

# Wollongong Galaxy Gazette

Wollongong Amateur Astronomy Club (WAAC) - April 2026

Bright comets, autumn imaging targets, Musca, IOTM winners and April meeting minutes



*Musca in rich southern Milky Way starfields. Image credit: E. Slawik / NOIRLab / NSF / AURA / M. Zamani.*

**Autumn skies are here, and April offers a great mix of dark-sky imaging, portable gear and club activity ahead of Frogmore.**

This issue adds the bright-comet watch, a practical target list for April, a Musca feature, congratulations to Petar and Jeff, and a wrap-up of the 2 April club meeting.

## Welcome from the Committee

April is shaping up as a very strong WAAC month. The 2 April meeting gave us a nice mix of practical gear, southern sky observing and club planning, and this refreshed gazette follows that same theme - get outside, make the most of the dark window, and keep the rigs simple enough that they actually get used.

### April imaging planner

Best dark-sky window for deep-sky imaging from Wollongong: about 11-20 April, centred on New Moon on 17 April.

Comet C/2026 A1 (MAPS): if it survives perihelion, try 6-10 April low in the western sky after sunset.

Comet 88P/Howell: a fainter telescopic challenge for experienced imagers during the darker stretch around 11-20 April.

Comet C/2025 R3 (PanSTARRS): southern evening views improve late in the month - aim for 26-30 April and keep an eye on early May.

Lyrid meteor shower: late 21 April to dawn 22 April, with dark skies after moonset.

## Headline comets for April 2026

Comet	Best April window	How to image it	Reality check
<b>C/2026 A1 (MAPS)</b>	6-10 Apr After sunset, very low west	Short lenses to small refractors. Work fast in bright twilight. Wide-field frames may show a dust tail best.	Potentially dramatic, but very unpredictable. Survival after the 4 Apr sungrazing pass is the key.
<b>88P/Howell</b>	11-20 Apr Darker nights	A telescopic challenge for patient imagers. Longer integrations and good tracking will matter more than speed.	Not a bright public comet, but a worthwhile southern challenge target while the Moon is out of the way.
<b>C/2025 R3 (PanSTARRS)</b>	26-30 Apr Evening twilight, low west	Try wide-field first, then step up focal length if it brightens. Keep horizons clear and follow current ephemerides.	Late April is the start of the southern window; early May may end up being even better.

*Always check fresh ephemerides before you head out. Comets can brighten quickly, fade quickly or do something completely different from the forecast.*

## Image of the Month winners

Congratulations to Petar and Jeff on this month's IOTM-winning subjects.

### Petar - Pelican Nebula



Winning subject: Pelican Nebula

### Jeff - Eta Carina Nebula



Winning subject: Eta Carina Nebula

## Best imaging targets in April

The list below favours objects that are rewarding from southern latitudes, visually attractive, and realistic for the kinds of rigs many WAAC members actually use. The sweet spot this month is the moonless stretch around 11-20 April.



*Eta Carina region*

### Eta Carina / Carina Nebula (NGC 3372)

**Why shoot it:** One of the showpiece nebulae of the southern sky - bigger than Orion in true size, rich in dust lanes, bright knots and colour.

**Best with:** Camera lenses through to short refractors. Narrowband works beautifully, but dark-site RGB is also superb.

**Best in April:** High enough for excellent data in the evening, especially through the darker half of the month.

**Club note:** If you only image one giant emission nebula this month, this is a hard one to beat.



*Omega Centauri core*

### Omega Centauri (NGC 5139)

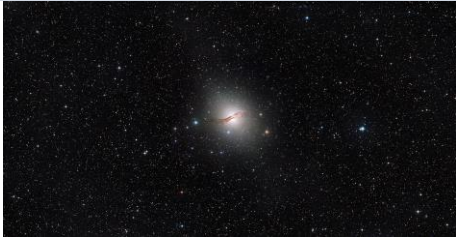
**Why shoot it:** The king of globular clusters - huge, bright and packed with ancient stars.

**Best with:** Medium focal lengths. Even small refractors can make a striking image; more focal length brings out the dense core.

**Best in April:** Easy evening target that benefits from good seeing and careful star control in processing.

**Challenge:** Avoid blowing out the core. A short-exposure blend can help preserve structure.

## More April targets



*Centaurus A*

### Centaurus A (NGC 5128)

**Why shoot it:** A famous peculiar galaxy with a bold dust lane and a compact, high-impact look.

**Best with:** Medium to longer focal lengths. It is a great step-up target once the Carina-scale wide fields are done.

**Best in April:** Well placed from southern sites and very rewarding under transparent dark skies.

**Club note:** Strong contrast makes this a nice target for modest integration times, but better data always improves the outer halo.



*The Jewel Box cluster*

### Jewel Box Cluster (NGC 4755)

**Why shoot it:** Small, bright and colourful - a perfect 'one session' target and a great object for outreach-friendly processing.

**Best with:** Small to medium focal lengths. It pairs well with quick sessions and shorter total integration.

**Best in April:** Easy to frame near Crux and especially nice when you want a target that does not demand an all-night commitment.

**Challenge:** Preserve the star colours and avoid over-sharpening.

### Quick rig matching guide

Short wide-field rigs: Eta Carina, Musca dark nebula fields, large Milky Way mosaics.

Medium focal lengths: Omega Centauri, Jewel Box, Centaurus A.

