



The Faint Fuzzy



The Official Newsletter of the West Kentucky Amateur Astronomers

January 2010

© WKAA 2010

UPCOMING MEETING

The next meeting will be January 16th at 7pm, with observing afterwards if it is clear. Visitors (as always) are welcome.

IN THIS ISSUE

Last Meeting Highlights

Recruiting Young Astronomers

Celestial Highlights:

- Jupiter and the Moon
- Mars
- Saturn Returns
- Lunar and Planetary Soireé
- Mira

Club Membership and Resources

Star Forming Region 30 Doradus



Credit: NASA, ESA, and F. Paresce (INAF-IASF, Bologna, Italy), R. O'Connell (Univ. of VA, Charlottesville), and the Wide Field Camera 3 Science Oversight Committee.

From the Editors:

Happy New Year—and goodbye to the 2009 International Year of Astronomy! In 2009 WKAA provided a lot of public outreach, good fellowship, and chocolate. Here's hoping for more of all in 2010—and a greater number of clear meeting nights!

—Bob and Melissa

LAST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Five diehard club members met last month. Club Vice President Jim Phfistner chaired the meeting. He reminded everyone of the upcoming March officer election and potluck dinner. Annual membership fees are also due at that time.

The planetarium laser show to benefit the observatory telescope upgrade project will be in the spring.

A question was raised about whether we would have a “FYBO” (aka, “Freeze Your Butt Off”) this winter. FYBO is a mini informal star party for club members willing to, well, freeze.... The discussion was postponed till January.

Jim asked attendees to be thinking of ways to increase club membership in 2010.

Due to low turnout, the discussion turned to whether we should continue to have December meetings since everyone is so busy at that time of year. One suggestion was to only have a December meeting if the new moon falls early in the month. More discussion is needed.

Jim adjourned the short meeting.

The meeting turned from astronomical to gastronomical and we enjoyed chocolate cookies provided by Sandy Phfistner and Melissa Vickers.

Recruiting Young Astronomers

by Bob Vickers

Amateur astronomy is having trouble attracting younger members. (By “younger” I mean teens and twenties.) It's not just here in western Kentucky but, from what I read in magazines like *Sky & Telescope*, it's a problem everywhere. It's hard for me to believe that the subject matter is any less interesting now than in the past. So what's going on?

The Star

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky!*

*When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.*

*Then the traveler in the dark,
Thanks you for your tiny spark,
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not twinkle so.*

*In the dark blue sky you keep,
And often through my curtains
peep,
For you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky.*

*As your bright and tiny spark,
Lights the traveler in the dark,—
Though I know not what you
are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.*

-Jane Taylor, 1806



During the recent holidays, I spent some time with my son and his wife (both 26 years old), as well as my daughter and her husband (both 23 years old). None of them have a hobby level interest in astronomy but they were willing to give me their opinions. Interestingly, their first response, when asked for reasons as to youngsters' lack of interest in astronomy club involvement, was "The Internet!" I guess I had known this but I was still a little surprised to have it voiced so assuredly. "Specifically," they said, "social networking." Young people are spending more and more of their time Facebooking, gaming, Twittering and text messaging. There are even fewer sixteen-year-olds getting their driver's licenses because they had rather stay at home and just interact over the Internet!

I suppose, when I was growing up, it was the telephone, television, and later, home computers and role playing games. Even though I received my first small telescope when I was ten and built my first telescope when I was eighteen, I didn't actually join an astronomy club until I was thirty-five years old. When I was a college student at the University of Georgia, I considered joining the local Athens Astronomy Club but didn't. For one thing, I wondered if I was too young! I wondered if older members wouldn't want "kids" in the club and I thought I might not be welcome for that reason. Secondly, being a relative newbie, I thought that maybe I didn't know enough about astronomy already to join. Thirdly, being a poor college student, I didn't have much money to devote to the hobby. Yes, I had built my own scope but I thought that it might be considered crude by the club members who all, no doubt, had big expensive scopes. Looking back, I wish I had overcome these excuses and given it a try.

"Next," my panel of experts said, "You're a bunch of old people!" I saw their point. Not already having young people in the clubs makes it harder to attract any young people who might be interested. Naturally enough, they want to be where there are already people their own age. I realized that we are going to have to work even harder to get ourselves out of this hole.

