glasses, smart telescopes, pinhole projectors, Calcium K system and hydrogen-alpha telescopes all showed something slightly different. Visitors didn't need to look through every telescope to experience the event.That proved particularly important as the crowds grew.

There were plenty of opportunities for conversations while people waited, and some of the questions reminded us why events like this are worthwhile. Holly spoke to one visitor who believed it was normally perfectly safe to look directly at the Sun and wondered why an eclipse suddenly made it dangerous. Another complained that his eclipse glasses were too dark because he couldn't see anything through them. Holly suggested that he put them back on and actually look towards the Sun. "Wow!" His face apparently lit up.

Elsewhere, Jane encountered a grandmother who remembered viewing eclipses using photographic negatives and insisted that "it didn't do us any harm". Her granddaughter's response summed up the passage of time rather neatly: "What's a film negative?"

Astronomy outreach occasionally makes you feel very old.

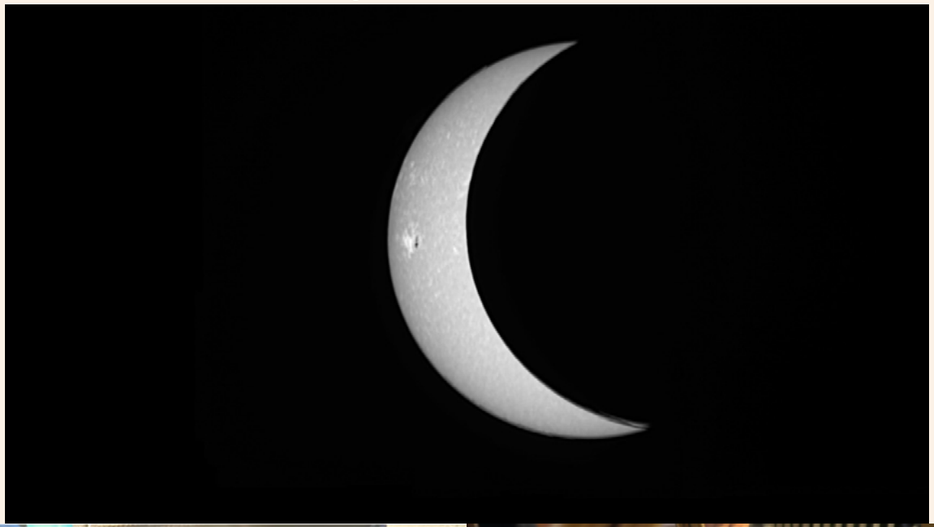
At 6.17pm, the eclipse began. Naturally, this was almost exactly the moment when ITV wanted another live interview. So, having spent months organising the event, I witnessed first contact while standing in front of an ITV camera. Surreal doesn't really cover it.

Once the interview finished, I made my way back towards the telescopes. The hydrogen-alpha scopes had been positioned along the fence overlooking the western horizon, giving us a clear view of the Sun as it gradually descended.

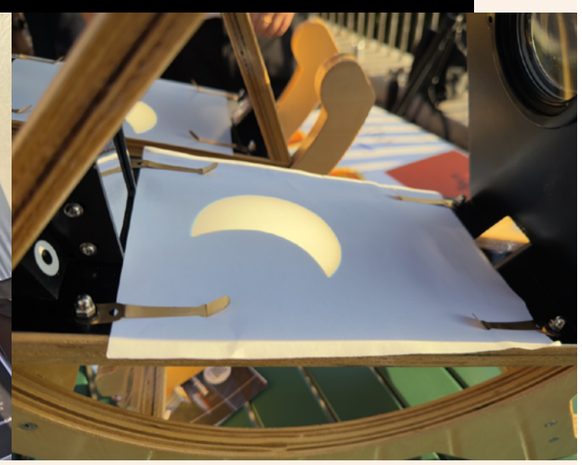
There was plenty to see even without the eclipse. Prominences were visible around the solar limb, along with filaments and a couple of sunspots. Tim had also noticed changing activity during the day, including a small flare and the appearance of another sunspot group. But, increasingly, nobody was looking at the solar activity.They were watching the Moon. Bit by bit, the dark lunar disc moved across the face of the Sun.

The kitchen colanders suddenly came into their own. Every hole projected a tiny image of the eclipsed Sun, turning the ground into a pattern of crescents. The cereal-box pinhole projectors did the same thing, while gaps between the leaves of trees produced natural crescent projections all around us. Some of the simplest demonstrations were producing some of the biggest reactions.

The view through the hydrogen-alpha telescopes was extraordinary. As maximum approached, the visible portion of the Sun became an increasingly thin crescent, with prominences still visible around the edge.







Spectacular views of the eclipse through the telescopes and Sunspotter. Pictures by Frederik Botha, Tim Rickard, Ed Fosbrook and Mike Meynell.

I had positioned myself beside the telescope that Manish was operating, which had the useful advantage that I could sneak another look through the eyepiece whenever there was a gap between visitors. Purely for quality-control purposes, obviously.

