

Photonic Cleaning Technologies presents:

**Astro Busybody - Alex McConahay**



M51

All Photos by Alex McConahay

I could not afford a telescope when I was a kid, but I have made up for that. It seems I just love every aspect of the hobby, it is full of challenges and although I have really met none of them spectacularly well the hobby has been very rewarding to me.

Since I started in this hobby a bit more than a quarter century ago I have dabbled, at one time or another, in nearly every part of it. I've built several telescopes including a beautiful, portable twelve and a half inch dob; ground the mirrors, did the testing and carpentry and all that. I'm engaged in scientific astronomical research, not that I do most of the calculating and other brain work, but I do have two cameras tracking any meteors in the skies within 200 miles of my house.

Those readings become part of a central database of worldwide meteor observations. I have spent enough time with visual observing to have been named a Master Observer by the Astronomical League (#191). I've done some solar eclipse chasing, having seen them on four continents, and I've travelled to all the really big US star parties; RTMC, Stellafane, Winter, Texas, Okie-Tex, Oregon, Nightfall. I've published a book (about how to use Sequence Generator Pro) and a couple of articles in Sky and Telescope including one about the night I captured all 110 Messier objects with my astro imaging rig. I keep most of my images, old and new, on my website: [Alex's Astro Web Page \(alexastro.com\)](http://alexastro.com) .



IC 2177 Seagull Detail

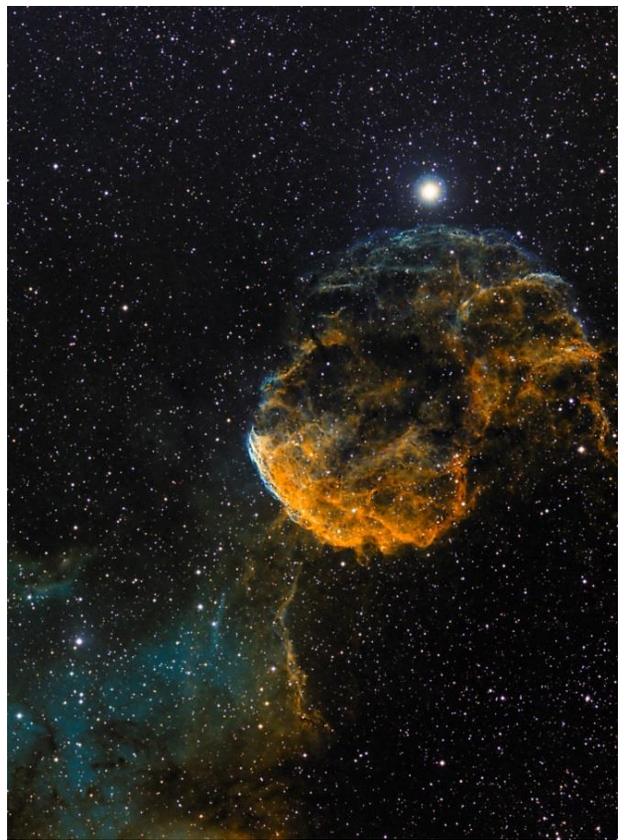
The club I belong to, the Riverside Astronomical Society, is blessed with a wonderful dark sky site. The site does however, require a lot of maintenance and occasional new construction. I keep myself busy as the "Station Master." I have an observatory at the site that I use for imaging and a concrete pad to keep me and my fifteen inch Obsession Dob occupied with visual observing while the imaging rig runs itself. Station Master is only one of many jobs I have had in the club throughout the years.

For the past eight years or so I have been heavily involved in a weekly YouTube program called The Astro Imaging Channel.

<https://www.theastroimagingchannel.org/> Every Sunday we have a guest tell us about one aspect of Astro imaging. Our channel is different because we are interactive where the audience, which ranges from 50 to 100 people, can ask questions of the presenters, offer other information, and get direct answers. Another 600 to 1000 people around the world watch the typical program over the next week or so, and more thereafter (but they don't get to ask questions!).



Perseus Cluster



IC 433 Jellyfish



Flame Nebula



ISS on Moon

I had seen First Contact cleaning products at the Advanced Imaging Conference and NEAIC. It was cool to see how the red sticky stuff just made the cruddy mirrors all new again. I was not motivated all that much to look into it until I heard a presentation (on The Astro Imaging Channel) by Greg Crinklaw, the developer of Skytools 4. Among other things, his program helps an imager analyze a photo and determine proper exposure time. The program worked great with refractors but would not accurately predict the ideal exposure for reflectors. After quite a bit of wondering and head scratching, he read something that prompted him to track how long since the optics of those big reflectors had been cleaned. He found that a reflector which had not been cleaned for a while was much slower in collecting photons. He threw a factor into his software: "How long ago were your optics last cleaned?" With that new parameter his predictions were spot on. Cleaning your mirrors matters.

The next time I was at AIC in San Jose I picked up a cleaning kit for my twelve-inch RC, and in due time I cleaned the mirror. It was relatively easy to do, and especially since I was able to call and get an immediate answer to a few questions as I worked through the process. The mirror looked very much like it looked when it first came out of its box. It's nice to be working with clean optics.

Visit my work at

[Alex's Astro Web Page \(alexastro.com\)](http://alexastro.com)

Are you a First Contact Polymer user and astro imager? Contact us at [sales@photonicleaning.com](mailto:sales@photonicleaning.com) for the chance to be our featured guest in an upcoming issue courtesy of Photonic Cleaning Technologies! Not familiar with our products; see our ad on the next page or visit us at <http://www.photonicleaning.com>



NGC 253