



Sky Watch

Issue #3-07
March

The Newsletter of the Brevard Astronomical Society

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Summary of Feb meeting:

Presentation by Mike Cressy of KSCAA on Home made Dew Heaters and electronics – copy of slides are on the website.

A motion was put forward and approved to have Chuck Greenwood assess the practicality of getting the primary & secondary mirrors re-coated on the donated 4 1/4" scope, up to an est cost of \$80. The plan is to raffle it off at Astronomy Day 2007 if ready.

Upcoming BAS Meetings & Agenda:

March 21st -

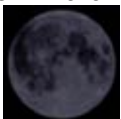
No specific agenda avail at this time, however it is planned for the officers to provide status and way forward for updating the BAS By-Laws.

Moon Phases:

Full: March 3rd



New: March 19th



The Moon Don't forget the total lunar eclipse on March 3rd!



Hopefully the weather will cooperate. Keep in mind that it will rise in the east eclipsed at dusk for us on the east central Florida coast, so observing time of the total eclipse will be limited to about 1/2 hour. Here are the particulars:
Penumbral begins- 20:18:11 UT
Partial begins- 21:30:22 UT
Total eclipse begins- 22:44:13 UT
MOON RISE- 23:22:30 UT (18:22:30; or 6:22pm EST)
Total eclipse ends- 23:57:37 UT
Partial eclipse ends- 1:11:28 UT

What else is in the Sky in March?

Hope you enjoyed the suggested objects in February. For this month I would like to draw your attention to a perhaps lesser know star in the constellation Gemini. While "backyard observing" one clear evening, I was panning Gemini overhead and the star Mekbuda caught my attention; or zeta Gemini. It is the third star down on the (inner) leg of the Pollux twin, or put another way, one star up from the left heel star Alhena. Mekbuda is a cepheid variable paired with an optical double. I noticed that the pair with Mekbuda as "yellowish" and the companion as "blue-whiteish", it looked very much like Albireo in Cygnus!! ,although perhaps not as prominent. Give it a view and see if you can determine the apparent brightness (see below). For additional information, see the AAVSO web site, <http://www.aavso.org/>

From the Web - One of the sky's few easily visible Cepheid variables. Lying in the constellation Gemini, Mekbuda changes from magnitude 3.7 to 4.1 and back every 10.2 days. Its Arabic name refers to a "lion's paw". Mekbuda shines yellow-white and has a temperature similar to that of the Sun. There, however, the similarity ends because Mekbuda is an aging supergiant. Through a small telescope, it appears to have a faint companion [TYC1353-237-1] one arc-minute arc away, but this is a line-of-sight coincidence. The bright star itself, however, does seem to have a true faint companion that can't be resolved by telescope.

Continuing for March:

It's that time of year where viewing of Ursa Major becomes more readily available for observing during the evening. Also, The Constellations Leo, Virgo, Coma Berenices, and Canes Venatici begin to rise in the evening. These are best viewed from a dark site. If you catch a good sky, they offer a plethora of galaxies.

B. Manley - During the south site observing session on 2/17, I was able to get 5 galaxies in *Markarian's Chain* in a 25mm eyepiece. I sketched the surrounding star pattern & determined it to be it to M84, M86 and three NGC objects (picture rotated & flipped as observed through the eyepiece).



There are many other galaxies to find this time of year including M64, the Blackeye galaxy (App Mag 9.00), M63, the Sunflower galaxy (App Mag 8.5), the tail in the Whirlpool Galaxy, M51, and M104, the Sombrero Galaxy (in the constellation Corvus to the south). Give 'em a try!

PLANETS:

Saturn begins rise in the east earlier in the evening in March and transits at approx 10:15pm by mid month. **Venus** remains blazing in the west in the early evening, setting approx 7:30 by mid month (Daylight savings time). **Jupiter** will rise by approx 1:00 am by Mid March, beginning its annual trek into the evening sky by early summer. **Mars** begins to rise a little earlier for the early birds. It will rise by 4:30am by mid March.



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Outreach News:

BAS Supported a school event with MAS in Fellsmere on 23 Feb; no report available.

March 16th – YMCA Star Party. Wickham Park youth area, Melbourne, FL. See the BAS website or contact Oscar Sifuentes to volunteer.

Upcoming BAS Star Parties:

March 10th – Harmony
March 17th – Shilo

Club Telescope News:

The BAS currently has two telescopes for use by club members. Contact Bill Manley (Newsletter Editor e-mail) for additional information.