But the solar glasses were every bit as effective for appreciating the eclipse as a whole. Being able to stand back and watch the changing shape of the Sun against the sky was something completely different from the magnified telescope view. Then the surroundings began to change.

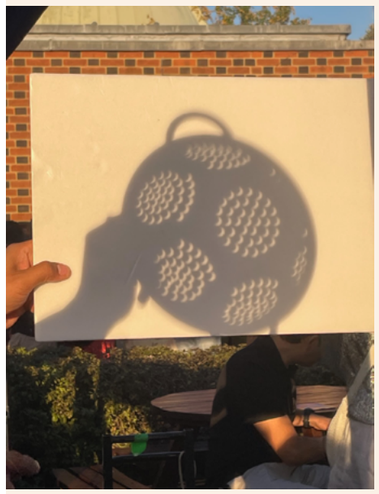
Around ten minutes before maximum, the light levels dropped noticeably. It wasn't simply darker. The quality of the daylight itself seemed different - strangely flat and almost polarised. Shadows became sharper and the whole landscape took on an unfamiliar appearance.
Then came the birds. Above the general noise of more than a thousand people around the Observatory, birdsong suddenly seemed to be everywhere. I was standing beside the NBC reporter at the time and she commented that similar changes in bird behaviour were being reported elsewhere. It was a wonderful backdrop to what was happening overhead.

Maximum eclipse came at 7.13pm, with around 91% of the Sun obscured from Greenwich. For perhaps the first time all evening, the crowd seemed to become noticeably quieter. People simply looked.

Through the telescopes, on screens, through eclipse glasses, through pinhole projectors and through kitchen colanders, everyone was watching the same narrow crescent of Sun. After all the preparation, the emails, the equipment lists, the contingency plans, the volunteer briefings, the media interviews and the queue management, this was the reason we were there. And it was spectacular. Then, almost immediately, things began to reverse.

The Moon continued its slow passage across the solar disc and the daylight returned remarkably quickly. This was particularly striking because the Sun itself was getting lower in the western sky, so under normal circumstances the evening should have been becoming progressively darker. Instead, for a while, everything became brighter.

As the eclipse moved beyond maximum, the atmosphere around the Observatory began to relax as well. The crowds slowly thinned and, for the first time in several hours, the volunteers had a little space to breathe. By then, we reckoned that at least 1,500 people had been on site during the evening.







The colander method works! And an early contender for an OBC, Miyuki and her pinhole camera box. Pictures by Jane Bezant.

I suspect most managed to see the eclipse through at least one of our telescopes or on one of the screens. Those who didn't still had excellent views using solar glasses, the Sunspotters or the various projection methods.

Considering the numbers involved, that felt like a considerable achievement.The eclipse continued until just after 8pm. Museum staff had begun clearing the site shortly before then, but the Flamsteed volunteers were able to remain until the end.

There was just time for the traditional group photograph.



The group photo. Most of our Flamsteed volunteer team for the evening.

Our cheering while the photograph was being taken was apparently loud enough to interrupt a nearby live BBC broadcast. By that point, nobody cared very much. We had done what we came to do. The equipment was packed away and we had several lovely conversations with museum staff and management, who went out of their way to thank the Flamsteed team. Messages received afterwards repeated the same themes - appreciation for the volunteers' expertise, organisation and enthusiasm, particularly given the very crowded and sometimes difficult conditions.

The Front of House team were particularly grateful for the way our volunteers continued talking to visitors, managing the crowds and sharing their knowledge throughout what had been a very long day. Other museum colleagues commented on the strength of the partnership between Flamsteed and the Royal Observatory and how much more we are able to achieve by working together. That meant a great deal to all of us. Perhaps the most satisfying feedback, though, came from the visitors themselves.

Paul Merriman attended this time with his family rather than as a volunteer and described the Flamsteed experience as the highlight of their visit. Others contacted us afterwards to thank the volunteers and tell us how much they had enjoyed the event. That is ultimately what matters.

We can talk about the media coverage - BBC Breakfast, BBC News, ITV, Times Radio, NBC and others - and that was certainly great exposure for the Society. We can also talk about the hairbrush. We probably will for some time. But the important part of the day was what happened between our volunteers and the thousands of people who came to see the eclipse.

Twenty-three Flamsteed volunteers gave their time:

Matthew Ayres, Jane Bezant, Frederik Botha, Eddie Cantello, Adrian Challinor, Helen Edwards, Ed Fosbrook, John Harries, Simon Hurst, Holly Kreider, Bobby Manoo, Katherine Melmoth, Mike Meynell, Manish Patel, Neale Patrick, Tim Rickard, Miyuki Shigeno, Graham Spinks, Leslie Stephens, Richard Summerfield, Trixi Summerfield, Chris Weir and Paul Wright.



Pictures of our volunteers, by Jane Bezant.

Every one of them played a part. Some operated telescopes. Some managed queues. Some handed out and retrieved solar glasses. Some demonstrated equipment. Some spent hours talking to visitors. Most ended up doing several of those jobs. Everyone should be extremely proud of what they achieved.

