

April 2026

Meetings at Highland Road Park Observatory and online through YouTube and Jitsi

<https://meet.jit.si/brasmeet>

Calendar:

- **10 April, 1PM: Youth Challenge Program**
- **13 April, 7PM: BRAS Meeting at Highland Road Park Observatory**
- **23 April, 11AM: Earth Day Science Resource Fair**
- **23 April, 8PM: Sidewalk Astronomy at Gonzales Library, main branch**
- **25 April, 3PM: International Astronomy Day**
- **25 April, 7PM: LSU Star party at Landolt Observatory**
- **28 April, 7PM: Sidewalk Astronomy at Perkins Rowe**
- **16 May, 9AM: Bluebonnet Nature Center Birthday Celebration**
- **26 May, 7PM: Sidewalk Astronomy at Perkins Rowe**
- **6 June, 10AM: LIGO Science Saturday**

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President's Message

Hi Everyone,

This month, my message is just about being in our club. From my first days in the club back in 2009, it's always been a welcoming place to come and share with others my interest in all things astronomical. I think that is still one of the most important aspects of our club.

We are made up of people from all walks of life and with a scope of experience that runs the gamut from complete novice to award winning professionals. (In all honesty, we have far more people that fit the former than the latter, haha!) However, regardless of the level of expertise in the room at any given time, I personally have always felt welcome and that my being there was just as important (being one of those novices when I first joined.)

As a current club leader, I'm proud of that. I'm proud that we aren't playing "gatekeepers" for astronomy. I think we truly do have arms wide open for anyone that wants to come talk about astronomy with us. I sincerely hope you feel the same!

Coming to club meetings for our monthly programs and doing educational outreach on behalf of the club is great, but what I enjoy most is the camaraderie we have in our club. Nice, fun people. If you don't frequent our events or just don't do well with folks you don't know, I encourage you to start making your way out to hang out with us. If you see a group of people talking, feel free to join them. If there's any flaw with us, it's getting too wrapped up in conversation with all the people we already know well and forgetting to include new faces. (Some of that is just because it's often the one time a month we see each other!) But I can almost guarantee whichever side topic is going on, those people would be more than happy to include you once they look up long enough to realize there's a new face there.

As always, I'm looking forward to seeing you all at our next meeting on Monday, April 13th. We've been getting around 30 people at the monthly meetings since January and that's great. I'm hoping we can keep trending with higher attendance to the point we have to start recommending people bring their own chairs because the Observatory ran out!

Have a great month and I hope to see you out and about somewhere.

Clear Skies,

Ben Toman

President



Great thanks to NASA Solar System Ambassador Amy Northrop for updating the club on the Artemis Program at our March meeting.

Vice President's Word

We find ourselves, once again in dreaded Springtime. And as the rest of the hemisphere welcomes the warmth and longer days, I think a lot of us are beginning to get a little down about the return of shorter nights and unrepentant insects. And with the added insult of Daylight Saving Time, it won't be long before the 9PM sunsets return and our little hobby is reserved for the chronically exhausted. Ironic that this is the time of year when the Earth turns its nights away from our galaxy and toward the vastness of intergalactic space, thus drastically increasing the number of objects we could find, if only we had the time.

Perhaps to help out, just a bit, we have two local star parties coming up that might give some people a chance to at least join the crowd for some sleepless nights of galaxy hunting. First up will be an informal star party being thrown together by Dr. Turley over at LSU and he's invited us all to come along. This will be at one of our dark sky sites across the river. We'll be asking people to sign up for this one beforehand so we know who's likely to be there. We'll talk more about it at the meeting, but if you're interested and can't make the meeting, email me and I'll get you the information.

The second event will be the Pontchartrain Astronomical Society's annual spring scrimmage in May. Don took the time to confirm what I said in the last newsletter about the information for that one being available on their website for the Deep South Stargaze, so baring a second confirmation, we'll assume that's still true.

