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Penobscot Valley Star Gazers

An Astronomical Society of Central Maine

I come, I come! ye have called me long,
I come o'er the mountains with light and song.
-Felicia Dorothea Hemans, of Spring



March Meeting

The March 2026 meeting of the PVSG will be held at John Bapst Memorial High School on Monday the 9th at 6:30 pm. Zoom will be available with the regular ID. (Zoom meeting ID 862 9984 6478 Password: PVSG.)



PVSG Official Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2026

Time: Meeting called to order (evening session)

Location: John Bapst High School (in-person) and via Zoom

President/Chair: Don Ferrell

Recorded by: Andy Royal, Secretary (interim)

1. Call to Order

The meeting of the Penobscot Valley Stargazers was called to order on February 9, 2026 by President Don Ferrell. Members were welcomed both in-person and online via Zoom.

2. Attendance

Members present included:

- Jeff Waring
- Dave Clark
- Scott Burgess
- Smith family
- Interim Secretary (noted during meeting)
- Additional members attended via Zoom.

3. Approval of Minutes

The membership expressed general agreement with the previous meeting minutes.

4. New Business

A. Newsletter Distribution

It was noted that not all members had yet received the most recent newsletter. Dave stated additional copies would be sent and thanked contributors for their work.

B. Upcoming Outreach and Events

1. Fields Pond Audubon Star Party (May 8, 2026)

Dave announced a requested observing session at Fields Pond Audubon on Saturday, May 8, beginning around 7:30 PM (time to be confirmed).

Members were asked to indicate availability and whether they could bring telescopes.

2. STEM/Recruiting Opportunity

An additional daytime outreach opportunity was discussed involving youth groups and possible tabling.

Members discussed:

- The value of public engagement
- Potential need for posters, handouts, or club materials

- Encouraging participation even without telescope ownership

3. Binocular Outreach

Members agreed binocular observing could be a helpful entry point for new participants and families.

C. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported the current club balance as:

- \$666.47

D. Insurance Payment Approval

The Treasurer reported the club's annual insurance premium would be approximately \$359. Per bylaws, expenditures over \$50 require member approval.

Motion: To approve payment of the insurance bill.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

E. Officer Elections Planning

It was noted that club elections are typically held in spring (March–May).

Positions expected to be open include:

- Secretary
- Member-at-Large

A nominating committee will be formed in advance of the May election meeting.

5. Observing Reports and Member Updates

•Members shared recent observations of Jupiter, the Moon, and aurora activity.

•A potential new observing location in Glenburn was suggested for future club events.

6. Bangor High School Observatory Project

Members reported progress assisting Bangor High School with their telescope system.

•Shawn Laatsch and others helped connect equipment and software.

•Plans were made to test dome operation and attempt imaging (Jupiter suggested as an initial target).

7. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Action Items / Next Steps

Dave to confirm details and attendance for May 8 Fields Pond Audubon Star Party.

Officers to begin nominating committee process for spring elections.

Continue support of Bangor High School observatory imaging tests.

Kind regards,
Andrew Royal



Observe the Sky This Month

Some Selected Objects
March 2026

General sky comments – The major event this month was the total eclipse of the Moon on the 3rd. It was an early morning event with the Moon in total eclipse as it set. Observation of the western zodiacal light (if your sky is dark) is once again visible this month starting on the 5th and continuing for the next two weeks. On the evening of the 6th the bright star north of the Moon was Spica in the constellation Virgo. Have you found the hour of sleep you lost Sunday? and Saturn were very close Sunday evening. Tuesday evening the 10th the star Antares is only 0.7° north of the Moon. Last quarter Moon is on the 11th. On Thursday the 12th the moons Io and Ganymede cast shadows on Jupiter. On Tuesday the 17th the planet Mercury is 2° north of the crescent Moon in the morning daylight sky. Wednesday the 18th is new Moon. On Friday the 20th the thin crescent new Moon is 5° south of Venus in the morning daylight sky and the vernal equinox is at 10:46 am EDT. On Monday the 23rd the crescent Moon is in the Pleiades (M45). Wednesday the 25th is first quarter Moon. Sunday the 29th the star Regulus is 0.4° south of the Moon and occulted east of North America.

Planets and Moon this month – Before the meeting on the 9th the full worm Moon was on Tuesday the 3rd and the Moon that night was in eclipse. The new Moon (lunation 1277) is on Wednesday the 18th, first quarter is on Wednesday the 25th and New Moon (lunation 1277) is on Wednesday the 18th. Mercury is best seen in the southern hemisphere this month. It was at inferior conjunction with the Sun on the 7th. It reaches maximum magnitude of 0.3 late in the month. Its best view will be in October. Venus is becoming bright in the evening sky through September. It passes a thin young Moon on the 19th. Mars is fading into the southern sky and is not worth observing as it recedes from the Earth. Jupiter is still bright and well placed for viewing in the evening sky in Gemini. Saturn is heading to solar conjunction on the 25th. This is the last time to easily observe Uranus (Οὐρανός) in the evening sky until July. Neptune is too close to the Sun to be seen being in conjunction with the Sun on the 22nd. Pluto is in Sagittarius beyond its viewing period.

