

# The High Desert Observer

April 2024

Yet Another Special Eclipse Edition!



## This Month's Meeting - April 26th

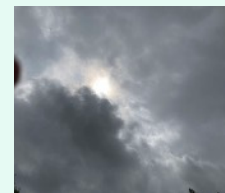
IN-PERSON & Zoom, Friday at 7 p.m.  
Mesilla Valley Radio Clubhouse  
6609 Jefferson Ave. Las Cruces, NM

At the corner of Wilt and Jefferson -- take the Porter exit from US 70, about 5 miles east from the I-25 interchange. Go south on Porter until you come to Jefferson. From there, turn left and go to the corner of Jefferson and Wilt. The meeting will also be available to members via Zoom.

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## From the President Tim Kostelecky



Just minutes before totality in Eagle Pass TX, I figured I'd be batting .500 with my four total eclipse expeditions (1979, 1999, 2017 & 2024). The cloud cover was ominous, with little hope that we'd be seeing anything of significance...perhaps just a darkening of the surroundings. That's what happened in Bavaria in 1999 — long trip, beautiful day, great anticipation, until a small bank of clouds came just in time to disappoint. It's a roll of the dice when chasing eclipses, and given the grim weather forecast for this month's event, many cancellations were made. But I figured, as many of our ASLC members did, that despite the odds, even a small chance of success is worth the effort. And the slim hope paid off with a spectacular show.



Wherever members of ASLC end up, we provide outreach opportunities. Eclipse watchers at this park in Eagle Pass TX were appreciative of our willingness to share.

## Tombaugh Lecture Series - Presentation for the Month ASLC Eclipse Viewers

### “The 2024 Total Solar Eclipse Experiences”

Members of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces travelled far and wide to view the 2024 solar eclipse. Clouds were forecast along much of the center line in Texas which forced eclipse travelers to seek out the clearest skies possible or hope for a 'sucker' hole when totality began. One member gave up a hotel in Eagle Pass and drove to northern Arkansas in search of clear skies (and he found them - picture on right).



Image by Bert Stevens

For the April 26th Tombaugh Presentation, ASLC members will share their travel and eclipse observing adventures along with their images.

## ASLC-West Outreach

### Mike Nuss

It didn't look like it was going to happen, but at the last minute the clouds opened enough to hold the Rockhound State Park presentation on Friday, April the 5th. The only reason I went to the park, was that a traveler from Las Cruces wanting to do some viewing, contacted ASLC, and Mr. Wood passed the information on to me. I didn't want to leave him stranded, and had told Mr. Turner earlier that it didn't look like the clouds were going to move and we wouldn't be having the presentation. Luckily, Guy Vanmeenen from Belgium, did drive over.

Guy, is a very accomplished observer, who was in the area for the eclipse. He was in Casper, WY for the 2017 event. We got the best telescopic view of comet P12/Pons- Brooks that evening from the west facing observation patio at the park. We

enjoyed the evening with 17 other people till the winds shut us down at 2200.

Guy (pronounced gee) was very appreciative of the sky here in New Mexico, from his usual Bortle 7-8 home.

He also wanted to extend an offer to any of us traveling to Belgium to contact him and he will arrange with their club to host a visit.

We mercifully got winded out on Saturday evening at City of Rocks, with temperatures dropping like a rock.

Bobby Franzoy and myself gave a telescope viewing session at the Hatch Elementary School on Wednesday, April 10th. We had 60 children and parents. The Principal realized that having this type of activity needs to happen when darkness comes earlier in the evening. And would like to have another this fall. Some of the young teachers were excited by the views, so I think next session will be more anticipated and attended.

**The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces**

**(ASLC)** is dedicated to expanding public awareness and understanding of the wonders of the universe. ASLC holds frequent observing sessions and star parties, providing opportunities to work on Society and public educational projects. Members receive electronic delivery of The High Desert Observer, our monthly newsletter, plus membership in the Astronomical League including their quarterly publication, Reflector, available in either paper or digital format. ASLC members are also entitled to a discount on a subscription to Sky and Telescope magazine. Annual Individual Dues are \$36; Family \$42; Student (Full Time) \$24. Dues are payable in January and partial year prorated for new members. Please contact our Treasurer, Patricia Conley, [treasurer@aslc-nm.org](mailto:treasurer@aslc-nm.org) for further information.