When we eventually left the Observatory, Greenwich Park was still packed with people and the queue of cars trying to leave was biblical. Bobby, Frederik, Richard and I therefore spent a while standing around talking about everything that had happened. We were exhausted, but still buzzing and swapping stories from the day. I eventually got home at around 10pm. Sleep took rather longer.

Meanwhile, several Flamsteed members who had travelled to Spain had experienced the total eclipse and were already sending back some wonderful images, giving us the chance to compare our 91% partial eclipse from Greenwich with the extraordinary sight of totality from inside the eclipse path.

It had been a very long day. At times, a slightly mad one. There had been hairbrushes, colanders, cereal boxes, television crews, enormous queues, bird song, strange light, 23 volunteers and at least 1,500 visitors.

But above all, there had been an eclipse. And what an event it was.

For full article, photo and videos visit https://www.flamsteed.info/post/hairbrushes-colanders-and-a-91-eclipse-partial-solar-eclipse-at-the-royal-observatory-greenwich

Flamsteed Astronomy Society. The amateur astronomy society based at the Royal Observatory Greenwich. ❐

Partial Eclipse from Yorkshire

Nic Spencer

I had planned to go to Spain to see the total solar eclipse 2026, but then made the very difficult decision not to go due to a combination of illness in the family and extreme heat/wildfires.

In the fortnight before the eclipse, I gave out 150 pairs of solar eclipse glasses to family, friends and villagers. It was enormous fun talking to everyone about it e.g. discussing the best places to see it, their previous interesting experiences and also being able to answer many questions.

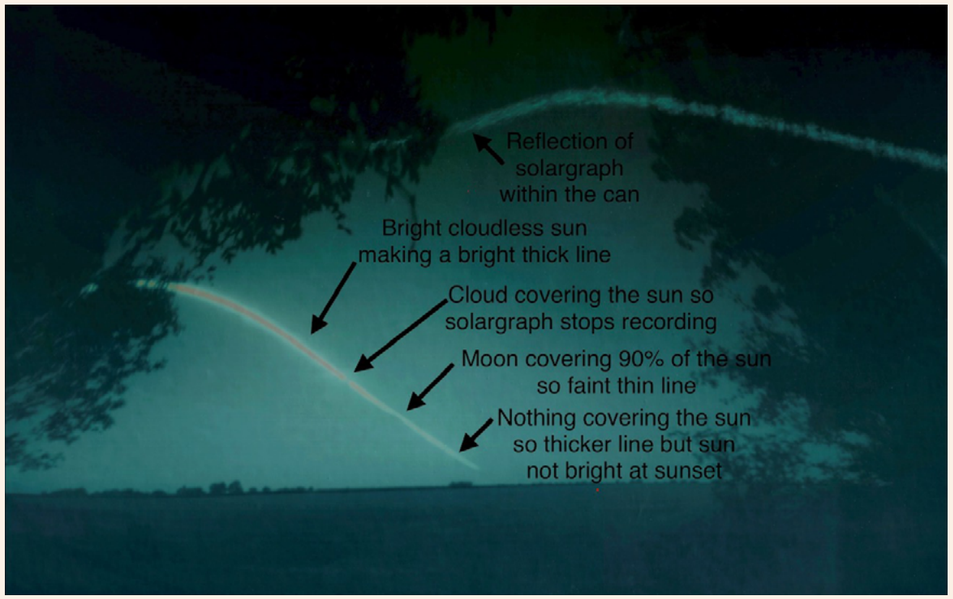
The weather forecast at home chopped and changed several times the day before, so I didn't actually know where I'd be for it until late afternoon, which made outreach plans tricky. In the end, I was in a prime spot to catch it just 15 minutes from home. I quickly told as many people as I could just to turn up and have a safe look at it through my hydrogen alpha telescope. It was cloudy at the start and at the end but miraculously clear in between. At maximum eclipse the sky was very clear and we had an amazing view and watched in awe. We felt the temperature change and noted a change in the breeze at the peak. I had my binocular projector and a colander with me which was fun too.

For days afterwards, I was thrilled to hear about people's experiences of watching the eclipse with the glasses I'd given out. It really moved adults in a way they hadn't expected and the children were so excited about it. I was sent a range of photographs from people wearing the glasses and clips of children talking about it as they were watching. It was wonderful.

I have one last chance in life of catching a total solar eclipse in Europe in southern Spain next year. At the same time I will get to meet Andy Devey whose images I've long admired. So I am going 'whatever the weather' both literally and metaphorically!! I am already counting the days…







I also recorded the event with a Solarcan and here are the results. ☐

GrandTotality.com

It's a free-to-use, UK-produced website for planning where to see the total solar eclipse on 2 August 2027.

The interactive map shows local eclipse timings and totality duration. Destination guides include historical cloud data and practical travel information to help compare viewing locations.

https://grandtotality.com

Please note that none of these advertised websites have been checked for accuracy or are endorsed by the BAA. Users should therefore exercise their own discretion when deciding whether or not to use them.

