

# Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 44 No. 12

December 1, 2007

**NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, December 3, 2007**

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

## **PROGRAM FOR THE NOVEMBER 5 MEETING – THE AUTUMN SKY**

Last month we talked about the Andromeda galaxies. In December let's talk about the rest of the autumn sky. With about three weeks of autumn remaining, this is a good time to see those sights. If you have pictures or observing tips, bring them along.

## **DATES TO KEEP IN MIND**

**Monday, December 3, 2007: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum, 7:30 p.m.**

Wednesday, December 26, 2007: Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter

Monday, January 7, 2008: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

**STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR THE 2007 SEASON: Public star parties resume in March 2008.**

## **2008 ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY HANDBOOKS AND CALENDARS AVAILABLE**

For many years the China Lake Astronomical Society has provided the RASC Observer's Handbook to our membership. The retail price for a single copy (delivered) is \$31.95 US. We get them at a group rate, and share the savings with our members. For the past two years we have sold them at less than cost, as a service to members. However, prices have increased to where we must again cover costs. If you buy in person we are charging \$17.00 for the handbook, and \$10.00 for the calendar.

Most of you know all about the handbooks and calendars. Suffice to say that the *Observer's Handbook* is 320 pages of astronomical data, which is presented as tables, charts and annual and daily information. The calendars also present useful information, along with great astronomical photographs.

## **THE SKY IN DECEMBER by Roger Brower**

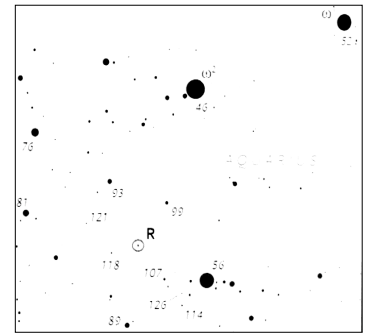
1. Venus remains in the morning sky month and rises in the east about 4AM.
2. Saturn rises about midnight on December 1st and about 10PM on December 31st. Look for it in Leo rising just after Regulus.
3. Mars moves into prominence this month as it reaches opposition on Christmas Eve. This means Mars will be visible all night. Look for it rising in the east as the sun sets.
4. Jupiter will fade into the sun this month on its way to the morning sky.
5. For early risers, the Geminid meteor shower peaks on the morning of the 14th.

## STAR WATCH FOR DECEMBER 2007 by Bob Stewart

There is one new bright naked-eye variable star this month that we can see from Ridgecrest. One of last month's brightest stars has just peaked and another is on the rise.

### R Aqr

This Mira type red giant should have reached its maximum brightness of mag. 6.5 around the 27th of November. There is a good finder chart and article about this star on page 72 of November's *Sky & Telescope*. For a comparison chart go to: [ftp://www.aavso.org/charts/standard/AQR/R\\_AQR/](ftp://www.aavso.org/charts/standard/AQR/R_AQR/)



### T Cephei

T Cephei should peak at 6th magnitude in early December, dozens of times brighter than it was when at 10th magnitude last June. T Cephei is easy to locate about 3° southwest of 3rd magnitude Beta Cephei. There is a good finder chart and article about this star on page 78 of December's *Sky & Telescope*.

### Mira Watch

Mira has started to brighten from its minimum of magnitude 9.4. The AAVSO reports its magnitude at 8.5 in mid-November. I was able to see it in my binoculars for the first time since last spring. It will reach its maxima of 3.4 in February, so now is a good time to start watching. Look for Cetus in the eastern sky, rising about 7 PM. For a comparison chart go to: [http://www.aavso.org/charts/CET/O\\_CET/](http://www.aavso.org/charts/CET/O_CET/)

## REPORT ON CLAS STAR PARTY, NOVEMBER 9, 2007 by Bruce Churchill

Our final Star Party of 2007 was held on Friday November 9. Cloudy skies before sunset cleared shortly thereafter, and the breeze subsided about an hour after that. The result was good observing conditions for Comet Holmes. Alex Shlanta and Chuck Morgan supplied telescopes. Several students from Cerro Coso College attended for the first time. Several other newcomers came to see the comet after hearing about it. Holmes was visible with the naked eye after which binoculars and telescopes provided different perspectives. Regular autumn objects included the Andromeda galaxies (M31, M32, and M110) and M15, the compact globular cluster in Pegasus. There were also remnants of the summer sky such as the Hercules cluster (M13) and Albireo, the blue and gold double star in Cygnus. Previews of the winter sky included the Pleiades (M45) and the Crab Nebula (M1) in Taurus.

## SECOND ANNUAL CERRO COSO COLLEGE ASTRONOMICAL BARBECUE & STAR PARTY by Alex Shlanta

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Astronomical Barbeque and Star Party were held at Cerro Coso Community College (CCCC) on 19 October 2007. Supporting this fundraiser for the College Observatory were the Cerro Coso Community College Foundation, CCCC Faculty, Staff, and Students. Members of the Ridgecrest City Council and the China Lake Astronomical Society assisted as well. The barbecue dinner along with entertainment was held from 5:30 to 7:00 pm on the College Library's front lawn. The evening ended with the Star Party at the Observatory that began at 7:30 pm., with about 300 - 400 people attending this event.