I hope everyone enjoyed the presentation Amy provided regarding the update to the Artemis missions: true to recent form, that information is already outdated since the Lunar Gateway has now been scrapped in favor of a permanent moon base. All of the other information should still be good and, from what I understand, the rocket is already back in the launch position as they try for an April First sendoff (no fooling).

Our speaker for April is one of our regular lecturers from LSU, Colin Turley, who will be coming to talk with us about the history of the Landolt Observatory at LSU. Having recently taken over as the director of Landolt, he's also been making sure that their monthly star parties have been a great experience for anybody who can make it out. These events are really fun, just in case you've never made your way over there. This will also be a great time to ask him about that upcoming April star party.

Last month, I asked for people who might be interested in joining a contact list for outings to sign up at the meeting. After soliciting input from everyone, we're going to try out GroupMe app. If it seems too complicated, we'll pick something else, but at the very least, this seems like a promising way to try to get more people involved with stargazing trips.

Another promising way to get people out is just to hold our own starparty at home. We had the first of those events in early March and the skies, somehow, cooperated. About a half dozen or so people showed up for that one, so we'll hope to do better for the next time, which we'll try to get a handle on in the near future. We also have an invitation to a new dark site at the home of one of our members just outside of Hammond, LA, which seems like it might just be the most accommodating site we've found so far.

All told, there is no shortage of opportunities to come observe with us, which seems like that's the way it should be.

Outreach Report

Hi Everyone,

Phew! March was every bit as busy as January was slow. At the time of writing this, there are still 2 more things yet to come before month's end.

We had a great time wherever we were this past month. We had lots of folks (and volunteers!) for Rockin' At The Swamp, St. George School's Star Night, Glasgow Middle's Spring in the Swamp Fest and 2 separate Sidewalk Astronomy events. It was a busy month, but also a lot of fun.

As always, a big shout out to our volunteers that make it all possible: Chad, Roz, Scott, John N., Chris and Annette, Chris K., Don, Susan, Tammy, Trey, David, Steve M., Steven T. and Ben. Also, a big shout out to Chris R. for continuing to do his own Solar Observing sessions at Moncus Park in Lafayette. We're probably one of the only Baton Rouge clubs that gets regular representation all the way over in Lafayette!

We do have some events in April and more keep coming in. As I mentioned at the meeting last month, we'd also like to have a table set up for the International Astronomy Day (IAD) event at the Highland Road Park Observatory. Since many of our regular volunteers will be involved as volunteers for BREC on that day, it would be nice to get some help from some of our non-regulars. Keep in mind, this would not involve telescope observing as all of that type of activity will be spearheaded by the BREC/HRPO. We would mostly be acting as ambassadors for the club with maybe some small exhibit or demos.

So, be sure to take a look at the list below and let me know if you'd like to come help out with anything. We always have a fun time so I hope you'll join us!

Clear Skies,

Ben Toman

Outreach Chairperson



Glasgow: Chris shows off a Sunspot, Roz and Annette talk about the lunar surface, Ben explains the relative scale of the planets, and Scott and Chris talk what to see in the afternoon while a rogue penguin sneaks up on them from behind.

Upcoming Events

Friday, April 10th

1pm-2:30pm

Youth Challenge Program in Carville

(Demos, exhibits, possible solar observing)

Thursday, April 23rd

11am-1pm

Earth Day Science Resource Fair - LSU Library

(Club info, maybe exhibit/demo)

Thursday, April 23rd

8pm-9:30pm

Sidewalk Astronomy at Ascension Parish Library- Gonzales

Saturday, April 25th

3pm-11pm

International Astronomy Day at the HRPO

(Club info, maybe exhibit/demo)

Long day so you can sign up for a shift

Tuesday, April 28th

7pm-9pm

Sidewalk Astronomy at Perkins Rowe



From Rockin' at the Swamp: Top, Coy promises not to blind people while looking at the sun and John goes over the relative scale of the solar system. Middle, Ben, Tammy, and Susan work the models during the busiest time of the day. Bottom, Chris hands out information, Scott walks a family through orbital mechanics, and Ben and Trey work on a way to make themselves look busy. Not shown, Roz, who was off climbing the portable rock wall while we were grabbing images (sorry I couldn't grab that photo, Roz—the film must have overexposed: we'll get it next time..