12th Solar Eclipse on board Cruise Ship MSC Virtuosa Spain and Canaries.

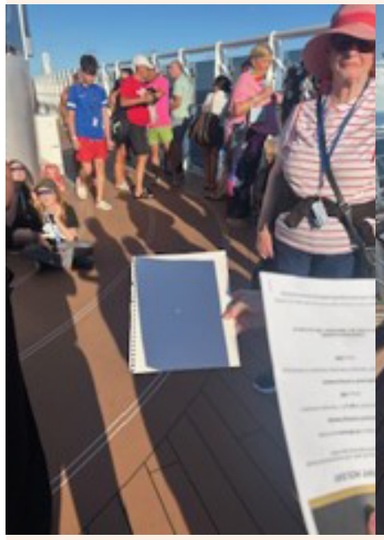
David Gwynn

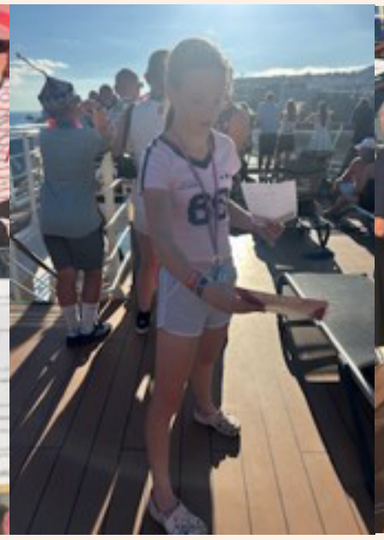


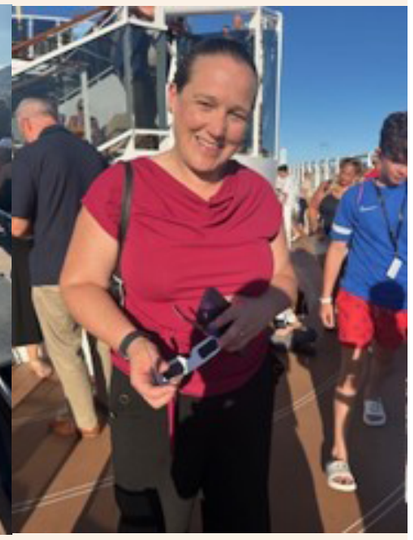
We booked a last-minute cruise feeling confident that the weather would be poor in the UK, and being aboard a massive cruise ship they would be organising speakers and viewing equipment? Wrong on both counts.

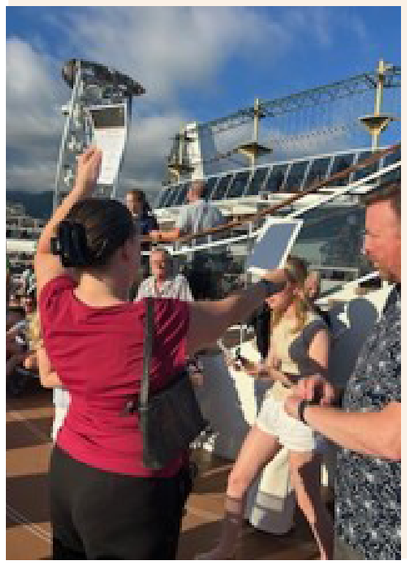
We were in Maderia for the eclipse so had to make do with solar glasses and showing the public how to safely project an image of the Sun using two pieces of card, one with a pinhole.

The weather was perfect and the eclipse high in the sky. I showed a young girl and her Mum how it was done and they took over and ran the event!









Top left. David demonstrating how the pinhole image works.

Middle. Young girl now demonstrating to audience.

Top right. Mum who gave us permission to approach her daughter.

Left. Mum now excited as she has never seen this before. ☐

Celebrating the Solar Eclipse at Beckford's Tower Herschel Museum of Astronomy and Bath Astronomers

Ellie Giles



Predicted clear skies and perfect conditions for viewing the solar eclipse this August sent people across Bath searching for the best vantage point. The Herschel Museum of Astronomy joined forces with the Bath Astronomers to host a solar eclipse event in the paddocks of Beckford's Tower, where the high, west-facing fields offered an excellent view.

In the run-up to the day, the Bath Astronomers had handed out over 7,000 solar glasses to local schools, but requests kept flooding in. The day before the eclipse, the Museum's learning team put on a special planetarium show for families at Bath Central Library, exploring the Sun, what happens during a solar eclipse and how to view them safely.

The event itself was a huge success, with 120 people heading up to Beckford's Tower on Lansdown Hill, just outside Bath. A carnival atmosphere took hold as families arrived with picnic blankets and hampers. Anyone who hadn't managed to get hold of solar glasses in advance was given a free pair, and children could make their own solar viewers from cardboard tubes. Once the eclipse began, there was plenty of fun to be had trying these out, along with cereal box viewers and colanders.

