

# Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 45 No. 10

October 1, 2008

**NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, October 6, 2008**

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

## **PROGRAM FOR THE OCTOBER 6 MEETING – CHANDRA X-RAY OBSERVATORY**

The Chandra X-Ray Observatory was the third of NASA's series of great observatories, following the Hubble Space Telescope and the Compton Gamma Ray Observatory. It was put into orbit by the Shuttle Columbia in 1999. Chandra is equipped with four science instruments and has provided astronomers with a wealth of data, including images of a pulsar inside a planetary nebula and material that seems to be disappearing down a black hole. These and more recent discoveries will be shown in a 35-minute DV D.

The Spitzer Infrared Telescope followed Chandra.

## **DATES TO KEEP IN MIND**

**Monday, October 6, 2008:** Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, October 22, 2008:** Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter

**Friday, October 24, 2008:** Public Star Party at Brown Road Site, see below.

**Monday, November 3, 2008:** Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

## **STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR THE 2008 SEASON:**

Star Parties will be held on the dates listed below. Star Parties are an activity where members and guests come together to view the skies. If you have a telescope, bring it; if not, come and look through someone else's. They are held at a site in the open desert south of Ridgecrest. To reach the 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. Signs and cones 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, October 24: Signs out at 7:00 p.m., Star viewing at 7:30 p.m.**

Friday, November 28: Signs out at 5:30 p.m., Star viewing at 6:00 p.m.

**This is your newsletter, please contribute an article.**

## **THE SKY IN OCTOBER by Roger Brower (Guest Contributor Rob Shaw)**

1. VENUS shines brightly in the west-southwest after sunset. It passes 3 degrees north of the star Antares in Scorpio on Oct 26. On Oct 31, the crescent Moon, Venus and Antares will form a tight little group in the southwest, overseeing the Halloween festivities.
2. JUPITER is prominent in the evening sky toward the south, northeast of the Teapot asterism in Sagittarius. Look for it above the first quarter Moon on Oct 6, when the planet will be at quadrature, 90 degrees from the Sun.
3. SATURN rises in the morning sky before dawn, as it emerges from the solar glare. By month's end, it will rise more than four hours before the Sun. Optical aid will show that the rings are almost edge-on to our view.
4. MERCURY is in conjunction with the Sun on Oct 6 and then rapidly ascends in the pre-dawn sky for its best apparition of the year in northern latitudes. Look for it just above the eastern horizon for the rest of the month.
5. MARS is too close to the Sun to be visible this month.
6. The Orionid meteor shower occurs late in the evening of Oct 21, with its radiant near the left shoulder of Orion, but the brightness of the last quarter Moon will hinder good viewing.
7. NIBIRU continues hurtling toward its catastrophic encounter with Earth in 2012, but is not yet visible to the naked eye. As is well known, it is a renegade planet ejected from an orbit around the star OCTAVIUS, which crosses the sky in the opposite direction from all other celestial objects, rising in the west and setting in the east.

## **CERRO COSO COMMUNITY COLLEGE STAR PARTY AND BARBEQUE SEPTEMBER 19**

Friday evening September 19 was selected for the third annual Cerro Coso Community College Star Party and Barbeque. The college, at the instigation of their astronomy professor, Alex Shlanta, conceived this event. Readers will recall that Alex established the college observatory, which was dedicated on May 4, 2006. Alex was a valuable member of the China Lake Astronomical Society. Alex passed away June 29, 2008, and is greatly missed. The event was dedicated to the memory of Alex.

This year's event, under the overall leadership of College President Dr. Mary Retterer, followed the general pattern of the previous two years, with advance tickets being sold at several locations. The physical arrangements were excellent last year, and even better this year. The evening began with tri-tip sandwiches on the Library lawn, with background music by local band Yesterdaze. Raffle tickets were sold for items donated by local merchants. Community participation was great. C.L.A.S. member Carroll Evans provided "Observing the Night Skies," his venerable slide show on Astronomy. The show was given three times, to a full house at the middle showing. For Carroll the highlight of the slide show was a fifth-grade student named Alex. Alex had numerous questions and offerings, and surely could give the show himself next year.

Meanwhile, the visitors found their way to the College Observatory. Some walked, others took the College's bus to the site. Attendance was reported to be at least as large as last year, in spite of the wind, which was not strong enough to be devastating, but the wind would have been appreciated more by its absence. Many telescopes were set up, looking at a variety of celestial objects, including, of course, Jupiter and its Galilean moons. The Andromeda Galaxy and star clusters were also included. At least seven C.L.A.S. members assisted with the operation of the telescopes.