**Coming Events**

Monthly, on an evening close to the first-quarter moon, ASLC hosts a public “MoonGaze” observing session in Las Cruces. We also hold periodic special evening sessions at Tombaugh Observatory on the NMSU campus.

Also monthly, the ASLC welcomes public viewing at the Haas Observatory in Leasburg Dam State Park, located just 20 miles north of Las Cruces. Our 16-inch Meade LX200 telescope at this site is used to observe under rather dark skies.

Keep updated on the dates, times, and locations through this [link](#) with additional information available at our website [www.aslc-nm.org](http://www.aslc-nm.org) as well as our [Facebook](#) page.

**ASLC Board of Directors**

[board@aslc-nm.org](mailto:board@aslc-nm.org)

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ALCOR: Patricia Conley [treasurer@aslc-nm.com](mailto:treasurer@aslc-nm.com)  
 Calendar: Stephen Wood [outreach@aslc-nm.org](mailto:outreach@aslc-nm.org)  
 Education: Rich Richins [education@aslc-nm.org](mailto:education@aslc-nm.org)  
 Loaner Program: Tim Kostelecky [loanerScopes@aslc-nm.org](mailto:loanerScopes@aslc-nm.org)  
 Observatories:  
     Leasburg Dam: Steve Barkes [LDSPObservatory@aslc-nm.org](mailto:LDSPObservatory@aslc-nm.org)  
     Tombaugh: Open [ASLCObservatory@aslc-nm.org](mailto:ASLCObservatory@aslc-nm.org)  
 Outreach: Stephen Wood [outreach@aslc-nm.org](mailto:outreach@aslc-nm.org)  
 Website: Steve Barkes [webslave2@aslc-nm.org](mailto:webslave2@aslc-nm.org)  
 HDO Editor: Tim Kostelecky [HDO@aslc-nm.org](mailto:HDO@aslc-nm.org)

## Featured Article

### Stargazing for Beginners

By Kat Troche

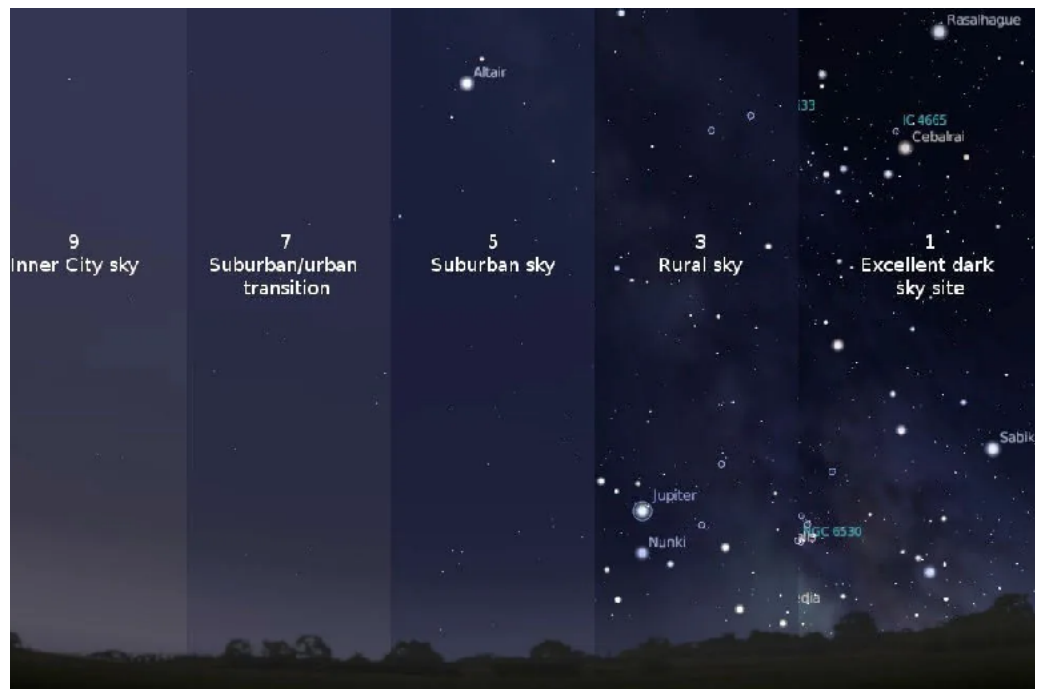


This article is distributed by NASA's Night Sky Network (NSN). The NSN program supports astronomy clubs across the USA dedicated to astronomy outreach. Visit [nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov](https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov) to find local clubs, events, and more!