The best views came through the array of solar telescopes set up by the Bath Astronomers, each fitted with a different filter. A few smart telescopes, such as the Dwarf 3, let people follow the eclipse's progress on a tablet and captured some amazing images.

As the eclipse reached its maximum, a real sense of awe and wonder spread across the field. One young visitor summed it up as "amazing" when interviewed by the local BBC news team. Bath Preservation Trust, who run both the Herschel Museum of Astronomy and Beckford's Tower, would like to express their thanks to Simon Holbeche and his team of Bath Astronomers as well as all the other volunteers who helped make the event such a success.

To find out about other events run by the Herschel Museum of Astronomy check our website at https://herschelmuseum.org.uk/ ☐



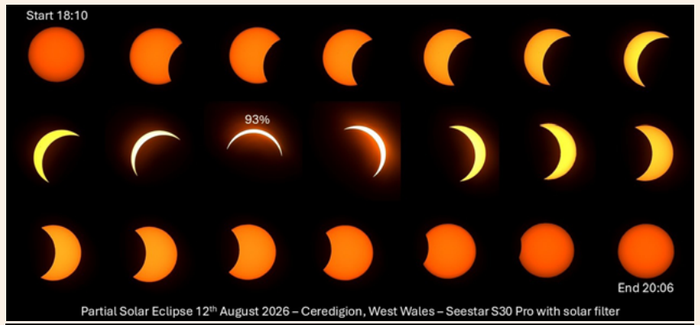
Partial Eclipse 12th August 2026 viewed from Seven Springs Lodge Park, Llanon, Ceredigion, Wales.

Edward & Theresa Cooper

An event to observe the Partial Eclipse was arranged for the visitors to Seven Springs Lodge Park. Eclipse viewing glasses were issued to the 16 attendees with appropriate guidance on use and the safety warning not to observe the Sun directly with the naked eye plus the necessity for specialist filters for cameras etc. In addition, one Seestar 30 Pro was setup to track the Sun with viewing on a display, and away from the group a DSLR camera with a Baader filter. A colander was also used as demonstration of indirect viewing techniques.

In advance of the gathering on the evening of the 11th August the selected site (a yet to be commissioned lodge base) was confirmed as a suitable vantage point with no obstructions (trees, lodges) interfering with the track of the Sun for the next day.

The weather behaved and excellent views were shared by those who attended as illustrated with the gallery of photographs below.

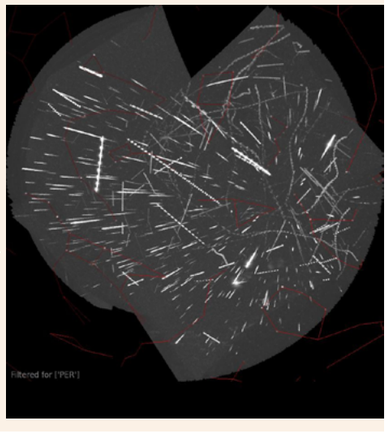






And then it was on to the Perseid Meteor Shower which peaked on the night of the 12th August.

A trackstack from UKMON/GMN camera UK0042 (right). ☐



Viewing the Eclipse at Jodrell Bank

Jeremy Shears





I'd originally planned to travel to Spain to see the total eclipse, but after booking accommodation only to have it cancelled twice, I decided to stay closer to home. Fortunately, I'd suggested to the team at Jodrell Bank the previous year that they organise a public viewing event—so I was able to join the event as a volunteer!

More than 1,500 visitors came along, the views were superb, and everyone seemed to have a wonderful time. Several film crews were there, drawn not only by the eclipse but also by the news surrounding Jodrell Bank itself. At the time, the future of the Lovell Telescope and the e-MERLIN radio telescope network was under threat, with their funding due to end in March 2028 (despite reassuring statements from government ministers, Jodrell Bank has yet to be “saved”, though the University of Manchester, which owns the site, is exploring possible solutions).



I even managed a live appearance on the BBC—well, BBC North West Tonight!

For me, though, the real highlight wasn’t the cameras or even the eclipse itself. It was the sheer excitement and enthusiasm of the public. I lost count of the number of “wows” I heard as people looked through the telescope. Seeing that sense of wonder, shared by so many people, made the whole event truly memorable. ❐







A first successful total solar eclipse experience – Spain 12th August 2026

Andy Devey

After waiting for decades, having suffered the bitter disappointment of thick cloud throughout the 1999 eclipse in Cornwall, I was very apprehensive about the prospect of travelling around seven hours north from our home to the east coast of Spain, near the coastal town of Peñíscola in the province of Castellón. The eclipse occurred later in the day at a very low altitude raising the prospect of poor seeing with totality being just above to the western horizon. Due to the mountainous terrain along eastern Spain, only a small number of observing sites were at sufficient elevation to see totality and any distant clouds had the potential to completely ruin it.

