

S. C. R. A. P. S.

Society's ChRonological Astronomical Papers



In this issue:

- [Message from the President](#)
- [Setting expectations for astronomy beginners](#)
- **Member profile of the month**
- [Upcoming Events](#)
- [Minutes from March Meeting](#)
- [Calendar - April](#)

Message from the President

I want to personally thank Vicente Diaz who is off to a great start in developing the club's program calendar for 2011. I am impressed with Vicente's enthusiasm and the work he has done so far to collect ideas. We all need to support Vicente's efforts by contributing ideas for programs, suggesting names of speakers and, of course, volunteering to make presentations.

Education of its members should be one of the key goals on any Astronomical Society. And, I hope we are able to better meet the needs of the membership during 2011. Because of the wide range of experience among attendees at our meetings, it is difficult to find programs that appeal to each member. During 2011, we will strive to have a mixture of programs including topics for beginners as well as some more advanced topics.

But one of the best education vehicles we have is a star party. This is a time for informal discussions and sharing ideas and experiences about targets, equipment, and observing techniques. This year, SMAS has a full program of star parties at Look Rock and Unicoi Crest. I encourage all our members to participate in as many star parties as possible. While we all have our own observing goals during one of these outings, I personally get a lot of satisfaction in taking time to share the view through my scope, answer questions, and offer advice where I can. But, I also enjoy the chance to interact with some of the more experienced members in our club – I always come home from a star party with some new tidbits of knowledge. I hope our new members will take advantage of these great educational experiences.

Special word education for beginners: It is very easy to become frustrated with the hobby of astronomy, so please read the article below about "Setting Expectations".

Jim Sanders



Setting Expectations for Astronomy Beginners

[Back to Top](#)



Many of us have experienced or heard about being a "disappointed beginner". Here, we give a summary of the kind of reasonable and unreasonable expectations that can influence a beginner's experience, or maybe even improve it.

What Not to Expect

Astronomy is an extremely rich and rewarding hobby. But there's a price: it's not easy. If it was easy it probably wouldn't be so rewarding. Even modern electronically-assisted telescopes, while they can be an aide and time saver, don't make something that is inherently challenging easy. You will need to take the time, and have the patience, to develop some skills and build up your understanding of what is going on out there to fully appreciate what you see.

If you are buying a telescope with the expectation of quickly seeing the complex swirling lights and colors of galaxies and nebulae like you've seen in magazine and Internet photos, you will be disappointed. Some objects (e.g. planets and clusters) will look as you expect them to look right away, but others like galaxies are actually quite difficult to see. You will learn to see some of the fascinating detail and structure in these objects but, for example, you will never see them in color with your naked eye.

Another thing you should understand is that an astronomical telescope is a very specialized instrument, and it is not very suitable for terrestrial use, such as looking at birds or other distant earth-bound objects. Depending on the design of your telescope, things may appear upside down or backward. In space, who cares? Things don't have a meaningful top and bottom anyway. On earth, you probably want the bird's head on top and feet on the bottom.

What You'll See

Certain objects are ideal targets for beginners, while others are more challenging.

You will easily see the Moon and the bright planets Venus, Jupiter and Saturn. You will see star clusters with interesting shapes and colors, and you may find looking at double stars interesting, especially those with contrasting colors or brightness. Certain bright nebulae are also easy to see and beautiful.

Other objects like most nebulae and most galaxies are very dim, hard to find, and hard to see. A big part of the hobby is learning to find these, and you will eventually see them, usually as dim wisps of light, or "faint fuzzies".

What You'll Do

You'll spend a lot of time outdoors, observing. You may stay with the easy-to-find planets, but more likely you will become familiar with star maps and charts, and the techniques for finding challenging objects by hopping from better-known stars to lesser-known.

If you have a "go-to"-equipped telescope, you'll learn to align it, and you'll learn its strengths and weaknesses. It can be a great assistance, but can also be a distraction if you expect too much.

You'll spend time assembling, aligning, disassembling, moving, and maintaining your equipment. Hopefully you will also spend time with other astronomers by attending meetings or public "star parties".

