Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 44 No. 5 **May 1, 2007**

NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, May 7, 2007

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

PROGRAM FOR THE MAY 7 MEETING – BLACK HOLES

Clint Spindler will discuss Black Holes: Where they came from, what they are, and where they are going?

DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

Monday, May 7, 2007: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, May 18, 2007: Regular monthly Star Party, see details below
Wednesday, May 23, 2007: Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter
Monday, June 4, 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, 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.

THE SKY IN MAY (Roger Brower)

1. Venus is in the evening sky. Look for it in the west-southwest soon after sunset.

2. Mercury puts on its best evening show of the year in May. Look for it in the west-northwest about 30 minutes after sunset the last half of the month.

3. Saturn remains a fine evening object. At sunset look for it in the south at the beginning of the month and in the southwest at the end of the month.
4. Jupiter moves to the evening sky this month where it rises about 11 p.m. at the beginning of the month and about sunset at the end of the month. Look for it in the southeast after it rises.

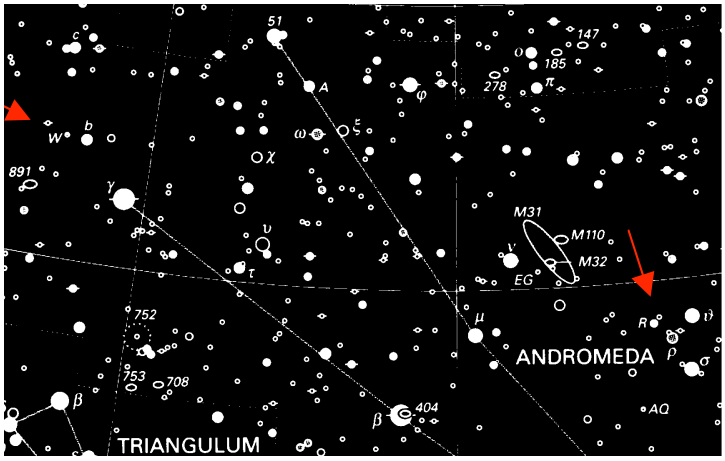
STAR WATCH (Bob Stewart)

Here are some variable stars that you might want to keep an eye on in May. Better yet, take a series of pictures and watch the stars brighten and fade.

Mira: Mira is setting in the west now just before dark. Mira's period of 332 days means we will see it again next Winter as it is brightening.

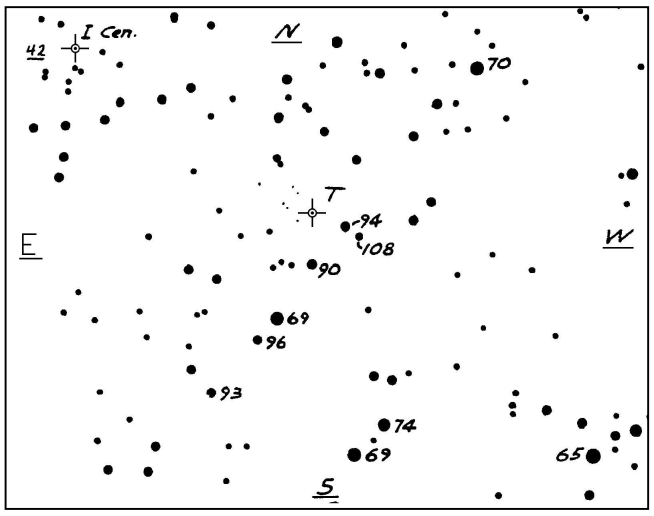
T Centaurus: This red giant Mira type variable should reach its maximum brightness of mag. 5.5 on May 10th. For a comparison chart go to: http://www.aavso.org/charts/CEN/T_CEN/

W and R Andromeda: The two other brightest variable stars for Northern Hemisphere observers in May are both in Andromeda, but neither brightens enough to be seen with the naked eye. W And. brightens to mag. 7.4 on the 10th of May and R And. brightens to mag. 6.9 around May 15th. Both stars are located near the Andromeda galaxy.



Using a Comparison Chart.: Comparison charts allow you to both find a star as well as estimate its brightness by comparing it with other nearby stars. In the accompanying comparison chart for T Centaurus you will notice that the brightest nearby star, 1 Centaurus, is magnitude 4 and the faintest is 9.6. In between there are stars of magnitude 6.5, 7.0 and 7.4. By comparing the brightness of T Centaurus with these stars we can get a good estimate of its brightness as it fluctuates from a magnitude range of 5.5 to 9.0.