Millions were able to experience the solar eclipse on April 8, 2024, inspiring folks to become amateur astronomers – hooray! Now that you've been 'bitten by the bug', and you've decided to join your local astronomy club, here are some stargazing tips!

#### The Bortle Scale

Before you can stargaze, you'll want to find a site with dark skies. It's helpful learn what your Bortle scale is. But what is the Bortle scale? The Bortle scale is a numeric scale from 1-9, with 1 being darkest and 9 being extremely light polluted; that rates your night sky's darkness. For example, New York City would be a Bortle 9, whereas Cherry Springs State Park in Pennsylvania is a Bortle 2.



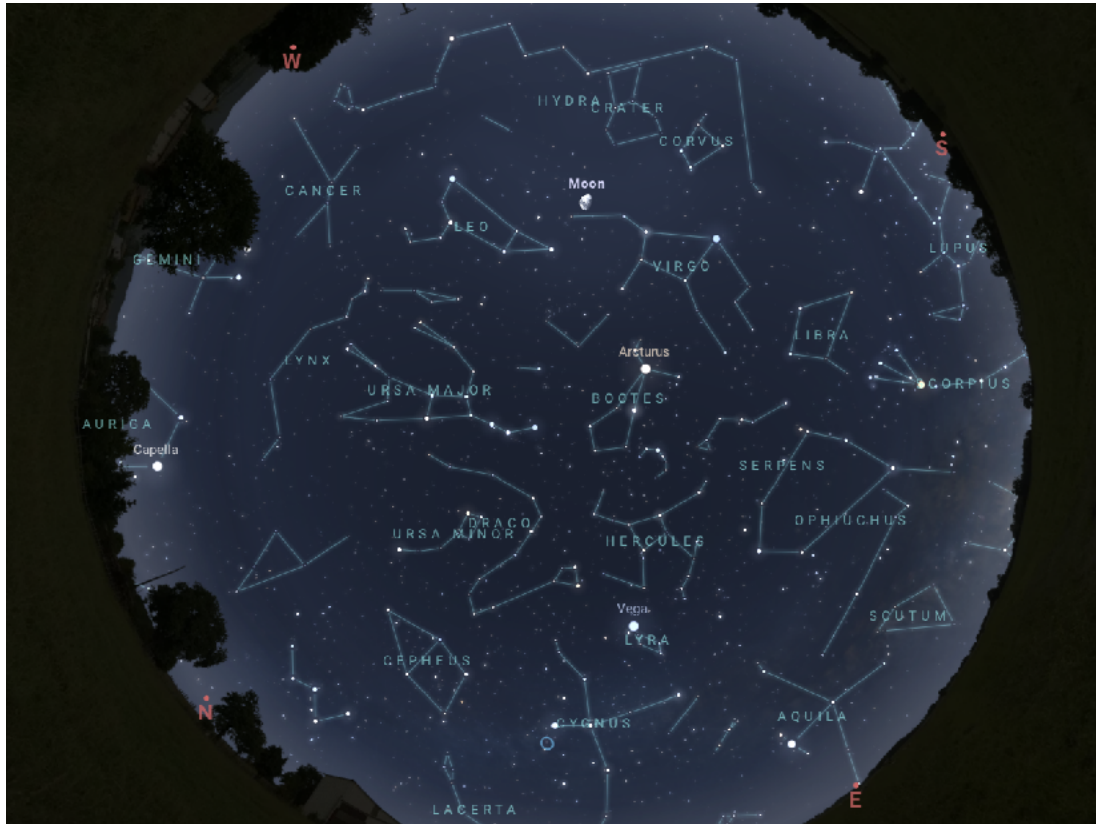
International Dark Sky Association Bortle map: <https://i.imgur.com/38DrWtA.png>

Determining the Bortle scale of your night sky will help narrow down what you can expect to see after sunset. Of course, other factors such as weather (clouds namely) will impact seeing conditions, so plan ahead. Find Bortle ratings near you here: [www.lightpollutionmap.info](http://www.lightpollutionmap.info)

#### No Equipment? No Problem!

There's plenty to see with your eyes alone. Get familiar with the night sky by studying star maps in books, or with a planisphere. These are great to begin identifying the overall shapes of constellations, and what is visible during various months.

