

|             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Name:       | <b>Alistair Macpherson</b>    |
| Location:   | <b>Shrewsbury, Shropshire</b> |
| Occupation: | <b>Dairy vet</b>              |
| Hobby:      | <b>Astronomy</b>              |

**Alistair Macpherson: “I find the ‘deep sky’ stuff really interesting”**

## Star gazing

text Rachael Porter

**W**hen it comes to escaping from the day job, there’s little to beat star gazing. This is literally an ‘out of this world’ experience, as astronomy enthusiast and Shropshire-based vet Alistair Macpherson will testify.

He’s been searching the skies and taking photographs of galaxies and nebulas for the past five years. But he says that his interest in astronomy was sparked when he was a boy, back in the 1970s and 1980s, during the ‘space race’ and particularly when the US Space Shuttle was launched for the first time.

“It’s only relatively recently that I’ve found the time to take astronomy up as a serious hobby,” he says. “I bought my first telescope five years ago – a second-hand one to keep the cost down, particularly as I wasn’t sure if I’d get on with it. I did, but within six months I’d sold it and bought a better one!”

He says that the most important aspect is the quality of the glass and mirrors. Magnification comes from using different eye pieces: “The better the lens, the better the vision. So it’s well worth spending a little more if you want a good view!”

Alistair, who works as a cattle vet at Shropshire Farm Vets near Shrewsbury, spends any spare time he has searching for and photographing galaxies and nebulas.

The latter are clouds of gas and dust in outer space, visible in the night sky either as an indistinct bright patch or as a dark silhouette against other luminous matter. “That’s really ‘deep sky’ stuff and it’s what I find interesting and exciting,” he says. “When you realise just how vast the universe is – and how small and insignificant our planet is among all that – it really puts things into perspective.

“It’s quite scary to think that there are hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy alone and that there are also hundreds of billions of galaxies out there. It blows your mind when you really think about it.”

As well as being escapism in one of its purest forms, Alistair also finds astronomy extremely challenging. “It’s not easy to find a galaxy or a nebula, even when using an electronic telescope. There are several computer programs that you can use to help to line up the equipment, but it takes a lot of time and patience to get the hardware and the software working together.”

He shares his hobby with his father and his son, although they’re more interested in the ‘end product’ – the photographs that he takes as opposed to the process of taking them.

“I enjoy both. Nebulas, in particular, are beautiful to look at and well worth the effort involved in searching for them. And taking photographs allows me to capture what I find. It’s a way to make something so vast and far away into something real that you can see with the naked eye.”

