



The Faint Fuzzy

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The Official Newsletter of the West Kentucky Amateur Astronomers *December 2008*

From the Editors:

We're coming to the end of another successful year of WKAA activities. Thanks to everyone for your efforts to bring the night sky to the public—and have a good time in the process. We have good memories of many enjoyable evenings throughout the year, including Summer Nights, the Star Party, and informal observing sessions after meetings. We look forward to more in 2009—the International Year of Astronomy!

—Bob & Melissa

UPCOMING MEETING:

The next meeting will be on December 6th. The meeting starts at 7:00pm, with observing afterwards if it is clear. Visitors are welcome (as always).

LAST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The annual Chili Supper was another culinary success—thanks to all who brought food, and thanks to Harold Meyers for coordinating the event! It was nice to see the additional family members who came as well.

Twenty-three people were at the supper and meeting.

Club President Dale Baltimore called the meeting to order with a little old business—he gave Jeremiah Viger his Astronomy Day certificate from LBLA. Dale also acknowledged the passing of a former WKAA club member, Jim Ingle, and gave a brief update on Lacy Thomas, another former member who is battling cancer.

Star Party Wrapup

Dale thanked Star Party Coordinators David Paessler and Bill Kassebaum for their hard work in organizing another successful Twin Lakes Star Party.

David gave a financial report on the Star Party, commenting that our expenses were a bit higher than our income, but that a few more t-shirt sales could take care of that deficit. (Contact David if you are interested in purchasing one of the remaining shirts.) We had fewer family registrations than last year, perhaps because the schools' fall breaks were not the same week this year. He also reported that we received a partial refund on the dumpster since we didn't fill it up. Everyone agreed the dumpster was well worth the expense.

David thought all in all, it was a good star party. There were several big scopes on the field, and many participants helped out with chores without asking. Bill's efforts in gathering door prizes was much appreciated. (It was generally agreed that the least appreciated "guests" on the field were the 1000 bees inadvertently lost by a beekeeper the week before!)

Next year will be both the International Year of Astronomy and the 20th anniversary of the TLSP. We discussed doing something special, such as displaying pictures from previous parties. That first party had only 20 participants and was held on the Golden Pond

Observatory field in 1989. Sandy Phfistner volunteered to make a t-shirt quilt from previous TLSP shirts as a door prize. The signature quilt that Sandy made for this year was beautiful and a fun addition to the event.

Camp Hazelwood Thank You

Harold Meyers shared a thank you note from Camp Hazelwood's Laura Francisco for the Girl Scout Camp program several club members helped with this summer:

"Mr. Harold & fellow star gazers,

Thank you all so much for coming out to visit our camp and open our girls' eyes to new interests. They enjoyed the telescopes and especially Saturn. (Girls seem to really like rings.) Thank you again for everything!"

Spring Star Party: April 17-18, Pennyrile

There will be an informal weekend observing party for anyone who wants to attend next April 17-18, at the TLSP observing field at Pennyrile State Park, KY. This will replace the Freeze Your Butt Off (FYBO) winter party and the perpetually cloudy Messier Marathon event. Look for more details in upcoming issues of the *Faint Fuzzy*. Mark your calendars!

WKAA Bylaws

There was a brief discussion of whether to update the existing club bylaws. It was agreed that further study is needed. Also, Bill Kassebaum suggested that the club consider applying for 501(c)3 non-profit status from the IRS that might allow us to receive grant funds for future projects. Again, more study is needed.

2009 Astronomy Magazine "Deep Space Mysteries" Calendar

This calendar is filled with beautiful, high quality space images and lots of astronomical information. David purchased a bulk order of these at reduced price. Supply is limited, so if you are interested in a \$12.95 value for only \$7, contact David!

Website Updates

Once again, website guru John Holland has been updating the [WKAA website](#). You can now preregister for the 2009 Twin Lakes Star Party, read back issues of the *Faint Fuzzy*, and be fully informed about all things WKAA. Thanks, John! Thanks also to John for his club button redesigns.

Last One to Leave the Observatory?

A reminder—if you are the last person to leave the observatory on an observing night, please dump the coffee and coffee filter and turn off the coffee pot. Dispose of any food as well. Your help is needed to keep the observatory clean—and free of little beasties!