And you will become an obsessive observer of the weather and sky conditions, always knowing whether it's supposed to be cloudy or clear tonight, the humidity, and the phase of the moon.

What You'll Learn

This educational hobby will teach you about Science and Nature. You'll learn your way around the night sky, including being able to find and name many constellations and many of the brighter stars and planets. You'll also pick up some of the basic theory of Astronomy, such as what causes the behaviors of the moon and planets, how far away various objects are, and how they may have been formed.

Some Negatives

To avoid disappointment or frustration, you should also be aware of some of the potential negative sides of this hobby.

- It's done at night. That means you'll be working in the dark, you'll be going to bed late, and you'll be coming in the house and disturbing your family at odd hours.
- It can be physical. You will be moving potentially heavy telescopes, batteries, and other gear around, possibly in and out of your garage or your car.
- It's cold. It's cold being outside at night even in the summer, but standing still for several hours on a winter night can be extremely uncomfortable. You will gain a whole new appreciation for warm clothing.
- When it's not cold, it's buggy. Mosquitoes, black flies, and June bugs will drive you crazy on those nights when you're not shivering.
- It's wet. Your metal and glass equipment, standing exposed in the cool night air, will drip with dew, which will interfere with your viewing, and with your grip when you try to put it away.

Why do we do it, with all these negatives? It's great fun. Really.

How to Manage Expectations

To give this hobby a fair chance, you should set your expectations based on the thoughts above. Start slowly, learn a little bit at a time, and give yourself the time it will take to build up the necessary skills.

Read a lot, ideally before you buy your first telescope. There are excellent books, magazines, and web sites available to help you select equipment that best matches your interests. Read them before you buy, not after.

Get help. The best thing you could do is find a local Astronomy club. Attend some meetings, and especially attend some "star parties" where members will be pleased to let you try a variety of kinds of equipment. And take some names of people who would be willing to help you as you start working on your own skills with your own gear.

The above article is part of a presentation prepared by Richard McDonald and used with his permission.

Back to Top



Interview with Club Member

For viewing by club members only.

Upcoming Events



April 2, 2011 –SMAS Star Party at Look Rock (weather permitting).

Back to Top

April 6, 2011 – Regular SMAS meeting at PSTCC

Tentative program:

1. Business Session
2. Night Sky: Spring Objects
3. Brent Holt: [Coma Correctors](#)
4. Michael McCulloch: Field Flatners

April 30, 2011 –SMAS Star Party at Unicoi Crest (weather permitting).

Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2011 Meeting Minutes

Reported by Noah Frere, Secretary

Any corrections to these minutes should be sent to Noah Frere at noahhaverkamp@yahoo.com

The regular SMAS business meeting was held at PSTCC on Friday March 11, 2011

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Sanders. Those in attendance were:

Noah Frere, Duane Dunlap, Roy Morrow, Jerry Kornegay, Michael Reuter, Ray Weedon, Lee Erickson, Shawn Harrison, Mark Ziolkowski, Vicente Diaz, Brent Holt, Michael Littleton, Ronald Dinkins, Jim Sanders, and Michael McCulloch.

Jim Sanders *welcomed* the group, and thanked SMAS for entrusting the role of President to him. He mentioned the need for a Star Party Organizer. Noteworthy among the business items discussed was how to join the Yahoo group as a new member.

Jim Sanders gave an *update on the night sky*. M51, M81, M82 in Ursa Major and M44 in Cancer make for good viewing this month. Mercury was rising in the West near sunset, very close to Jupiter in retrograde. You need a clear view of the western horizon to see. Roy Morrow mentioned that looking down the Oak Ridge Hwy provided that view.

Jim showed a picture of the "Straight Wall" (Rupes Recta) taken both during sunrise and sunset to illustrate the different highlighting. An occultation of Mu Geminorum around 19:40 was to occur just about sunset on March 14. The observer needs to be set up early in order to catch it, since it strikes so quickly.

