

Simon Newcomb Award

Nicole Mortillaro

The Simon Newcomb Award is intended to encourage members of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada to write on the topic of astronomy for the Society or the general public, and to recognize the best published works through an annual award.

An eligible entry should be a recently published piece of writing with an astronomical theme. This could be one of: a book or a portion of a book; an article in the *Journal of the RASC*, a Centre newsletter, or another RASC publication; an article in a commercially published magazine; and so on. A series of articles or a history of exemplary writing would also be considered eligible.

Our nominee, Nicole Mortillaro, is one of Canada's best-known and most widely read science journalists. Her writing is both incisive and accessible, balancing a critical, analytical approach to her subject matter with a readable style. She brings complex and fascinating astronomy topics to Canadians of all ages. Well respected for her clear communication and insight into a wide range of complex scientific issues and diverse subject matter, she brings sensitivity and understanding to astronomical topics. Her work inspires curiosity and shares the excitement of scientific discovery.

In 2013, she became well known through her work on Global Television by writing, blogging, and reporting on numerous astronomy, science, and weather topics. With her move to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 2015, she has become one of the nation's pre-eminent science writers, with a large national audience.

In 2010, Firefly Books published her book "Saturn: Exploring the Mystery of the Ringed Planet," based on science data and imagery from the Cassini-Huygens orbiter and space probe. It includes extraordinary mission photographs and accessible text for the general reader.

Nicole also maintains a science blog at www.nicolemortillaro.ca, where she has published numerous articles ranging from exploration of our solar system to the fight to save our skies from the scourge of excess lighting.

Nicole was appointed Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada* in the summer of 2015, following several years as an assistant editor and she is responsible for moving the *Journal* forward from issue to issue.

She has written an estimated 170 articles, and many can be found on the CBC News website. A concise piece titled "Are we really headed to the Moon?" features some quotations from NASA executives and excerpts from an interview with RASC Executive Director Randy Attwood. Published 2017 September 28, it can be found at: www.cbc.ca/news/technology/goingmoon-nasa-russia-1.4309109

Nicole's November 2016 article on Science and Canada's First Nations peoples, "How science and First Nations oral tradition are converging" displays her sensitivity and understanding of complex issues, although this particular article does not relate to astronomy, it demonstrates how Ms. Mortillaro is bringing science to all Canadians.

Her work related to the 2017 August 15 "Total solar eclipse 2017: Read CBC's complete coverage" is another example of good science, supporting information, practical advice, and

excellence in bringing astronomy to the citizens of Canada. In this multi-faceted article, and the related items she brings together material to cover where the eclipse could be experienced, how to do it safely, and explain in clear terms how it comes together. It can be found here: www.cbc.ca/news/technology/full-eclipse-compilation-1.4247285 and Ms. Mortillaro's article here: www.cbc.ca/news/technology/solar-eclipses-science-1.4242330

We heartily recommend that the Simon Newcomb Award be presented to Nicole Mortillaro. She has proven her science-writing skills and her work is well-aligned with the RASC's effort to inspire all Canadian's to learn more about their Universe. We believe her work is of the calibre of prior award winners Terence Dickenson, Dan Falk, and Ivan Semeniuk. She would be the second woman to receive the award since 1979. She has potential to reach and inspire generations of Canadians, sparking their interest in astronomy and encouraging them to protect our night skies.

Submitters:

Colin Haig, RASC President

Craig Levine, RASC Past President