WKAA 2009 Meeting Schedule

- January 24
- February 21
- March 28
- April 25
- May 23
- June 20
- July 18
- August 22
- September 19
- October TLSP 10-18
- November 14
- December 12



THE NIGHT SKY NATURALIST, by Bob Vickers

The “E.T.” Cluster

From mountaintops to the depths of the oceans; from high in the sky to the darkest of caves; on every continent, every island, and in every nook and cranny; life, from whales to viruses, seems to be everywhere. Yet, throughout the vastness of space, the Earth is the only place we know for sure that life exists. Almost the entire universe beyond the Earth is a hostile environment that is bathed in lethal radiation or at temperatures far too hot or far too cold to sustain life as we know it. From this perspective, like an oasis in the desert, life on our tiny planetary home seems precarious (and precious).

Yet, when I am looking through my telescope at a distant galaxy, I sometimes wonder if there is not some other intelligent being looking back at the Milky Way Galaxy (and me) through their own telescope! I can't help but wonder if there aren't other oases of life scattered throughout the universe. Maybe someday in the not-too-distant future we will know.

But there is at least one extraterrestrial that I know of, and he lives in the constellation of Cassiopeia (the Queen). On a clear, crisp, early December night, face north and find Polaris, the Pole Star. Looking above Polaris, you will see five fairly bright stars forming an “M” shape. This is Cassiopeia. Just above and to the left of the right-hand peak of the “M” lies an open cluster of stars called NGC 457, discovered by William Herschel in 1787. Nowadays it is commonly known as the E.T. cluster because of its resemblance to a certain popular movie character of the same name, but in years past it has been referred to as the Owl Cluster.

There may be as many as 80 stars in this large, rich cluster with a wide range of magnitudes. Through my 12.5” f4.8 Dobsonian, I have counted as many as 56. It has two bright “eyes” to the southeast consisting of a beautiful pair of yellow and blue stars (Phi Cassiopeiae, which may not be a true member of the cluster), and a curve of 11th and 12th magnitude stars forming outstretched arms to the southwest and northeast.

There is one very obvious red star on the northeast side of the cluster's 13 arcminute span. According to

Burnham's Celestial Handbook, this is a red supergiant of type M0 and an apparent magnitude of 8.6, which, at the cluster's distance of between 8000 and 9900 light years, puts its true luminosity at about 10,000 times that of the sun!

At an integrated visual magnitude of 6.4, NGC 457 can be found and viewed in binoculars but its richness is best appreciated through a telescope. It is a favorite of mine for nights of public viewing. (See Vyron Mitchell's article on “Why We Do Summer Nights” in the October 2008 *Faint Fuzzy* for an explanation.)

If anyone else knows of more extraterrestrials out there, let me know at [cosmosbob\[@\]hotmail.com](mailto:cosmosbob[@]hotmail.com).

May there always be starlight on your path.



Photo Credit: Ken and Emilie Siarkiewicz/Adam Block/NOAO/AURA/NSF

CELESTIAL HIGHLIGHTS

In response to a member suggestion, this new column will list some of the “must see” events of the month that aren’t to be missed—the best of the best! Here’s the list for December:

- **Saturn’s rings** are getting more and more edge-on. On **December 26th**, the rings will be just 0.80 degrees from edge-on, best viewed in the early morning hours. The rings will open back up to about 4 degrees by next May, but will close again to 0 degrees in September, 2009.
- **A four way conjunction** will be visible on **December 31st** shortly after sunset. The planets Mercury and Jupiter will be just 1.3 degrees apart low in the southwest, and farther to their upper left will appear Venus and the crescent moon.



*“Who would believe
That so small a space
Could contain all the images
Of the universe?”*

--- Leonardo da Vinci, on the eye



CLUB RESOURCES

Loaner Scopes/Imager

The club has two Dobsonians (6”, 8”) and a Meade Deep Sky Imager available for club members to borrow. Anyone who has been a club member for six months, completes a training/safety session, and signs a written agreement may borrow one of the scopes or the imager.

Library

The club has several books and magazines available to members for reference or checkout. Take a look and see what we have at the next club meeting.

Magazine Discounts

Club members who subscribe to *Sky & Telescope* or *Astronomy* magazines through the club receive a discount! Annually you can save \$10 on *Sky & Telescope* and \$9 on *Astronomy*. Contact David Paessler for more information.

CLUB OFFICERS

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