The site we selected was near La Salzadella at the Mirador d’ermita de Sant Josep at a height of 628 m above sea level. Because of the potential of crowding, we went early and set up under a large parasol some 7 hours before first contact. The final track up to the Ermita had been closed to traffic due to the extreme fire risk and so the narrow mountain road at 500 m altitude and a very small car parking area was the only real option available due to the amount of equipment we had. I was aware that the Sun would set behind a 1200 m high mountain at 21 km distance from us. I had done calculations to check my horizon angle and took a geological clinometer with me to confirm the prospect of seeing totality. We set up at the road closure barrier across from the small six vehicle car park and were able to interact and give tips to people that started to arrive from as far away as Canada for the astronomical spectacle. Just in case, I also had conversations with the local environmental agency staff and Guardia agents to ensure we were okay at our selected site.



The Daily Herald

Monday, April 8, 2024 BRINGING YOU THE NEWS THAT MATTERS £1.20

MAN BLOCKS PEOPLE’S VISION OF ECLIPSE WITH MASSIVE BROLLY

By Tom Withers
Staff Reporter

A SELFISH stargazer sparked outrage yesterday after setting up a massive beach umbrella and blocking the view of dozens of eclipse watchers.

The unidentified man, pictured right, pitched his oversized brolly just minutes before totality on a popular viewing spot, casting a huge shadow over other spectators who had arrived hours earlier.

“We waited all morning for a good view and then he just plonks down in front of us with what looks like a patio from Benidorm!” fumed one onlooker.

Despite growing murmurs from the crowd, the man remained unbothered, lounging in his chair and even waving at complainants.

Police were not called, but social media users have dubbed him “Umbrella Man” and “Eclipse Wrecker”.

EYE-ROLLING: The man with his enormous brolly at the prime viewing spot.







About two hours before first contact, lots of cars started to appear and tried to park on the single-track road causing a traffic hazard and the Guardia were constantly moving people on to the official site in the valley near La Salzadella cemetery where totality would have been behind the mountains! This made us nervous and about an hour before first contact this was compounded by thick high cloud that started to form above us with a fixed western edge that refused to move. Unfortunately, this cloud persisted, people were getting depressed and many considering moving on to the west. I advised them to hold their nerve until the Sun did drop below the cloud which was some 30 minutes after first contact! Fortunately, I was then able to start imaging with my Canon EOS 1200 and Sky 90 telescope through second contact, totality which lasted one minute to third contact and a then for a further 10 minutes until the Sun set.

People were using eclipse glasses and mainly mobile phones to photograph the event with a small number using DSLR's. Even The Guardia had eclipse glasses, and everyone removed them during the silence of totality. Everyone was euphoric and lots came to thank me afterwards for advising them to hold their nerve and stay put.



My goal had been to enjoy and help others cherish such an experience as well as photograph and produce an animated GIF of the event https://spaceweathergallery.com/full_image.php?image_name=Andy-Devey-12-August-2026-_1786743787.gif

We made lots of new friends from Canada, France, Hungary, Poland and Spain. Contact details were exchanged and I shared my photographic results with them. ❐

An eclipse, a TikTok and more than 500 people at St Sannan's

Reverend Matt Davis



I'm a vicar who likes science. I have a conservation degree, and I've always been fascinated by the stars, space travel and all the gloriousness of the universe.

So, when a solar eclipse was on the way this summer, I made a TikTok video about it and invited people to come and buy eclipse glasses. What happened next took me by surprise. People began contacting me about setting up an event. Someone generously offered to donate eclipse glasses. Before long, what had started as a video had grown legs, and we found ourselves organising an eclipse party at St Sannan's, Bedwellty.

Our invitation was simple: "Come and look up."

On Wednesday evening, more than 500 people responded.

We advertised the event quickly and brought a few people together to make it happen. A neighbouring farmer kindly allowed us to use a field for parking and another for watching the eclipse. We gathered around the church, set up a telescope for safe viewing and showed the eclipse on a television so that more people could see what was happening.

The response was extraordinary. We were oversubscribed, and there was a lovely atmosphere around the church as people chatted, met their neighbours and shared in the excitement. People shared eclipse glasses, drank cups of tea and settled into camping chairs. Together, we watched a beautiful event in a beautiful place.

At the time, eclipse glasses were being sold in some places for extortionate prices. Our gathering gave people an opportunity to see the eclipse safely and share the experience with others. I was also able to explain a little about what was happening as the Moon passed in front of the Sun.

One of the best parts of the evening was seeing volunteers from across Mynydd Bedwellte Ministry Area working alongside one another. They welcomed visitors, handed out glasses, served refreshments, helped people find their way and made sure the event ran safely and smoothly. I'm incredibly grateful to everyone who gave their time and energy.

For me, the evening was a reminder that we don't always need months of planning to create

something worthwhile. Sometimes an opportunity is coming, you know people will be interested, and you need to bring people together and give it a go. Planning still matters, particularly when safety is involved. But a lack of time or a long lead-in doesn't always have to stop us. Knowing what is coming can help us spot an opportunity, respond positively and build something around it. It also reminded me of the value of our churches as trusted community spaces. St Sannan's is held in high regard by many local people, and that makes it a wonderful place to bring people together, share good science and help everyone enjoy something safely.