Constellations for the month – March is the end of the winter constellations. We will start with another constellation that was part of the old constellation Argo Navis. It was renamed by Nicolas Louis de Lacaille from part of Malus, the Mast, to Pyxis Nautica, the Mariner's Compass. Pyxis is barely 20° above the horizon for Maine and the two main stars are only 4th magnitude and at the bottom of the constellation. Puppis and Monoceros next door we observed last month. The first hint of the spring constellations is Hydra, the Female Water Serpent. We must travel about 25° through

fields of mostly stars until we reach the head of Hydra, the female Water Serpent, a grouping of six, 3rd and 4th magnitude stars in a distinctive asterism easily fitting in most binocular fields. For more about Hydra read below in the featured constellation section. Above Hydra's head is the Zodiac constellation Cancer, the Crab. Cancer contains the naked eye visible open cluster, M 44, Praesepe (Latin for Manger) also called the Beehive. Cancer the Crab is a dim constellation with the brightest stars looking like an inverted Y pattern with M 44 at the junction of the three lines. Cancer is the dimmest Zodiac (path of the Sun) constellation and the first spring constellation. The constellation is best known for hosting M 44 but also contains M 67 another open cluster. It can be located 2° W of Acubens alpha (α) cancri. In Greek mythology Cancer is the crab sent by the goddess Hera (a sworn enemy of Hercules) to distract him while he dispatched the many-headed water monster Hydra. Hercules was not very distracted as he either kicked it away into the stars, crushed it under his foot, or Hera put Cancer into the stars in a dim part of the sky because the crab was unsuccessful with his mission. The two stars on either side of M44 (Praesepe, Manger or Beehive) have their own mythology. According to Eratosthenes when the Titans were overthrown and the gods and giants began fighting, the gods Dionysus and Hephaestus came in riding on Asses to join the fight. The braying of the Asses was so loud it scared off the giants who thought monsters were coming to fight. To honor the Asses they were put in the sky by Dionysus on either side of the Manger. The names of the stars are Asellus Borealis, [north Ass] gamma (γ) cancri and Asellus Australis [south Ass] delta (δ) cancri. Above Cancer is the eastern half of Lynx including the alpha (α) star at the very east end of the constellation observed last month. Cancer contains seven multi-star system stars observable by anyone with a 6" or larger telescope. To observe start with the north star of Cancer 4th mag Iota (ι) cancri. It is double star of yellow and white. The next star system is featured below. Use a star atlas to find and observe the others. They are Iota (ι), Sigma (σ) 3 and 4, Phi (φ) 2, and Σ1311.

Featured star – Zeta (ζ) cancri is a quadruple star system first observed by William Herschel located 3° west of gamma (γ) cancri the middle star of the constellation and listed as a triple star system in his first list of double stars published in 1782. In 1731, he noted an irregularity in the motion of the third star but thought it was an observational error. Forty-four years later the Russian astronomer Georg and his son Otto Struve had determined Herschel's observations were correct and component C has a companion. The almost circular orbit shows we are looking down on the Zeta system about pole-on. More modern observations have determined this star system may contain as many as six components and maybe more. Zeta is around 85 light years distant and the two closest stars are at a distance comparable to the distance between our sun and the planet Uranus with the other components much further distant. When you think of all the possibilities with this system it becomes mind-boggling.

Featured Constellation – Hydra, the (Female) Water Serpent is the largest and longest of the constellations. The brightest star and heart of Hydra is Alphard, alpha (α) Hydrae at mag 2. Alphard means “The Solitary One” because of the lack of bright stars in the area. Its red-orange glow makes it easy to identify SE of the “Beehive”. Below the “Beehive” is the head of Hydra, the Water Serpent. It is a grouping of six, 3rd and 4th magnitude stars in a distinctive asterism easily fitting in the viewing field of most 7x to 10x binoculars. Below this grouping look for M48 (NGC 2548) a large open cluster covering about ½ degree in the sky with 50 to 80 stars noted, some in lanes. To find this cluster look 10° SE of the head of Hydra. Because Hydra covers nearly seven hours of right ascension we will note the two other Messier objects it contains as we come to them. For now the head, the heart, and the open cluster M48 are the objects for this month. Hydra also contains a good number of interesting galaxies I have yet to explore.

Mythology – Present day is most familiar with the demigod Hercules killing Hydra as one of his seven labors. Hydra would grow two heads for every one cut off making it a problem. Hercules had no problem because he burned the spot where the heads were severed making it impossible for them to regrow. Hercules was not the first hero to slay a multi-headed serpent. Mesopotamian legend has their god of war and agriculture Ninurta killing a multi-headed serpent written on a tablet circa 2500 BC.

Featured Messier object – M67 is an open cluster in the constellation Cancer. It is usually overlooked because of the easily seen M44 Praesepe – Beehive. 7° SSE of M44 is Acubens the alpha (α) star of Cancer, a little over 1° W is M 67. I counted over 100 stars in M67 with the 8” Clark refractor at the University of Maine before giving up. The cluster is listed to have 500+ stars. It does appear to be about the same age as some globular clusters making it one of the oldest open clusters. Do not miss this one. It is easy to find slightly less than 2° west of Acubens, alpha (α) Cancer. M67 is an open cluster easily confused with an evaporated globular cluster. If you have seen my presentation on globular clusters you should have absorbed the way to find out if a star cluster is an open cluster or a globular cluster. Comparing H-R (Hertz-sprung Russell Diagrams) aka Color-Magnitude diagrams of M67 and a globular cluster such as M3 in Canes Venatici, M3 has a distinctive horizontal branch of giant stars and other characteristics making it a globular cluster while M67 does not have these characteristics.

Other objects of interest – Iota, the northern star of the inverted “Y” of Cancer is a beautiful double of gold and blue reminding some of the more famous Albireo of Cygnus.

Remove the lens cover, come see the night sky
Bill Shackelford