Saturday, May 16th

9am-4pm

Bluebonnet Swamp and Nature Center Birthday Celebration

(Demos/exhibits and possible solar observing)

Same as Rockin' At The Swamp. Sign up for shifts

Tuesday, May 26th

7pm-9pm

Sidewalk Astronomy at Perkins Rowe

Keep it in mind!

Saturday, June 6th

10am-4pm

Science Saturday at LIGO

(Demos/Exhibits, possible solar observing)

Also sign up for shifts if you won't/can't do the whole event



Perkins Rowe: Top: Chad and Scott go to the moon. Middle, Roz and Coy sharing the view. Bottom, Ben enthralled the crowd with starfacts.



St. George Star Night: Top: Coy and Ben help wide-eyed children find Jupiter in the daylight. Bottom, Roz and Scott hunt down Venus for enthusiastic students.

Secretary's Summary

There were 37 people in attendance at the March meeting.

NASA/JPL Solar System Ambassador and BRAS club member Amy Northrop delivered an illuminating presentation titled “The State and Science of Artemis.” For information about the Artemis program, visit the Artemis II Science page at:

<https://nasa.gov/humans-in-space/artemis-ii-science>

...and the NASA Biological and Physical Sciences Resources page at:

<https://qrc0.de/bfkYHV>

BRAS President Ben Toman reviewed the upcoming outreach events and passed around a volunteer sign-up sheet. There is a possibility we may be adding an event at the Port Hudson State Historical Site on March 20th from 9:30am until noon. We are scheduled to return to LIGO for another outreach event on June 6th.

It was decided by vote that in conjunction with our current T-shirt order, BRAS would buy 20 extra shirts (5 each, S-M-L-XL) to reduce future shipping costs.

Since BREC employees are not permitted to handle cash, a lockbox will be set up at the Highland Road Park Observatory for members to deposit dues and/or membership applications.

Ben thanked all members who recently volunteered for outreach events, particularly the big turnout for BREC's “Rockin’ at the Swamp” event held on March 7th.

International Astronomy Day is on April 25th. BRAS may set up an outreach table at HRPO.

During the \$1 raffle, Abby Gravois won an ASTROCON 2025 Bryce Canyon T-shirt. Roz Readinger won a Milky Way keychain. Christopher Kersey won a BRAS swag Bag. Jerry Clouatre won a book, “The Whole Shebang: A State-of-the-Universe(s) Report,” by Timothy Ferris.

A separate raffle was held for a Bushnell Northstar telescope recently donated to BRAS, which was won by Jody Solito.

Despite partial cloud coverage, some members stuck around for stargazing after the meeting. Ben helped Jody get acquainted with her newly acquired telescope.

Observatory Notes

{A binocular is recommended for all twilight and night viewing.}

AMERICAN STEM: A QUARTER-MILLENIAL CELEBRATION

Fridays from 5:45pm to 9:45pm

for ages twelve and older / no admission fee

Part III: 3 April [1876-1926] Part IV: 1 May [1926-1976]

Part V: 22 May [1976-2026] Part VI: 12 June [2026-2076]

The great Constitutional Republic experiment has been going strong for 250 years. In addition to incalculable gifts in the areas of human rights and the arts, the United States educational and capitalist and social systems (and our international partnerships) have generated enormous accomplishments in STEM fields.

[This series will follow the Community Discussion format rather than the Lecture format.]

SCIENCE ACADEMY

Saturdays from 10am to 12pm.

for Cadets aged eight to twelve / \$5 per Cadet per week (\$6 if out-of-parish)

advanced registration via [WebTrac](#) strongly recommended

[activity #431320] / parents may stay with or leave Cadet

Four Cadet minimum and sixteen Cadets maximum per session.