This wasn't a religious event. There was no bait and switch: no requirement to listen to a talk about faith or come back to church in exchange for a pair of glasses. We did let people know about our other activities, but that was beside the point. People were welcome simply to come along, watch and enjoy being together.

The eclipse encouraged us to pause, look up and enjoy the wonder of creation. It also gave us a chance to look around and appreciate the community in which we live.

We're already thinking about what comes next. There will be another partial solar eclipse visible from Wales on 2nd August 2027. From here, it will be smaller than this year's, but it gives us another chance to gather. We hope to have more eclipse glasses and build a wider programme of science activities around the event. We're thinking about teddy parachutes and teddy zip lines, alongside activities exploring physics, astronomy, space and space travel. We'd also like to offer more explanations and talks for anyone who wants to learn.

If this year taught me anything, it's that curiosity can bring people together. Give people a safe place, a warm welcome and something wonderful to look at, and you might be surprised by what grows.



Thank you to everyone who came along and helped make the evening so memorable. It was a wonderful time, and we were delighted to share it with so many of you. ❐

Solar Eclipse Sharing

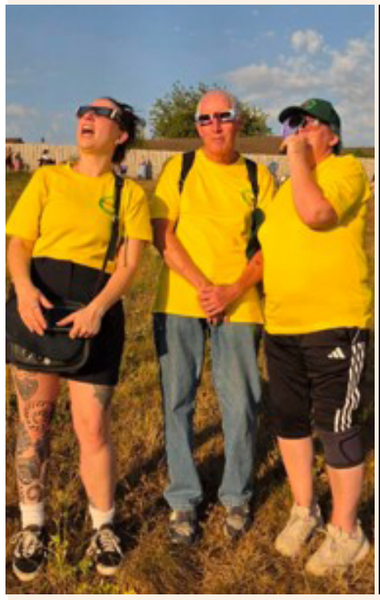
Helen Usher

With a total solar eclipse within easy travelling distance, it was certainly tempting to head for the path of totality to experience my fifth total eclipse. But the alternative was to stay home and share a deep partial eclipse of over 93% with family, friends and the local community.

I'd had great fun running a pop-up observing event for last year's partial eclipse, and the public response was fantastic. A deeper eclipse seemed likely to attract even more interest. Besides, I think I enjoy sharing astronomy with people as much as I enjoy observing. The prospect of another accessible total eclipse next year also made the decision a little easier!

To help as many people as possible enjoy the event safely, I took advantage of the inexpensive eclipse glasses made available through Go Stargazing, Astronomers Without Borders, and First Light Optics. Many thanks to all three organisations. In total, I obtained 600 pairs to distribute locally.

I planned an informal pop-up event at Parc Penallta, which offered the essential ingredient for this eclipse: a low western horizon. Finding one of those in the South Wales Valleys is not always easy!







Sharing the Eclipse Across the Community

In the weeks leading up to the eclipse, I worked with several local groups to get eclipse glasses out into the community.

My husband took 100 pairs to his Saturday Parkrun and handed them out at the finish. Demand was so high that the supply quickly disappeared, leaving some of the slower runners disappointed. I also left glasses at my hairdressers and our church, and distributed to family, friends and neighbours.

Through social media, I discovered that several local organisations were planning informal eclipse gatherings. It was lovely to be able support them by providing free glasses, information and guidance to help them set up safe observing activities too.

One small volunteer-run eco park organised pinhole camera workshops for children using cardboard boxes. The projectors were shared alongside eclipse glasses, giving visitors a variety of safe ways to watch the event. The park reported the largest attendance in its history, with many people visiting for the first time.

They later told me:

"We had a great evening. I don't think we've ever seen so many people in the park. We had

over 300 visitors. Thank you for your help and support. Despite only having 50 pairs of glasses, people happily shared with one another. I made around 40 projectors with the children, and we even ran out of refreshments! We'd love to work with you again in the future."

I'm hopeful that this will lead to more astronomy activities in the Eco Park.

St Sannan's Community Event

Elsewhere in this newsletter you can read about the event organised by the ministry team at St Sannan's Church, Bedwellty, another group I was delighted to support.

As well as supplying eclipse glasses, I provided a telescope for solar projection. We also placed a Seestar telescope on top of the church tower and streamed its view to a screen at ground level. More than 500 people attended the event, sharing refreshments, conversation, and the experience of viewing the eclipse together.

Like the eco park, the church team is already discussing future collaborations and asking, "What's next?"

A Thousand People in the Park

My own pop-up event attracted even more people than I had imagined.

We estimate that well over 1,000 people came to Parc Penallta for the evening. It was a perfect venue, with plenty of space for picnic blankets and deckchairs, allowing people of all ages, families and friends to enjoy the eclipse in the warmth of a beautiful summer evening.