Interactive sky maps, such as Stellarium Web, work well with mobile and desktop browsers, and are also great for learning the constellations in your hemisphere. There are also several astronomy apps on the market today that work with the GPS of your



May Full Sky Map: <https://i.imgur.com/o9lm151.png>

smartphone to give an accurate map of the night sky.

Keep track of Moon phases. Both the interactive sky maps and apps will also let you know when planets and our Moon are out! This is especially important because if you are trying to look for bright deep sky objects, like the Andromeda Galaxy or the Perseus Double Cluster, you want to avoid the Moon as much as possible. Moonlight in a dark sky area will be as bright as a streetlight, so plan accordingly! And if the Moon is out, check out this Skywatcher's Guide to the Moon: [bit.ly/MoonHandout](https://bit.ly/MoonHandout)

#### Put On That Red Light

If you're looking at your phone, you won't be able to see as much. Our eyes take

approximately 30 minutes to get dark sky adapted, and a bright light can ruin our night vision temporarily. The easiest way to stay dark sky adapted is to avoid any bright lights from car headlights or your smartphone. To avoid this, simply use red lights, such as a red flashlight or headlamp. The reason: white light constricts the pupils of your eyes, making it hard to see in the dark, whereas red light allows your pupils to stay dilated for longer. Most smartphones come with adaptability shortcuts that allow you to make your screen red, but if you don't have that feature, use red cellophane on your screen and flashlight.

Up next: why binoculars can sometimes be the best starter telescope, with Night Sky Network's upcoming mid-month article through NASA's website!

## Monthly Meeting Minutes March 2024

### John McCullough - Secretary

#### Call to Order:

Tim Kostelecky, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC, the Society), called the March 2024 meeting to order at 7:00 pm on 22 March 2024 at the Mesilla Valley Radio Clubhouse. There were eighteen (18) members, spouses, and guests in attendance, as well as nine (9) attendees via Zoom at the start of the meeting.

Tim welcomed the group to tonight's meeting and announced that the minutes from the February 2024 meeting (thanks to John McCullough, Secretary) were published in the March 2024 issue of the Society newsletter, the *High Desert Observer* (HDO). Tim asked if there were any required additions, deletions, or corrections to the minutes as submitted. There being none, a motion to accept the February 2024 minutes as submitted was offered by Rich Richins and seconded by Bernie Jezercak. There being no objections, the motion was passed by acclamation.

#### Presentation:

Tonight's Tombaugh Series speaker was ASLC member Tim Kostelecky on "Confession of a Reluctant Astro-imager". Tim has been a visual amateur astronomer for more decades than he can count on one hand. His resistance to delving into astrophotography had been mainly due to a couple of considerations: cost and complexity. Not to mention Tim had always believed there is a certain harmony with the universe that is best conveyed directly — photons to retina. But recently the cost and complexity barriers to imaging have come down considerably and Tim believes it is time to explore that mysterious world of the astro-imagers. Will Tim be converted? In this presentation, he examined this transition and how it could benefit his visual endeavors.

Currently serving as President of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces, Tim has been involved with outreach programs in astronomy since his college days, extending to volunteer stints at observatories in both Colorado and Washington state. Educated as a biologist/chemist, he retired from a 46-year career as a brewing & hops chemist — a pursuit that took him to breweries around to globe to provide education, training, and technical support. So, cheers to clear skies.

There were no new members and/or guests in attendance at tonight's meeting.

#### Officer/Committee Reports:

##### Treasurer:

Trish Conley, Treasurer, was not present at tonight's meeting. A report on the status of the Society's accounts was provided. The Society's accounts showed net income of \$226 (dues, interest, and gifts) since the last meeting and \$1277 for the current fiscal year.

##### Outreach:

Stephen Wood, outreach coordinator, reported on recent and upcoming events. Events and attendance were:

Event Date	Members	Visitors
LDSP (3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr. Moon)	02 Mar 7	40
March Moon Gaze	16 Mar 4	1

##### Event Date

Sonoma Elementary STEAM Night, 1700 to 1900  
28 Mar

LDSP (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr. Moon) 30 Mar

Solar Eclipse at Branigan Library, 1030 to 1400  
08 Apr

April Moon Gaze 13 Apr

Contact Stephen if you can support any or all events. He would like to see more members support the smaller events with telescopes and

especially is counting on member participation during the solar eclipse at Branigan Library.

