

Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 44 No. 3

March 1, 2007

NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, March 5, 2007

Maturango Museum, 100 East Las Flores Avenue, Ridgecrest, California

PROGRAM FOR THE MARCH 5 MEETING – MESSIER MARATHONS

March is coming, and it is the time for Messier Marathons. Let's talk about the Messier Catalogue at our March meeting. If you have favorite Messier objects or observing tips, bring them along.

DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

Monday, March 5, 2007: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, March 16, 2007: Regular monthly Star Party, see details below

Wednesday, March 21, 2007: Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter

Monday, April 2, 2007: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR THE 2007 SEASON:

Star Parties will be held on the dates listed below. Star Parties are an activity where members and guests join together to share views of the skies. If you have a telescope, bring it. If not, come and look through someone else's. Star parties are held at a site in the open desert south of Ridgecrest. To reach the star party site from Ridgecrest, go south on China Lake Boulevard 6.5 miles from its intersection with Ridgecrest Boulevard. Continue straight across Highway 395 and you will be on Brown Road (Old Highway 395). Follow Brown Road as it curves to the right and goes west. After 2.3 miles there will be a 30-inch orange cone on the left. Turn left and follow the dirt road marked by 12-inch cones. The CLAS Star party is 0.5 miles along this road. Watch for signs and cones, which will be put out about a half hour before viewing starts. Call Carroll Evans 760-375-5681, or Bruce Churchill 760-375-7247, for more information.

Friday, March 16: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing at 8:00 p.m.

Friday, April 13: Signs out at 8:00 p.m., Star viewing at 8:30 p.m.

Friday, May 18: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, June 15: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, July 13: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, August 10: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, September 7: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing 8:00 p.m.

Friday, October 12: Signs out at 7:00 p.m., Star viewing at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, November 9: Signs out at 5:30 p.m., Star viewing at 6:00 p.m.

STILL AVAILABLE!

The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada Observer's Handbooks and Calendars for 2007 have arrived, and will be available at the meeting. We will hold the price line for one more year, at \$15.00 each for the

Handbooks and \$10.00 for the calendars. Please call Roger Brower at 375-1181 to arrange for purchase if you can't make the meeting.

THE SKY IN MARCH (Roger Brower)

1. Venus is in the evening sky. Look for it in the west-southwest soon after sunset.
2. Saturn is just past Opposition so it is still a fine evening object. Look for it in the east-southeast at sunset in the constellation of Leo near Regulus.
3. Mercury, now in the morning sky, will be visible only briefly about March 22nd. Look for it very low in the south-southeast just before sunrise.
4. Jupiter, still in the morning sky, rises about midnight. Look for it in the southeast after midnight.
5. On March 3rd, there will be a total eclipse of the Moon. We will, however, be poorly placed to view this event as it will be almost over by time it rises on the west coast.

OUR PRESENCE ON THE WEB – Carroll Evans

Ever since Ridgecrest joined the Internet in about 1997, CLAS member John Bush archived our newsletters in his personal web space on Ridgenet. Not quite a year ago he had to quit this process, and move to Arizona. His files were transferred to my Ridgenet web space, and I took over maintenance of the archive. However, the transition was not instantaneous, and the fact that it happened at all was due to the efforts and help of new CLAS member Bob Stewart. Bob helped immensely with the coding and other details, and the archives are now available again.

It seemed to be the consensus at the February meeting of the club that we should have our own domain name. President Earl Wilson had a suggestion, which I can't recall, and Bob Stewart has proposed the following as possibilities.

chinalakeastronomers.org, chinalakeskywatchers.org, chinalakestargazers.org, claswebsite.org, clashomepage.org, clasonline.org

The details of implementation are yet to be determined, but the idea is to expand on the CLAS web page, now hosted by Roger Brower, to have an up-to-date interactive web page, with lots of room for pictures and news bulletins, etc.

HOT NOVA NEWS VIA EARL WILSON (As of Wednesday evening, February 21)

New Nova in Scorpius discovered by two Japanese nova hunters. This had brightened to magnitude 3.8 on Friday the 16th. Wednesday morning the 21st, it had faded to about 4.9.

This is still a naked eye object under clear dark skies for early risers or the interested that is 0400-0500 PST. Object is just left (same binocular field) of Epsilon Scorpii which is the 2nd star towards the scorpions tail, from Antares, and above the double star which is the 3rd. Epsilon Sco, is a magnitude 2.3 star and just to the left are two mag. 5 stars with the nova to the upper right of the higher of these two.

AAVSO finder chart: http://www.aavso.org/charts/SCO/V1280_SCO/V1280SCO-AA.GIF

Now, a second nova right nearby! (from SkyTonight) (no nova #2 finder charts yet)

On Wednesday, February 21st, came remarkable news: *another* nova has apparently gone off in Scorpius, and it's a mere 3° due south of the first!

