Sky Watch

Issue #7
Aug 06

The Newsletter of the Brevard Astronomical Society

BAS Contact Info:
P.O box 1084
Cocoa Village
Cocoa Fl. 32922
www.brevardastro.org

Officers:
President:
Gary Scott
Gary.Scott@IEEE.Org
Vice President:
Jan Ferguson
Astronomerjan@aol.com
Treasurer:
Mark Jones
mjones32@cfl.rr.com
Secretary:
Megan Boyd
sds9397@aol.com
Newsletter:
Bill Manley
bmanley@cfl.rr.com
Outreach Coordinator:
Oscar Sifuentes
osifuentes@cfl.rr.com

Club News:

The BCC College is requiring Observatory volunteers to be fingerprinted and receive a background check. This is provided at no cost to the volunteers. Please contact Jennifer Marletta BCC Cocoa Campus@ 433-7704 to make an appointment, or if you have any questions. The deadline is the end of September.

Summary of July Mtg:

(1) John Norczyk conducted a lecture/presentation on basic telescope designs. His material is available on the BAS website.

(2) Discussion about the September (22/23) BAS star party at Chiefland Fl.

(3) Discussion about a "BAS Astronomy" award at the fall '06 public school science fairs.

Moon Phases:

Full: Aug 9th
New: Aug 23rd
Moon @ Apogee 8/28

What's in the Sky in (late) August?

Since I am woefully late on this August issue, it will be an abbreviated version, and I will address the 2nd half of the month.

There will be many good overhead passes of the HST in the 2nd half of August. Most are in the pre-dawn range. No visible passes of the ISS near term. Check: www.heavens-above.com for specific pass times and coordinates.

It is "*Sagittarius hour*", in August and we are looking toward the center of the Milky Way (from the northern hemisphere, at night). The constellation transits around 10pm by late August. There are many gems in Sagittarius including the Lagoon and Trifid nebula's (M8 & M20), as well as many open and globular star clusters. M22 is especially bright and easy to find just 2-1/2 deg east of Kaus Borealis (top star in the tea pot asterism).

The "summer triangle" formed by stars Vega, Deneb & Altair rises high overhead, and transits in the 1am range. Albireo at basically the center of the summer triangle is a beautiful binary star system.

PLANETS: **Jupiter** still dominates the sky virtually all evening, transiting around 6:30 pm, and setting about 11pm by late August. **Neptune** in Capricornus transits about 1am. **Uranus** in Aquarius follows Neptune by about 1-1/2 hrs. However, you will need a dark clear sky (not readily available in Florida in August…) and a good telescope for any attempt at Neptune. Try and find Uranus first. This will also work *for the dawn watchers* since they don't set until approx 8am. There are other gems in that area of the sky as well including the Helix Nebula, NGC 7293, if you are lucky to get a dark sky low and due south.

This month's featured article on variable star observing comes from John Norczyk:

Variable Star Observing

I admit it. I am a frustrated individual who always had the aspiration of being a professional astronomer. I feel as though I would like to make a personal and immediate contribution to the understanding of the universe. Amateurs have long contributed to astronomy. Why not me? A somewhat overlooked contribution by amateurs is in the filed of variable stars.

Variable stars have helped unlock many mysteries of the universe. One good example is the class of variable known as Cepheid variables (seehttp://www.aavso.org/vstar/vsots/0900.shtml#gaskell). This class of variables became an astronomical "yardstick".

There are thousands of variable stars that are being studied by professional astronomers and astrophysicists. They rely on thousands of observations made by amateur astronomers. In 1911 the American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO) was founded to gather and compile amateur observations for use by professionals. The AAVSO provides information, observing aids and training to professionals and amateurs alike.
Variable stars can be observed with the unaided eye, binoculars, or any type of telescope. You can observe variable stars from any location, at any time of the night or year and you do not need crisp unpolluted skies. You can spend a few minutes or a few hours of observing. All you need are finder charts (available from AAVSO) and a little practice.
I can use a lot of space to discuss variable stars and how to observe them but the best thing to do is to go to the AAVSO web site, http://www.aavso.org/ , The major drawback to the AAVSO is the annual membership fee of $70. If you want to make a regular meaningful contribution to astronomy and astrophysics you can select a dozen or so variables within the range of your telescope and observe them once a month. This will yield 50 or so observations a year. This is significant when added to data submitted by hundreds of other amateurs. Once you get the hang of it you will add more variables and increase the number of observation submissions.
JN

Thanks John!