**ASLCWest:**

Mike Nuss, ASLCWest coordinator, reported on recent activities in the Deming area. Public observing events were held at Rockhound State Park and City of Rocks (CoR) State Park on 08 and 09 March, respectively. The Rockhound event was 'clouded out' but the CoR event had good weather. Events next month will be on 05 and 06 April.

**Old Business:**

There was no old business for discussion.

**New Business/Announcements:**

1. Meeting Presentations - Tim would like more members to offer presentation ideas, possible speaker contacts, and their own astronomically related efforts to share with the Society.

There was no additional new business offered for discussion.

The March 2024 meeting was adjourned at 8:08 pm.

-Respectfully submitted:  
John McCullough  
Secretary, ASLC

## Member Images - April 8th Solar Eclipse

### Dave Doctor from Ingram, Texas



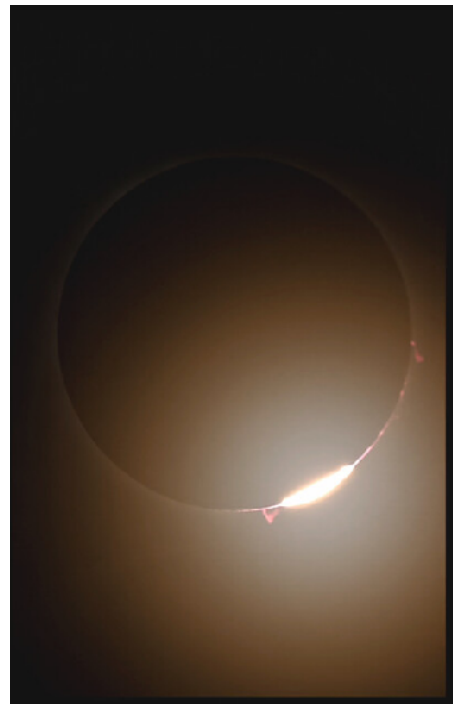
Mostly clouds in Ingram TX but we did see it in and out of the clouds until about mid-totality. This is the best image from the day. Prominences at C2

## Nils Allen from Waco, Texas



Like most of us, our small family & friends group observing just NW of Waco struggled with lots of clouds (which departed mostly After totality). Felt like we were in Vegas, hoping for 'the odds [of a clear patch] to be in our favor'!

The highly automated ZWO SeeStar struggled to find, track & focus on the sun early on. Timed exposure taken, 1 image every 5 sec. I wasn't sure what I was capturing, since I mostly concentrated on visual observing (and was glad I did...my binocs revealed lots more than the images show). Loved all the hoopla being expressed by the first-timers! Here's a few selected frames: ...Nils





## **Ranimo Bush from Fredericksburg, Texas**



It was cloudy in Fredrickerburg which made it all that more dramatic as the sun kept coming in and out of the clouds during totality. We did get to see the prominence and even Jupiter. All narrated by Bill Nye and Tim Dodd (the Everyday Astronaut) as I was with the Planetary Society 2-day event called Eclipse-o-rama.

## **Rich Richins from Las Cruces, NM**



I didn't take many pics, but here's one from a bit after local maximum. I think we estimate that we had a few hundred folks stop by for a look.

## Jeff Johnson from Killeen, Texas



Here are results from my Canon T3i, 250mm Canon lens @ f/6.5 and 1/40s (and re-doing focus continuously throughout --- super difficult as had to WAIT for it to come out of the clouds in most instances). All shot at 250mm, just cropped differently in these .jogs (for size consideration here).

However... the clouds did magic actually in varying the results.

I think my favorite is the "10 carat" diamond ring effect...looking like an explosion. And, you can STILL see the prominences as it comes out of Totality.



## Sandy Kostelecky from Eagle Pass, Texas



The image above is how the partial phase looked just minutes before totality in Eagle Pass...but when totality did arrive, it was spectacular! Thank you, eclipse gods for putting on a great show, with the sun/moon darting in and out from behind the clouds. Impressive indeed. My wife Sandy took these pics. I was too engrossed to do anything but watch.