Jim Sanders presented the *results from the Planning Activities Meeting* held at Perkins in February. We reviewed and discussed the Star Party Calendar. The PSTCC Star Party was suggested for Thursday Night in early April. Newsletter ethics was discussed: does publishing a member bio present a possibility of theft to that member since his/her observing equipment is then known to the public? A decision was made to publish bios in the Newsletter only, but not publicly online.

Vicente Diaz, Vice President, presented *ideas for monthly programs* and desired input from members. He stressed membership participation. Roy Morrow recommended a DSNR Shutter program. Lee Erickson suggested a GIMP tutorial (GIMP=photo-editing freeware), and a Nuclear Synthesis presentation. Ron Dinkins suggested an Observing Clubs presentation, and volunteered to give it. Brent Holt volunteered a Coma Correction presentation next month if we have a regular Friday meeting.

Program #1: Equatorial Mount Alignment by Michael Littleton

Some remarks by Michael: Knoxville is located at about 34 degrees latitude. The Alt-Az (altitude-azimuth) mount is the simplest. The Equatorial mount is beneficial in that it accommodates the rotating earth. It is difficult to align the Declination to the earth's axis. Showed a Youtube video describing the "stardrift" method for polar alignment on equatorial mounts. Various SMAS members commented from time to time during the presentation. The video can be seen at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OtelWKWntc&playnext=1&list=PLF39239F8B820E023>

Jim Sanders made an executive decision to skip the 10 minute break since we were running behind.

Program #2: How to Prepare for a Star Party by Lee Erickson

Main topics were What to Bring, and Etiquette, with a little of What You Do and Learn.

- 1) Use "Sky This Month" section from Astronomy Magazine Seasonal Sky Charts on our website.
- 2) Be prepared. No gas stations near Unicoi Crest. Go before sunset first time. Follow someone. Link up at Backyard Burger in Maryville. It's about 5,000 MSL (Mean Sea Level). 4 degrees F colder for every 1,000 feet of altitude. So about 20 degrees F colder than sea level.
- 3) Before departure: Charge batteries. New batteries. First aid kit. Check for *all* telescope parts. Let friends/family know where you are going and when to expect you back. Bring directions.
- 4) Bring: xtra clothes. Chair. Blanket, pillow. Notepad, pen. Binocs. Warm drink. Snacks. Toilet paper. Hand Sanitizer. Bug spray. Toolboxes for telescope and car. Camera/film.
- 5) Etiquette: red flashlight. Get to know lighting controls for your car. Enter parking carefully. Bug spray caution: spray before arriving or at a distance from scopes. Ask permission before using others' equipment. Smoke away from group.
- 6) Lower Expectations: you will *not* see beautiful colorful Hubble telescope images.
- 7) Learning to see: telescopes offer views that photos will not show. Sketching helps.
- 8) Drive home safely. Announce before you open car doors, so as not to blind others. Get help getting out of overlook. Snoozing in car is better than falling asleep at the wheel. Watch for animals. Use lower gear when driving downhill.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM


Submitted by Noah Frere March 28, 2011

Photos for SMAS meeting, March 11, 2011



Back to Top

April 2011

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 UT K	2 SMAS Star Party, Look Rock TAO
3  New Moon Saturn in opposition, closest to Earth reaching 43".7°	4	5	6	7	8 SMAS Meeting PSTCC 7:30 PM	9
10	11 Algol minimum for 2 hrs centered at 04:34 EDT	12	13	14 Algol minimum for 2 hrs centered at 01:23 EDT	15 UT K	16 Algol minimum for 2 hrs centered at 22:12 EDT TAO
17  Full Moon	18	19	20	21 April 21 & 22 Lyrids Meteor Shower	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30 SMAS Star Party,

UTK – roof of Neilson Physics Building on the Hill At UT on 1st and 3rd Fridays
<http://www.phys.utk.edu/trdc/telescope.html>

TAO – Tamke-Allen Observatory
Public Stargaze
Watts Bar Lake, Roane County
1st and 3rd Saturdays
<http://www.roanestate.edu/obs/>