Word had spread that eclipse glasses would be available and that telescopes would be set up for public viewing. By the time we arrived, hundreds of people were already waiting. Later, traffic into the car park became completely gridlocked as more visitors tried to reach the site.

We distributed more than 350 pairs of glasses, limiting them to one pair per family group, and still ran out. While I concentrated on setting up the telescopes, my husband handled the distribution.

He later said it felt a bit like feeding ducks: the moment the glasses appeared, people flocked towards him! Thankfully, everyone was good-natured, and we could reassure those who missed out that they could easily share the glasses, and there would also be plenty of other ways to view the eclipse safely.



Telescopes, Solar Funnels and Seestars

For observing, we set up a hydrogen-alpha solar telescope alongside a refractor fitted with a solar funnel. This combination worked particularly well. Groups could watch the projected image together while waiting for a closer look through the hydrogen-alpha telescope.

A Seestar telescope proved very popular too, providing a live image showing sunspots as well as the eclipse, and encouraging plenty of questions and discussion.

We also had pinhole cameras, colanders, information displays, and leaflets explaining more about the Sun, and the science and orbital mechanics behind eclipses.

Over the course of the evening, we probably showed telescope views to more than 500 people. The atmosphere was wonderful. Conversations ranged from the eclipse itself to astronomy more generally, and the feedback on local community Facebook pages was so positive.

Many families described how much they had enjoyed experiencing the eclipse together.



My Favourite Moment

My favourite moments involved my own family.

My nieces and nephews attended with their children and brought along plenty of friends. My great-nephew, aged six, and my great-niece, aged nine, proudly introduced their friends to the telescopes and enthusiastically showed them the Seestar that was like theirs!

At maximum eclipse they came running over to tell me they had spotted a planet: Venus. They then proceeded to show other people how to find it for themselves.

Oh, to have young eyes again.

I hope that for them, and for many others who attended, this will be one of those special experiences they remember for years to come.

Was It Worth Missing Totality?

Absolutely.

Sharing the eclipse with family, friends, and the wider community on a rare warm and sunny Welsh evening was genuinely magical. The excitement, curiosity, and sense of shared experience made it one of the most rewarding astronomy events I've been involved in.

That said... I am already looking at travel plans for next year's total eclipse! ❐





Liverpool Astronomical Society
145 Years of Astronomy on Merseyside

Young Astronomers Club dates and themes for 2026/27
Juniors & Young Astronomers Events

From Gabriel Becerra – Liverpool AS Junior Representative

I've selected the following dates for the Young Astronomers Club for this session (and some possible themes) night sky observations weather permitting.

2026

10th December: Gas Giants (Saturn will be visible, can also do Kerbal)

2027
14th January: Space Exploration/Kerbal

11th February: Planets (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars and the Moon visible)

11th March: Search for life (Jupiter and Mars are visible)

The activities we do depend on the weather. If clear, we take full advantage of the weather and use the telescope at our observatory. Otherwise we will prepare a talk and some activities to be done indoors. We will also make use of software to explain some concepts, like Sandbox Universe or Kerbal Space Program (our young astronomers are quite good at designing and flying space missions). ❐

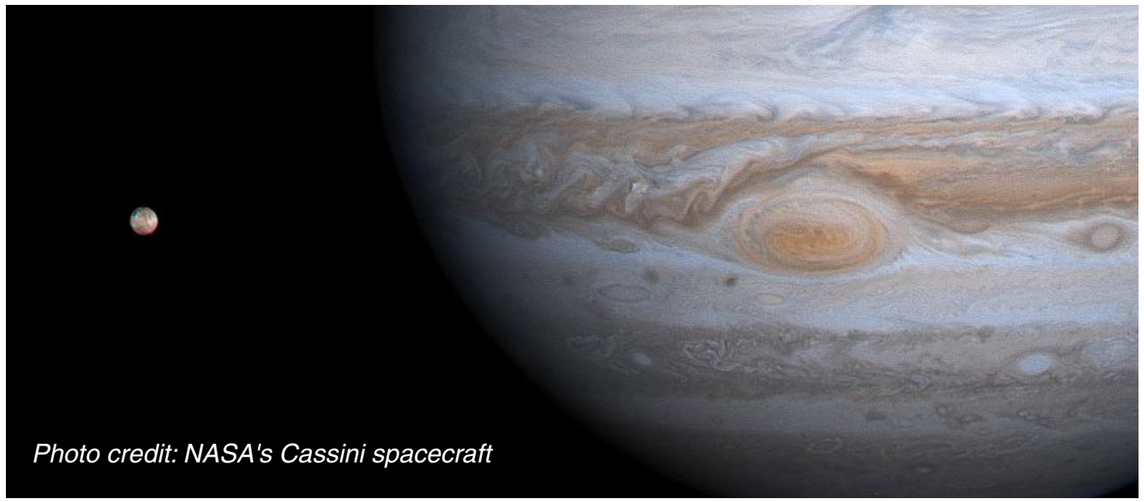


Photo credit: NASA's Cassini spacecraft