Yuji Nakamura, codiscoverer of the first one, found the likely nova at magnitude 9.3 on two CCD images taken at February 19.86 Universal Time. A day later, at February 20.85 UT, K. Itagaki confirmed the new star; it's at right ascension 16h 56m 59s, declination $-35^{\circ} 21.8'$ (2000.0 coordinates). He judged it to be magnitude 8.8.

What's likely to be named "Nova Scorpii 2007 Number 2" was also independently discovered by Hideo Nishimura on the morning of the 20th Japanese time; he called it magnitude 9.2. Stay tuned.

So, what is a nova?

A classical nova occurs when fresh hydrogen from a donor star builds up on the surface of a hot white dwarf. Eventually the bottom of the hydrogen layer becomes hot and dense enough to ignite the hydrogen-fusion reaction, and the entire layer enshrouding the white dwarf suddenly explodes as a hydrogen bomb.

http://media.skytonight.com/images/GS-Scorpius_12.jpg
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NOTES ON CHINA LAKE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY HISTORY – Carroll Evans

The best we can tell without extensive historical research, the China Lake Astronomical Society is now about 49 years old. How about that! It was founded in the Fall of 1958 during the initial excitement of the Space Age, following the launch of Russia's Sputnik. An Air Force Major stationed at China Lake, Don Scheller, sent around a memorandum suggesting the formation of an astronomy club. The rest, as is so often said, is history.

We are still here, and still having good meetings and other interesting activities. We should all be amazed and gratified by this. I will take this opportunity to reminisce a bit, with perhaps some comments thrown in. I have been a member from the beginning, making me a charter member, but I don't consider myself a founding member. Initial meetings were held on the Navy Base in the Community Center.

Somewhat after formation of the club it took over operation of the China Lake Moonwatch station from the China Lake Natural Science Club. Moonwatch was a volunteer organization whose purpose was to keep track of artificial satellites, and was sponsored by the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, as a part of the International Geophysical Year. China Lake was supplied with special telescopes, and was for some time one of the premier stations in the network.

After some few years, somehow the Society slipped into a period of dormancy. Then two young newly hired Junior Professionals, Curt Chaffin and Keith Honey, got the idea that we should have an astronomy club. George Stillwell told them that we already did, and that they should get it going again. And, they did.

It was at about this time that the Navy made buildings available for the use of the various clubs and organizations that had come into being. One of these wooden buildings, known as "Bishops" provided a home for us for many years. We were given the use of two adjoining apartments, which we combined into a meeting place. We have many memories of the effort of converting adjoining apartments into a projection room, meeting hall, library and shop. We had the building for many years, until the Navy decided, quite properly, to demolish them. The Navy offered to provide alternate meeting spaces, but we, the club, decided that it was time to move our activities off of the base. We next had our monthly meetings in the Community Room of the Ridgecrest Branch Library. This was pretty good, but in time the Maturango Museum was built in Ridgecrest, and we switched our meeting place to there.

You are reading this in Volume 44 Number 3 of SKYWATCHERS, so it is clear that this newsletter is not quite as old as the club itself. The first issue was in January 1964, and it has been published monthly ever since. When Jim McMahan was no longer able to produce Skywatchers, I took over.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Basic CLAS dues are \$20.00 per year, which includes the *Skywatchers Newsletter*. As a benefit of membership you may also receive *Astronomy Magazine* and/or *Sky and Telescope Magazine*. The fee schedule is as follows:

Basic membership	\$20.00 per year
Membership with Astronomy magazine	\$54.00 per year
Membership with Sky and Telescope magazine	\$53.00 per year
Membership with both S & T and Astronomy	\$87.00 per year

Send your check to: Roger Brower, Treasurer, China Lake Astronomical Society, P.O. Box 1783, Ridgecrest, CA 93556.

PRESIDENT – Earl Wilson – 760-876-5455 (email zearl.email@gmail.com)
VICE-PRESIDENT – Bruce Churchill - 760-375-7247 (email bchurchill@atsecure.net)
SECRETARY – Ted Hodgkinson - 661- 824-2738 (email ghodkinson@sbcglobal.net)
TREASURER – Roger Brower - 760-375-1181 (email brower@iwvisp.com)
NEWSLETTER EDITOR – Carroll Evans Jr. - 760-375-5681 (email clevans@ridgenet.net)

WESTERN AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS WEB SITE <http://www.waa.av.org/>

Meetings of the China Lake Astronomical Society are held at the **Maturango Museum** at 7:30 p.m. on the first Monday evening of each month, except when the first Monday is a holiday.

**SKYWATCHERS, Newsletter of the
CHINA LAKE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
POST OFFICE BOX 1783
RIDGECREST, CA 93556-1783**

FIRST CLASS

**NEXT MEETING: 7:30 p.m., MONDAY MARCH 5, 2007: “Messier Objects”
AT THE MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE.
CLAS WEB PAGE <http://www1.iwvisp.com/brower/clas.html>
INDEX OF CLAS NEWSLETTERS <http://www.ridgenet.net/~clevans/clas/>**