4 April = "The Parker Solar Probe"

11 April = "Colonizing the Moon"

EVENING SKY VIEWING

for ages six and older / no admission fee

Saturdays (4, 11 and 18 April) from 7:30pm to 10pm

Fridays (10 and 17 April) from 8:30pm to 10pm

HRPO houses a 50-cm reflector, a 40-cm reflector and several smaller telescopes to bring the majesty of the night sky to the public. Trained operators, sharing duties via a rotating roster, work throughout the year in shifts. Each operator has a pre-planned list of objects to highlight. However, requests will be taken if there is time and if all present have viewed the previous target.

SPRING SPACE EXPLORATION CAMP

Tuesday 7 April and Wednesday 8 April (8am to 5pm daily)

for ages nine to thirteen / \$55 per EBR-Parish child; \$66 per other-Parish child)

[activity #531880] / limit thirty Explorers / Registration begins 7 February.

All materials are supplied; Explorers will need a sack lunch and drink that does not require refrigeration. Explorers will also need to bring a hat and sunscreen.

FRIDAY NIGHT LECTURE SERIES

7:30pm / for ages twelve and older / no admission fee

10 April = "Status of Artemis" Amy Northrop (acting as a JPL Solar System Ambassador) will relay the latest on humanity's return to the Moon.

17 April = "Our Birth Stars" A person's birth star is a star whose light took as long to reach Earth as he's been alive. Of course, birth stars change over the course of a human lifetime and are as varied as human beings themselves! How can you see yours?

BATON ROUGE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY MEETING

Monday 13 April from 7pm to 9pm

for ages fourteen and older / no admission fee

STEM EXPANSION: “Rocket Engineering”

Saturday 18 April from 2:30pm to 6:30pm

for ages twelve to sixteen / \$15 each per in-parish registrant; \$18 each per out-of-parish registrant. Advanced registration via [WebTrac](#) required [activity #431321].

This program offers advanced topics, topic extensions and all-new games and activities to an older crowd. Certificates will be earned, and a section of archived experiments, some *never* performed on site, take place. There are also giveaways and door prizes.

INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMY DAY

Saturday 25 April from 3pm to 11pm

for age six and older / no admission fee

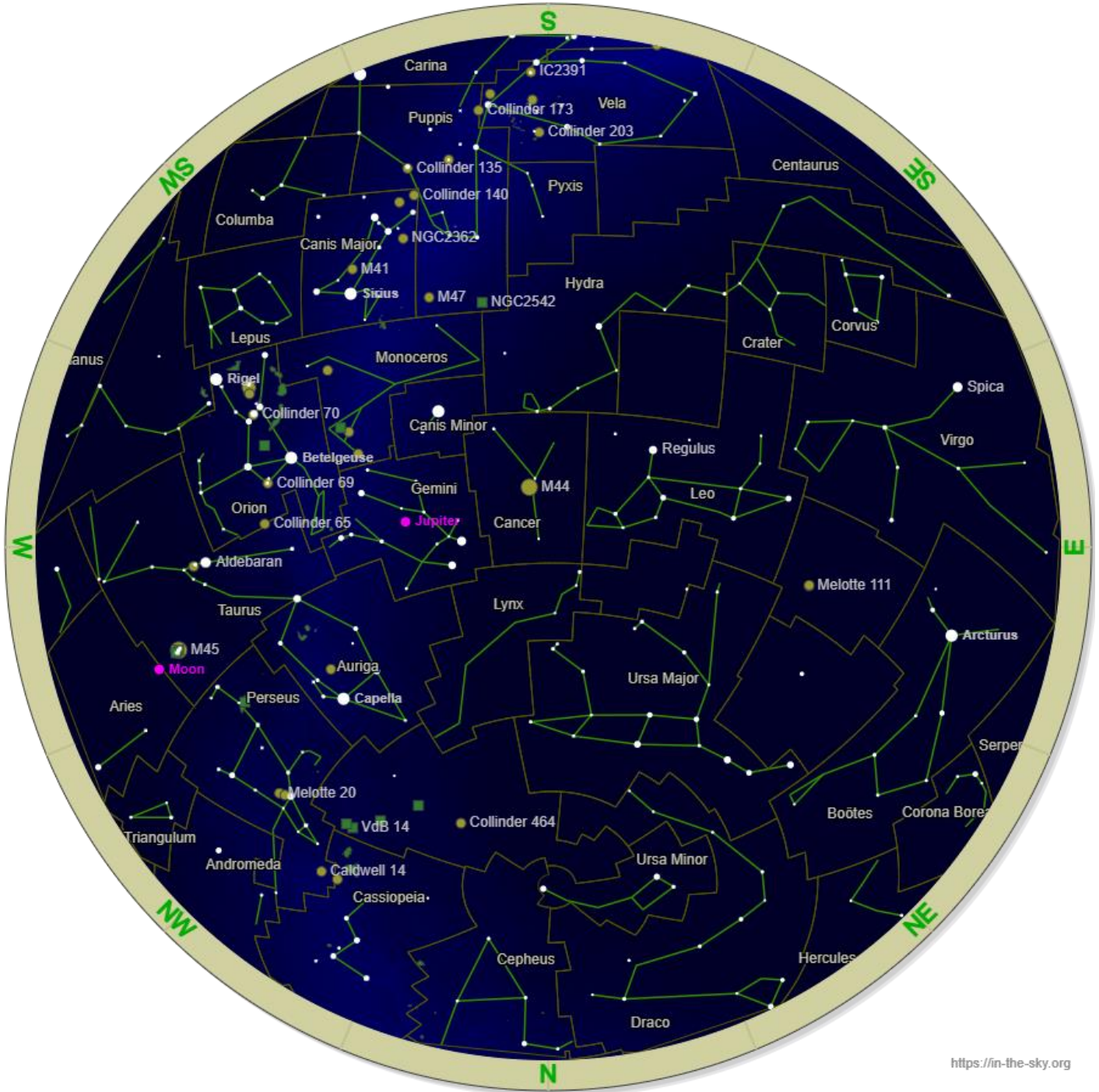
The greatest IAD event in the region returns! Once again, expect visitors and interactions involving amateur radio, gems and minerals, Earth nature, the latest in popular STEM publications, and non-visible light investigations of the Universe. A deep-sky tour, a lunar tour, solar viewing and a chemistry demonstration will also take place. Don't forget the Renaissance Sundial! Mark your calendar and don't miss it!

AMERICAN RADIO RELAY LEAGUE FIELD DAY

Saturday 27 June from 2pm to 10pm / For ages six and older. No admission fee.

One section of the electromagnetic spectrum gets all the love, as tens of thousands of “hams” ascend to the radio waves with “phone” (voice) and CW (Morse) in this exciting contact contest that stretches from coast to coast! Get on the GOTA station and make your own contact! Ham radio is awesome for parents and kids alike.

Sky Map



<https://in-the-sky.org>

Sky map centered on 15 April 2026 at 10PM

Quick Picks—Events for April

- Wed 1 [Full Moon](#)
- Thu 2 Spica 1.8°N of [Moon](#)
- Fri 3 [Mercury](#) at Greatest Western Elongation - 27.80°
- Mon 6 Antares 0.6°N of [Moon](#)
- Tue 7 [Moon](#) Apogee at 404,974 km.
- Thu 9 [Last Quarter Moon](#)
- Wed 15 [Mercury](#) 5.2°S of [Moon](#)
- Wed 15 [Mars](#) 3.7°S of [Moon](#)
- Fri 17 [New Moon](#)
- Sun 19 [Moon](#) Perigee at 361,631 km.
- Sun 19 [Venus](#) 4.8°S of [Moon](#)
- Sun 19 Pleiades 1.0°S of [Moon](#)
- Mon 20 [Mercury](#) 0.5° of [Saturn](#)
- Mon 20 [Mercury](#) 1.7° of [Mars](#)
- Wed 22 Lyrid Meteor Shower
- Wed 22 [Jupiter](#) 3.6°S of [Moon](#)
- Thu 23 Pollux 3.2°N of [Moon](#)
- Thu 23 [First Quarter Moon](#)
- Thu 23 [Venus](#) 3.4°S of Pleiades
- Fri 24 Beehive 1.1°S of [Moon](#)
- Sat 25 Regulus 0.2°S of [Moon](#)
- Thu 30 Spica 1.8°N of [Moon](#)