The chefs for the BBQ were Ridgecrest Mayor Chip Holloway, City Councilman Dan Clark, and City Parks and Recreation Director Jim Ponek. Dr. John Stenger-Smith, Professor of Chemistry/Physical Science along with Yesterdaze, a popular local singing group, provided excellent musical entertainment during the dinner. Master

of Ceremonies and President of Cerro Coso College Dr. Mary Retterer conducted a raffle of many prizes. Well received, three back-to-back 25-minute slide show presentations of a brief overview of Astronomy were given in the College Library Room 604 by China Lake Astronomical Society (CLAS) charter member Carroll Evans.

Earlier in the week there were some questions about the weather being suitable for the event. However, conditions on Friday evening ended up permitting operations at the Observatory. There was 10% cloud cover, temperature 65 deg F, and a southwest wind at 12 miles per hour.

The Cerro Coso College bus driven by Larry Board provided about six trips from the dining area to the Astronomical Observatory. When people arrived at the observatory Dr. Shlanta used a green laser pointer to show the guests the Big Dipper, the North Star, the constellation Cassiopeia, the Square of Pegasus, the location of the Andromeda Galaxy, the Summer Triangle of stars (Vega, Deneb, and Altair and their constellations), the Teapot, and the planet Jupiter. People were thrilled to see the space station cross the northern sky. Then we went inside the observatory compound where nine stations were waiting for us, set up with telescopes, a pair of binoculars, and a TV screen to view the Moon from an electronic eyepiece in a telescope. Dr. Tom Foggia provided recordings of excellent space-oriented background music at the observatory. Manning the equipment and explaining the celestial views were China Lake Astronomical Society members Neal Barry, Roger Brower, Calvin Clayson, Peter Eiserloh, Kiran Mehra, Chuck Morgan, and Clint Spindler. Also manning stations at the observatory were Richard L'Hommedieu and Bill Weiss. The telescopes set up at the Observatory consisted of refractors, reflectors, and Schmidt Cassegrain systems ranging in size from 5" to 12" in diameter.

The Moon was the highlight of the evening and we were able to see it in its quarter phase. Looking along the light to dark terminator under magnification, people were able to see peaks in craters and craters in craters. Jupiter and its Galilean moons and M45 Pleiades (the seven sisters) were popular sights as well. The blue and gold dual colored double star Albireo was a favorite of many. Also viewed were the globular cluster in Hercules M13, M31 the Andromeda spiral galaxy along with its two companion elliptical galaxies M32 and M110, M27 the Dumbbell planetary nebula, and NGC7662 the Blue Snowball, a bluish appearing planetary nebula.

## **SHUTTLE PHOTOS**

Check out these pictures, they are from the most recent mission.

<http://www.texasjim.com/NASApix/NASA%20pix.htm>

## **COMET HOLMES by Carroll Evans**

On the evening of October 24 I received an email from club president Earl Wilson, announcing a sudden flare-up in a comet. I forwarded the email to the club list, and soon thereafter Bob Stewart replied that it was indeed something to look at. And that's how the fun began. Comet Holmes had gone from an insignificant 17<sup>th</sup> magnitude comet to magnitude 2.8, naked eye visibility. In the past few weeks it has attracted lots of attention. A Google search will produce tons of information about this unusual event.

British amateur astronomer Edwin Holmes discovered comet Holmes in 1892, after a similar outburst. Apparently it has gone around the sun once every seven years, attracting no attention until now. As of now, it is visible all night long, appearing about midway between the Pleiades and Cassiopeia. I have seen it naked eye, with binoculars, and through a telescope. Photos of it were shown at our November 5 club meeting.

## **ELECTIONS**

The annual election of officers for the China Lake Astronomical Society will be held at the December 3 meeting. The offices of President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer must be filled.

## 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](mailto:zearl.email@gmail.com))  
VICE-PRESIDENT – Bruce Churchill - 760-375-7247 (email [bchurchill@atsecure.net](mailto:bchurchill@atsecure.net))  
SECRETARY – Ted Hodgkinson - 661- 824-2738 (email [ghodkinson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ghodkinson@sbcglobal.net))  
TREASURER – Roger Brower - 760-375-1181 (email [brower@iwvisp.com](mailto:brower@iwvisp.com))  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR – Carroll Evans Jr. - 760-375-5681 (email [clevans@ridgenet.net](mailto: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 DECEMBER 3, 2007: “THE AUTUMN SKY” AT THE  
MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE., RIDGECREST, CA  
CLAS WEB PAGE <http://www.chinalakeastroc.org>  
INDEX OF CLAS NEWSLETTERS <http://www.ridgenet.net/~clevans/clas/>**