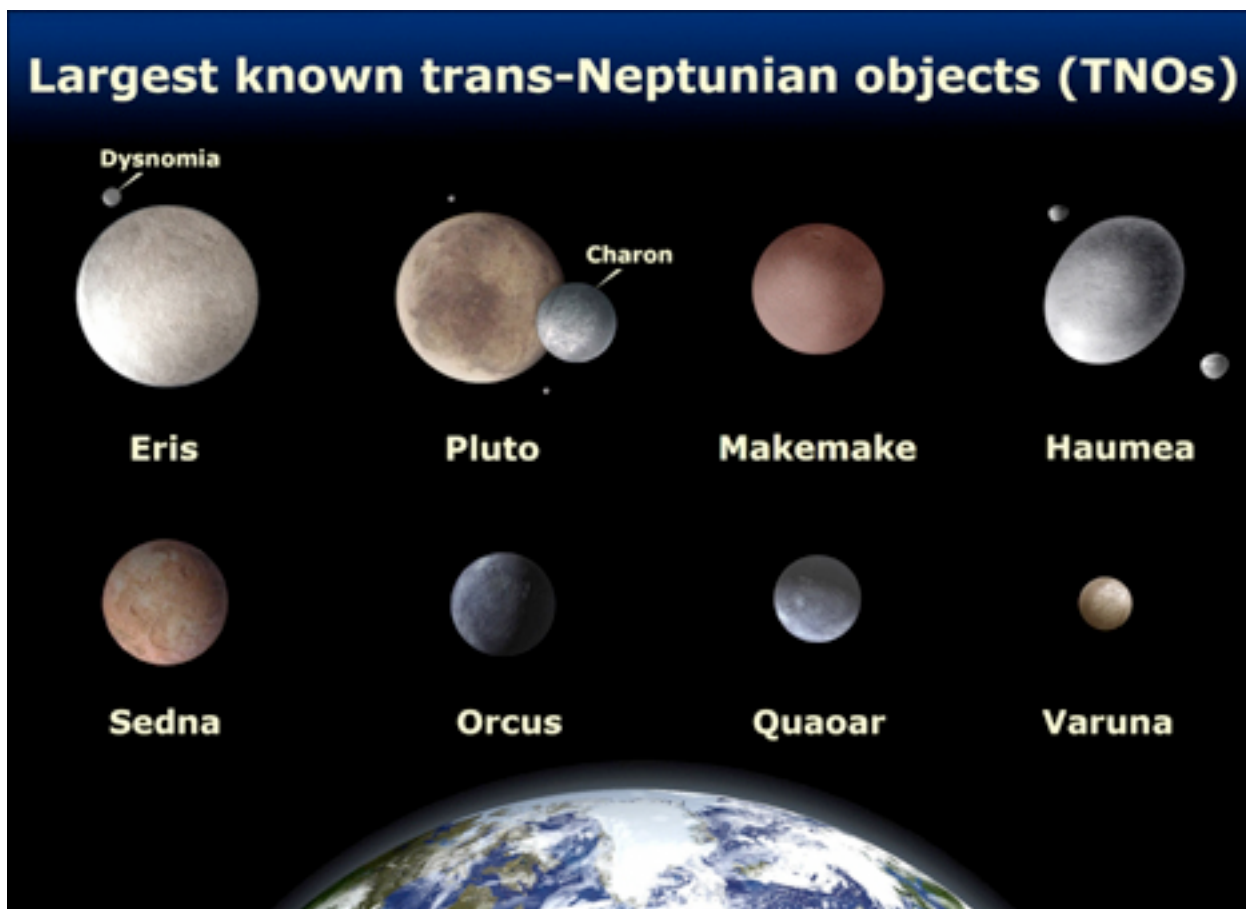
**TELESCOPE FOR SALE:** Call 760-376-6303 or 379-6860 for information about an 8-inch Celestron with tripod and accessories. Asking price is said to be \$600.00. Information provided by Chris Quinnert.

## FIFTH DWARF PLANET NAMED

The International Astronomical Union has formally designated a fifth member of the recently established category of “dwarf planet”: Haumea, a Trans-Neptunian Object (TNO) which joins Ceres, Pluto, Eris and Makemake (see Skywatchers for August 2008). Haumea, discovered by Michael Brown in 2003, is named after the Hawaiian goddess of childbirth and fertility, and is accompanied by two tiny moons, Hi’lake and Namake. It orbits the Sun with a period of 285 years, ranging from a distance of 36 AU at perihelion to 57 AU at aphelion. Its estimated dimensions are 1960 x 1510 x 996 km, making it highly elongated due to its rapid rotation, with a period of less than four hours. Due to its great distance and small size it is extremely dim, shining at only 17.3 magnitude.

Use Google to find the Wikipedia story of Haumea. There is some interesting controversy surrounding the discovery and announcement of the object.

This figure compares the sizes of the largest TNOs with Earth, shown at the bottom.



## 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.

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**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 OCTOBER 6, 2008: “CHANDRA X-RAY OBSERVATORY” AT THE MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE., RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA**

**CLAS WEB PAGE** <http://www.chinalakeastrosoc.org>

**INDEX OF CLAS NEWSLETTERS** <http://www.ridgenet.net/~clevans/clas/>