

Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 46 No. 5

May 1, 2009

NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, May 4, 2009

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

PROGRAM FOR THE MAY 4 MEETING – TRANS-NEPTUNIAN OBJECTS

When many of us were born, Pluto was the outermost planet in our solar system. Today, Pluto is neither a major planet nor the outermost body orbiting the sun. We'll talk about the outer regions of the solar system and its recently discovered denizens at our May meeting. Much has been learned about this remote region of space beyond Neptune in the past year.

DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

Monday, May 4, 2009: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 20, 2009: Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter

Thursday, May 21, 2009: Museum Observatory public viewing session, 8:30 p.m.

Friday, May 22, 2009: Next public star party.

Monday, June 1, 2009: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR THE 2009 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, May 22: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, June 19: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, July 17: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, August 21: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, September 18: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing 8:00 p.m.

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

Friday, November 13: Signs out at 5:30 p.m., Star viewing at 6:00 p.m.

Some public star parties are to be held at the Maturango Museum's observatory, on the Thursday evening just before the C.L.A.S. public star parties.

C.L.A.S. HELPS CELEBRATE 100 HOURS OF ASTRONOMY

2009 has been designated as the International Year of Astronomy. The weekend of April 4 and 5 was included as part of "100 Hours of Astronomy." Our club participated by bringing astronomy to the public, on the grounds of the Maturango Museum. The sun was shown in sodium light both afternoons, and regular telescopes were used to show the night sky on Saturday evening. The Museum connection to the World Wide Web was used to show recorded segments of "Around the World in 80 Observatories." These shows, which allotted 21 minutes to each observatory, were shown on the big screen in the Museum's art gallery. Web broadcasts were shown Saturday afternoon and evening, and Sunday afternoon. We estimate that 125 people were able to look through telescopes. Those who looked through a telescope were given badges which stated, "I saw Saturn" (or the Moon, or the Sun).

THE SKY IN MAY by Roger Brower

1. Venus remains in the morning sky this month. Look for it very low in the east at the beginning of the month and higher in the east at the end of the month.
2. Saturn remains a fine evening object and will be visible high in the south-southeast soon after sunset throughout the month. The rings are closing (getting more edge-on) so they will become less brilliant throughout the summer.
3. Mercury remains in the evening sky the first week of the month. Look for it low in the west-northwest soon after sunset. The Pleiades are also in the area.
4. Jupiter is also in the morning sky this month where it rises about 3 a.m. at the beginning of the month and about 1 a.m. at the end of the month. Look for it in the south-southeast for the entire month.
5. Mars remains near Venus but is 160 times fainter. Look for it about 5 degrees to the lower left of Venus.
6. The Eta Aquarid meteor show peaks on May 5th. Look for them high in the south after about 4 a.m.

OPEN HOUSE AT THE JET PROPULSION LABORATORY ON MAY 2 AND 3

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif., welcomes the public to its annual Open House on Saturday, May 2, and Sunday, May 3, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The lab will salute the 40th anniversary of NASA's Apollo 11 mission – the first human landing on the moon. JPL will also celebrate the International Year of Astronomy, a United Nations-endorsed series of events around the world that commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first telescope observations of stars and planets by Italian scientist Galileo Galilei.

Open House highlights include: seeing JPL's next spacecraft bound for Mars, the Mars Science Laboratory, in the lab's biggest "clean room;" talking to scientists and engineers who work on missions to destinations such as Mars, Saturn, Jupiter and Earth's moon; and visiting JPL's Microdevices Lab, where engineers and scientists work in the world of the ultra-miniature. Visitors can also view the sun through solar-safe telescopes, and learn how NASA instruments measure greenhouse gases, helping scientists better understand global climate change.

TELESCOPE DOCUMENTARY WILL AIR ON KCET APRIL 30, 9:00 p.m.

In the April 2009 issue of Skywatchers we informed our readers about the upcoming PBS documentary "400 Years of the Telescope," hosted by Neil Degrasse Tyson. The program was scheduled for broadcast nationally at 10:00 p.m. on April 10. As it happened, KCET in Los Angeles did not air the program on that

date, but scheduled it for broadcast at 9:00 p.m. on April 30. Although this newsletter is dated May 1, you should receive it in plenty of time for you to see the program.

THE LIGHTEST EXOPLANET YET DISCOVERED

The discovery of the lowest mass exoplanet so far detected was announced on April 21. This object is the fourth planet to be found circling the star Gliese 581 in Libra and is only 1.9 times the earth's mass. It orbits far too close to the star to be in the habitable zone, taking just 3.15 days to revolve around its host. The other known planets in the system are more distant from their sun and have masses of 16, 5, and 7 times Earth's respectively. The current tally of extrasolar planets stands at 346.

ASTRONOMY ONLINE

New photographs released by NASA have included an image of a vast stellar formation resembling a human hand reaching across space. The image, taken by NASA's space-based Chandra Observatory telescope, shows an X-ray nebula 150 light years across. See <http://johncwright.livejournal.com/241509.html>



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 MAY 4, 2009: “TRANS-NEPTUNIAN OBJECTS” AT THE MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE., RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA

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