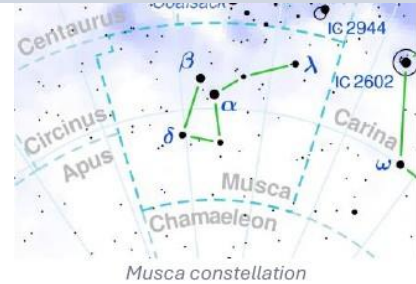
Longer focal lengths: Small galaxy work, planetary nebulae, and detailed globular-cluster cores.

## Constellation focus: Musca

Musca is compact, easy to overlook, and absolutely worth your time. From Wollongong it sits in rich southern Milky Way star fields and offers a pleasing mix of dark nebula, globular clusters and an oddball planetary nebula for imagers who want something a bit different.



*Musca in context*



*Musca constellation*

*Finder chart from the April meeting wrap-up*

## Objects of interest in Musca

**Dark Doodad Nebula** - A long dark nebula about 3 degrees in length near Gamma Muscae and NGC 4372. A beautiful binocular and camera-lens target under dark skies.



**NGC 4372** - A dimmer Musca globular cluster sitting near the Dark Doodad - an attractive combination for wide-field imagers.

**NGC 4833 / Caldwell 105** - The brighter Musca globular cluster, around magnitude 7.8, and a rewarding small-scope or binocular target from the south.

**NGC 5189** - An unusually complex planetary nebula with a twisted or reverse-S look in photographs - a fine challenge target for longer focal lengths.

### How to approach Musca at the eyepiece or camera

For binoculars: start with the Dark Doodad and the broader Milky Way contrast around Musca.

For short refractors: wide-field dark-nebula framing works well from Frogmore-class skies.

For larger scopes: move in on NGC 4833 and NGC 5189 when transparency and seeing cooperate.

## Gear review from the April meeting

Two bits of equipment drew attention at the meeting for very different reasons: the compact TeSeek HM17PE harmonic mount and Dave's William Optics ZenithStar 61. Together they make a lot of sense as a practical small-rig pairing for the kind of targets featured in this issue.



TeSeek HM17PE harmonic mount

TeSeek HM17PE demo image

### TeSeek HM17PE - compact harmonic mount

**Club take:** plenty of interest for a portable, value-oriented harmonic mount shown at around the AUD 1,300 AliExpress level at the meeting.

**What it suits:** grab-and-go imaging with smaller refractors, camera lenses and compact OTAs where low setup friction matters.

**Strengths:** portable form factor, modern harmonic-drive style, and a feature set aimed at GoTo imaging users.

**Keep in mind:** realistic payloads, sensible balancing, clean cabling and a solid tripod or pier still matter. A small mount only shines when the whole system stays tidy.

### William Optics ZenithStar 61 - why it still gets attention



The ZenithStar 61 is a small 61 mm f/5.9 APO refractor with a 360 mm focal length - exactly the kind of scope that makes wide-field southern nebula imaging easy to enjoy.

**Quick verdict:** a classy little wide-field refractor that fully deserves its grab-and-go reputation.

- **Core specs** - 61 mm aperture, 360 mm focal length, f/5.9 optics and a quoted OTA weight of about 2.2 kg.
- **Strengths** - Portable, well-finished and ideal for wide-field imaging, large nebulae, star fields and casual visual sessions.
- **Limits** - A 61 mm refractor is not a light bucket, so expectations for high-power planetary and faint deep-sky detail should stay realistic.

**Why members like it:** light weight, compact tube, pleasant mechanics, and a field of view that flatters giant nebulae, clusters and dark dust.

**Best use cases:** Eta Carina, Musca fields, Jewel Box context shots, Milky Way mosaics and travel imaging.

**Honest limitation:** it is a wide-field specialist, not a tiny-target sniper. Use it where it shines and it rewards you.

**Verdict:** the HM17PE plus ZS61 combination is a sensible 'actually use it' setup for club members who value portability more than brute-force aperture.

## April meeting minutes - Thursday 2 April 2026

*Based on the WAAC meeting wrap-up circulated after the club night.*

- A demonstration of the new TeSeek HM17PE harmonic mount drew strong interest.
- Thanks to Dave for bringing along the William Optics ZenithStar 61 - the compact 'Tak killer' scope.
- Barry presented the Treasurer's Report with little change to the club's financial position.
- Jeff gave a talk on the constellation Musca, nearby celestial objects and the Frogmore trip.
- Hans shared the LX200 wedge he manufactured some years ago.
- Jeff also brought along an eyepiece that compared very favourably with a Nagler of similar size at less than half the price.

### Club reminders

Membership reminder: please pay your \$25 membership fee by the next meeting if you have not already done so.

Frogmore trip: attendees should complete the \$150 bank transfer for 17-19 April and ensure their details are submitted.

Solar outreach: Graham is looking for a few members with solar filters to help at a daytime fundraiser next month.

### Image credits

Musca wide-field: E. Slawik / NOIRLab / NSF / AURA / M. Zamani.

Eta Carina region and Omega Centauri: NASA / ESA / Hubble.

Centaurus A: ESO / ESA / Hubble / NASA / DSS.

Jewel Box: NOIRLab / NSF / AURA.

Pelican Nebula image used as representative IOTM subject artwork: Francescodib, via Wikimedia Commons.

HM17PE photo and Musca finder chart drawn from the April WAAC meeting wrap-up page.