Events from Telescopius.com and are non-local; check Stellarium.com for local times

Looking up

NASA's Roman Observatory Passes Final Major Prelaunch Tests

Ashley Balzer
MAR 19, 2026
ARTICLE

NASA's Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope team recently blasted the observatory with extreme sound, shook it, and listened to its electronic hum. Roman passed all three assessments, which aimed to confirm that the observatory will withstand launch conditions and function as expected in space. The achievement keeps the mission on track for launch as early as this fall.

"All of the testing went smoothly and progress is well ahead of schedule," said Jack Marshall, the Roman observatory integration and testing lead at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. "The team has done a great job putting the observatory together, and the tests show that everything is lining up with expectations."

In January, the team set up an absorbent panel around the observatory for an electromagnetic interference test. This special configuration is designed to block external radio signals and absorb reflections inside the test facility.

Engineers powered on all of Roman's electronics and measured the signals they generated, closely monitoring for any errors. Too much electrical noise could interfere with the observatory's ability to detect faint infrared signals, but Roman passed with flying colors.

The team moved on to vibration testing in February. "Each time the observatory traveled between test facilities, it was placed in a custom-made portable clean room to protect it from contamination that could otherwise compromise scientific performance once in space," said Joel Proebstle, a mechanical systems engineer who led the vibration and acoustic tests at NASA Goddard.

Engineers tested the observatory on a large shaker table to simulate the vibrations it will experience during launch, gradually building to higher frequencies. “Try to imagine sitting on that rocket and feeling all those vibrations,” said Cory Powell, the Roman structural analyst lead at NASA Goddard. “We simulated the shaking that the launch vehicle will produce to ensure the components and connections will all remain intact.”

In early March, the team conducted an acoustic test. The test took place in a state-of-the-art sound booth, where engineers ramped up the volume to 138 decibels — about as loud as a jet engine from 100 feet away.

“If you’ve ever been at a concert with an extremely loud bass, that load you felt was acoustic energy,” Powell said. “Now think about how loud a launch is. The acoustics can produce very high loads on a large structure like Roman.”

This video showcases some of NASA’s Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope team’s major accomplishments during the second half of 2025, culminating in the completion of the observatory.

NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center

Roman has now returned to the large clean room at Goddard where it will undergo a final series of smaller tests. The next one aims to replicate the shock Roman will experience shortly after launch when the observatory separates from the rocket. Then the team will deploy all of the elements that will initially be stowed (including the solar panels, “visor,” antenna, and “sunblock” shield), to verify that they’ll still work correctly even after launch and rocket separation.

Early this summer, the observatory will be transported to NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Florida for launch preparations. There, engineers will verify that the observatory arrived fully intact and begin prepping the rocket — a SpaceX Falcon Heavy. The team expects Roman to be ready for launch within a few months after the observatory’s arrival at NASA Kennedy.

“We have a great team, great leadership, and with our successful testing we continue to set the standard for staying within budget and schedule while balancing difficult challenges,” Powell said. “Meeting cost and schedule commitments without compromise to technical standards is a major point of pride for the Roman team.”

Contact Information

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Baton-Rouge-Astronomical-Society-122591151112271/>

Reddit: <https://www.reddit.com/r/BRAstro/>

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