Another reason that they thought the hobby may not be as appealing to today's young people is that everything they are exposed to today is "extreme." Nothing, they are led to believe, is even worth considering unless it has some extreme element or is combined with some other discipline. I think the History Channel has made some attempt to appeal to these folks with *The Universe* program. I have watched several of these shows. They are good, but they seem to feel that nobody will pay attention unless they

SCREAM. Sometimes it feels like I'm watching a Billy Mays commercial. "THAT EXPLODING STAR WAS REALLY COOL, *BUT WAIT...!*" Let's see, Survivor Messier Marathon? Deep Sky Bungee Jumping? Dancing with the Astronomers? I can't quite picture it.

Finally, in addition to young people leading more indoor, Internet-connected lives, when they do get out at night, thanks to air and light pollution, the stars literally look duller than they used to. This is especially true in urban areas.

So, what's the answer? Well, here are some suggestions from my panel of experts:

- ◆ Connect with young people via Facebook. Include lots of catchy visuals (astronomical images). Infuse with pizzazz! (SCREAM! – a little.)
- ◆ Connect with college students at nearby universities. (Murray State?) Recruit from astronomy and physics classes where there is already some interest. Offer free pizza and transportation. Talk the professor into giving extra credit for attending club meetings.
- ◆ Dispel the notion that astronomy is too technical or too expensive.
- ◆ Get them out to a dark sky location in comfortable conditions (not too cold and not too hot or buggy) and show them "showpiece" objects.
- ◆ Reduce the membership fee for students.

It's obvious that we have to work harder to actively recruit young people to the hobby, especially the first few. We can't assume that interest in the subject matter will be enough. We need to actively work to remove any impediments that might discourage an already interested person from joining. We may even need to gear at least part of our ongoing club activities to them – perhaps a youth program?

If you have any other ideas or suggestions I (or any of the club officers) would love to hear from you at [cosmosbob\[@\]hotmail.com](mailto:cosmosbob[@]hotmail.com).

The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or, perchance, a palace or temple on the earth, and, at length, the middle-aged man concludes to build a woodshed with them.

--Henry David Thoreau

CELESTIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Jupiter and the Moon

In the early evening of January 17th, Jupiter at magnitude -2.0 appears 5 degrees to the upper left of the two-day-old crescent moon. A lovely pair!

Mars

Mars becomes bigger and brighter this month (though not as big as the full moon!). It is closest to earth on January 27th, attaining an apparent diameter of 14.1 arcseconds. It peaks at magnitude -1.3 on January 29th. Compare this to the 2003 apparition when its apparent diameter was 25.1 arcseconds and its magnitude was -2.9. This is not the best Mars apparition but you should still be able to view its polar cap and dusky markings.

CLUB OFFICERS

President: Dale
Baltimore—Paducah, KY;
270-554-6603;
w.daleb[@]comcast.net

Vice President: Jim
Phfistner—Hardin, KY;
270-354-6860;
phfistners[@]gmail.com

**Treasurer/Astronomical
League Coordinator:** David
Paessler—Kevil, KY;
270-488-3784;
dcpaessler[@]yahoo.com

Secretary: Bob & Melissa
Vickers—Huntingdon, TN;
731-986-3082;
Vickers[@]aeneas.net

Star Party Coordinator: Jim
Phfistner—Hardin, KY;
270-354-6860;
phfistners[@]gmail.com

**Assistant Star Party
Coordinator:** Ross
Workman—Dawson Springs,
KY; 270-797-8959
planetman[@]bellsouth.net

Website:
John Holland—Hopkinsville,
KY; yjohnjohn1001
[@]gmail.com

John
McCubbin—Hopkinsville, KY;
mccubbin.astronomy
[@]gmail.com

Saturn Returns

Saturn rises around 9:30pm by the end of January. The rings are still pretty close to edge-on, but are slowly beginning to open back up again. Always a beautiful view!

Lunar and Planetary Soireé

On February 14th through 16th, catch the evening dance of Jupiter, Venus, and the moon about 15 minutes after sunset and very low to the western horizon.

Mira

If you haven't looked at the variable star Mira in the constellation of Cetus, the whale, recently, give it a try. It is easily visible with the naked eye at about 4th magnitude. This red giant star actually appears red through binoculars. It has a period of about 331 days and ranges in magnitude from 9th to 3rd or 4th or sometimes 2nd. It is about 220 light years distant. Thanks to David Paessler for alerting us to this sometimes elusive event!

CLUB MEMBERSHIP AND RESOURCES**Club Membership**

Club membership is \$25 for an individual or family, which allows one member to earn Observing Club certificates through the Astronomical League. Additional family members who also want to earn certificates can pay an additional \$5. Contact David Paessler if you have questions. Club membership fees are due in March each year.

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.