The 16" Dob is on loan to Jonathon Scotto.

The 8" Orion remains on loan to Rich Rosa.

The weekend of 2/17 was one of the best viewing sessions in a long time for BAS members at both the North and South observing sites. The sky was crystal clear, the temp was in the 50's and Humidity was low. We observed an "apparition" in the sky; or "diffused nebula looking object" most likely attributed to a failed satellite or something to that effect. The following is a synopsis (John Small) of the observation from the north site and the BCC Planetarium. A similar account was made from the south site (Tom Callahan of MAS, Bill Manley and Gordon Schaffer of BAS).

Apparition observed 2/17/07 by BAS Members, as written by John Small:

We were having our monthly star party at the Shiloh site 4.8 miles North of the Haulover canal bridge on State Rd 3. This is in the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. There were two experienced astronomers present, Oscar Sifuentes and Dave Guibert. I was also observing this night and consider myself semi-experienced. The sky was dark and clear, the best conditions I have ever seen. Seeing was good to excellent. At about 2115 hours EST Oscar yelled "What is that?". In the sky at about 75 degrees altitude there appeared to be a white or light gray triangle moving from the North toward the South-Southeast. Oscar quickly acquired the object in the Telrad of his 14" Dobsonian Telescope (32mm 2" eyepiece) and followed it while it moved along. Oscar stated that the triangle appeared to be one and a half times the width of the full moon as viewed through his Telrad. He also said there was something inside the object that was spewing out smoke or vapor. When we first observed the object it was almost due East of Saturn. At the time Saturn was at about 80 degrees altitude. The object moved along the described path and came to a stop just South-Southeast of Sirius. Dave and I also observed it through his tripod mounted binoculars. I do not know the specs of Dave's binoculars. We also noted that vapor or smoke was being emitted by something that was spinning in a counter-clockwise direction. The object never changed shape during its movement and through the binoculars it appeared to have a greenish tint. After the object came to a stop it faded out and disappeared in about thirty seconds. The whole encounter lasted about ninety seconds.

The other witnesses to the event were at the observatory on the campus of Brevard Community College. They were John Powell and Jan Ferguson, both experienced astronomers, and Matthew Corbett. They only saw the object for about thirty seconds and were trying to slew the twenty four inch telescope to it as it disappeared. Matthew observed that even though the object was in the light -polluted sky of Cocoa Beach it remained quite visible. All the witnesses at the observatory stated that the object appeared as a white triangle. Estimated time of the event was 2115 hours EST. This was approximated by the fact that it happened about fifteen minutes before Jan had to leave for work as stated by John and Matthew.

It is possible that we may be wrong on our time line [south site observers reported the observation was in the 7:40pm time frame]. We were all so excited about what was happening we did not document the actual time. On 2/23/07 while volunteering at the BCC observatory I estimated the position of Saturn to be approximately 75 to 80 degrees altitude at 2115 hours EST. If all the facts stated above are close to accurate this makes for some interesting discussion on what we all actually saw.

John Small, BAS

Article request from Oscar Sifuentes: "Klingon Battle Cruiser" like star pattern for the Star Trekies – NGC 1662. Here is an open star cluster that resembles the Klingon Battle Cruiser, better known as "The Bird Of Prey". I first saw the article in the Feb. 2005 issue of Sky & Telescope Magazine. Page 86, finder map page 87, written by Sue French, I emailed her and got the information. I know we have a lot of Star Trek fans in our club! This one is for all you Trekies out there! While you are observing M42 (Orion Nebula), take a moment to check out NGC1662 in Orion's shield. Easy to see... If you want to see more of Timmerson astro photos, go to http://www.madpc.net/~firmament/astro/main_screen.html

With permission by Jan Timmerson:
"November 2, 2005 00:57 - 01:00 UT
NGC 1662 Open Star Cluster in Orion.
Nice cluster in an article of Sue French:
Sky and Telescope, February 2005
issue, page 86.

I liked the Klingon Battle Cruiser idea and thus I put NGC1662 on my to-do list. RA: 4 : 48.5 (hours : minutes); DEC: +10 : 56 (degrees : minutes); Apparent Magnitude: 6.4; Apparent Diameter: 20. (arc minutes)."

[Photo to dark to insert; please see website above]

(Thanks Oscar...!)

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