Sometimes it is hard to estimate the relative brightness of two stars when they are different colors. Mira is a good case in point, since it is red and most stars are yellow or bluish white. By putting the stars out of focus so that they appear as large disks, rather than points, the color difference is minimized. This is called the (what else) out-of-focus method.



The AAVSO keeps track of the observations of variable stars by its members. You can compare your estimate with theirs, by going to the AAVSO web site (http://www.aavso.org/) and finding your star using the "Pick a Star" search feature. Use the standard abbreviation like "T CEN" for your star and select the "Recent Observations" option. Often you will be pretty close to other observers in your estimate. If you are way off, you were probably looking at the wrong star! So try again.

To get a comparison chart go to: http://www.aavso.org/charts/CEN/T_CEN/

Just One Double: Check out tau Leonis. It's located in the rear foot of the Lion, south of sigma Leonis, and is easy to split in binoculars or a small scope. The primary is mag. 5.0 and secondary is 7.5. And while you're there, check out 83 Leonis just to the west of tau Leonis. At mags. 6.6 and 7.5 it's also easy to split.

For more on double stars, check out the article on "Colorful Double Stars for your Viewing Pleasure" in May's Sky and Telescope.

Next Month: More variables plus some colorful doubles. And don't forget to send in your observations and pictures to your web site (www.chinalakeastrosoc.org).

CLAS STAR PARTY 4/13/07 (Alex Shlanta)

The April 2007 CLAS Star Party was held at its usual place, off Brown Road Southwest of Ridgecrest, starting around 8:00 pm. There were about 12 people attending the Star Party. Two Telescopes were set up for viewing: Bill Weiss had his 14-inch C1400 Celestron Schmidt Cassegrain telescope and I had my 10-inch XT10 Orion Dobsonian Intelliscope. CLAS members Ken Pringle and Roger Brower were in attendance as well. The weather was not too conducive for a Star Party. However, we were still able to make it a meaningful experience for our guests. For the weather conditions the temperature was about 65 degF, wind about 10 mph from the SSW, and it was mostly cloudy with thin mid-and-high altitude clouds with a significant amount of atmospheric turbulence.

Due to sky conditions it was not a good night for deep space viewing. Venus appeared low in the west with a large halo around it due to the atmospheric effects. Close to directly overhead we were able to see Saturn and its rings fairly well. Looking toward the West, M42 the Great Orion Nebula did not appear to be very spectacular trough the telescope. But, when I used a Lumicon UHCR filter on the eyepiece a significant amount of the gaseous nebulosity could definitely be seen. Bill was able to find M51 the Whirlpool galaxy with his telescope, but it was very dim and no structure could be seen. Some of the predominant open star clusters were viewed, through optical finders and telescopes, namely M45 Pleiades, Caldwell 41 Hyades, and M44 Praesepe or Beehive Cluster. We were also able to see Mizar and Alcor and resolve Mizar A and B with the telescope. In spite of the poor optical seeing we were able to take advantage of the situation to point out some major constellations and tell about their roles as signposts to other stars and constellations. The big dipper asterism in Ursa Major was seen clearly along with Merak and Dubhe pointing the way to Polaris. Located directly north, Cassiopeia could not be seen due to city lights and clouds. We were also able to show our guests how the arc of the handle from the big dipper arced to Arcturus in Bootes and spiked down to Spica in Virgo. Constellation Orion could be seen as well as the Winter Triangle stars of Betelgeuse, Sirius, and Procyon. We also identified the major stars in the oval around Orion namely Sirius in Canis Major, Procyon in Canis Minor, Pollux and Castor in Gemini, Capella in Auriga, and Aldebaran in Taurus.

By 10:00 pm the crowd dissipated so Bill and I called it a night, packed up our telescopes, and went on home.

OUR PRESENCE ON THE WEB (Carroll Evans)

Bob Stewart and I have set up a domain name for the society. Check us out at http://ChinaLakeAstroSoc.org We will continue to upgrade the site, and will soon allow members to post pictures and comments. People can get the new web site on Google or Yahoo, if they do a search on "China Lake Astronomy" or "Ridgecrest Astronomy."

TILLIE CREEK PRESENTATIONS

This year's Tillie Creek Forest Service presentations are scheduled for Saturday evenings June 9, July 21 and August 11. If you can help by bringing a telescope, please do. Contact Carroll Evans at 375-5681.

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
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RIDGECREST, CA 93556-1783

FIRST CLASS

NEXT MEETING: 7:30 p.m., MONDAY MAY 7, 2007: "BLACK HOLES"
AT THE MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE.
CLAS WEB PAGE http://www.chinalakeastrosoc.org
INDEX OF CLAS NEWSLETTERS http://www.ridgenet.net/~clevans/clas/