METEOR


METEOR is the official publication of both the Greenbelt and Goddard Astronomy Clubs and is distributed monthly as a privilege of membership in one or both of these organizations. Articles and other contributions are welcome. Membership in the Greenbelt Astronomy Club is open to all, but membership in the Goddard Club is only open to NASA civil servants and contractors. The Greenbelt club meets on the last non-holiday Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm EST at the Owens Science Center. The Goddard Club meets on the second Tuesday of the month at the Goddard Space Flight Center at noon in Bldg. #21 Rm. #183. The address of the Editor is: 58-D Crescent Road, Greenbelt, Maryland 20770.

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Goddard Astronomy Club

The Goddard Astronomy Club held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, December 13th in Bldg. #11 Rm C2 at noon. Joe Davila talked about some of what they’ve learned about the Sun from the SERTS missions, which were launched by Black-Brant sounding rockets. The effects of convection and magnetic fields, and how they relate to the elemental abundances in the chromosphere and corona was explained. Afterwards, member Dan Schultz showed his pictures of the November 3rd Total Eclipse of the Sun taken from Arica, Chile.

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Greenbelt Astronomy Club

The monthly meeting of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club was on Thursday the 15th due to the Christmas holiday. Astronomy Day on May 6th was mentioned. The Owens Science Center will be open again to support us this year. As we don’t have the grant money we had last year, we’ll have to scale back on some activities. Sue Bassett showed us slides of the November 3rd Total Solar Eclipse that she took in Bolivia. Some of the local light pollution problems were mentioned. More on that follows. A talk on the Stars seen from South America will be given at the next meeting on January 26th.

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Leonids Picking Up

According to IAUC No. 6109 the Leonids were very active this year despite the nearly Full Moon. Although it was clouded out for us here, observers from Japan and the Dutch Meteor Society, using radio and visual data, report a ZHR of about 100 occurred at November 18.2 UT. Next year the moon will be out of the way. The rates should continue to pick up as we approach the 1999 Leonid meteor storm, which we are all looking forward to.

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Geminid Meteor Shower

Unfortunately, it was cloudy for the Geminid maximum in this area, and I only
managed to see one through some holes in the clouds on the evening of December 14th. However, a report received from Chagrin Falls, Ohio, amateur astronomers Kim and Don Himes of the Chagrin Valley Astronomical Society, mentioned about 44 Geminids per hour on the morning of the 14th. In fifteen minutes, they saw three fireballs low in the eastern sky. They also reported that the temperature was a chilly 16 degrees F, but that seeing those bright Geminids was worth it.

 Supernova in NGC 3370

This supernova was found in mid-November using the University of California at Berkley, Calif. automatic supernova patrol telescope. It is located 30" west and 6" north of the galaxy's nucleus. Ohio amateur astronomer, Bob Modic reports that the SN was 12.8 magnitude on December 9th, making it within range of many backyard telescopes. Spectra show that the SN is a type Ia near maximum. NGC3370 is located in the belly of Leo; the coordinates of the Supernova are: RA 10h 44m 21.5s, DEC +17 deg. 32' 21" (equinox 1950).

 Brighten Baltimore Campaign

The Baltimore Gas & Electric Company wants to light up the World Trade Center in downtown Baltimore with super bright Xenon lights. It's part of their "Brighten Baltimore Campaign" that is supposed to start January 1, 1995. Forrest Hamilton, a friend of both our clubs, who is a good observer, telescope maker, and light pollution activist, alerted local amateur astronomers to this very bad idea for Baltimore. Letters have been sent from both the Greenbelt and Goddard Astronomy Clubs, as well as the National Capital Astronomers, that are critical of these plans. We don't know if enough negative feedback has altered or killed these dismal plans yet, but will update you soon.

 Winter's Open Clusters

Although the Milky Way in the Winter sky is not as bright as that of the Summer sky, there are several bright open clusters that are easy to find and pretty nice to observe in binoculars or small telescopes. One is near the bright star Sirius in the constellation Canis Major. Just four degrees south of Sirius is the bright open cluster M41. It is listed as being 5.2 magnitude and can be seen with the naked-eye in a dark sky. The cluster is about the size of the Full Moon and looks best in binoculars or low power. Heading up toward Gemini, in the foot of Gemini about 2.5 degrees north of epsilon Gemini is the fine open cluster M35. It's listed as being 5.5 magnitude. It too is best seen in binoculars or with low power in a telescope. However, it will take magnification better than M41 as it contains many more fainter stars. Going farther up the Milky Way you run into M37 in Auriga. For this open cluster, although good in binoculars, a higher power is better to show its many fainter suns. Just another couple degrees up into Auriga are two more nice open cluster, M36 and M38. These are best seen with low power or binoculars.

 Source - Edmund Magnitude 6th Star Atlas

 Jupiter SL-9 Impacts

Word has come in through Internet that amateur astronomer and co-discoverer David Levy has seen the comet SL-9 Jupiter impact scars with an 8-inch reflector telescope in the morning sky. Although Jupiter was low he was able to see some detail in the newly formed belt. It is possible that these impact scars will be visible for a long time. He reported that the scars were still easy to see.
December 15, 1994

As the year draws to a close, I'd like to reflect back on the past 12 months. During 1994 the Greenbelt Astronomy Club hosted star parties at Northway Fields, helped a local elementary school with their own star party, hosted Astronomy Day Activities, and had some very interesting talks at club meetings. An article in the Washington Post chronicled club members' observations of the Great Comet Crash. In addition, we have a number of new members.

All in all, it's been a good year. Now is the time to look forward to the new year and new plans.

I believe we must continue our efforts to increase membership. This means we must continue to offer good programs for the general public, beginning with our regular meetings. We should seek speakers from within the club as well as from the local astronomical community. Opening these talks to the public should attract some attention to us.

Warm-weather star parties at Northway Fields will be one of the major ways we can serve the community. Perhaps we can begin a project to construct a permanent observatory at the site.

Astronomy Day will be Saturday, May 6. Please plan now to be a part of that event. We need the time and talent of every club member to make it a success. Even if you don't have a telescope, your help is sorely needed (besides, we can provide extra telescopes). As in the past, Astronomy Day will take place at the Owens Science Center.

Unfortunately, circumstances did not permit offering an astronomy class during the past year. I hope it will be a top priority to offer a class in the spring. We need an instructor! The planetarium at the Science Center will be made available (complete with an operator, namely me). If you are interested in teaching the class, please talk to me.

We can look forward to many interesting astronomical events in the coming year. The big question is, will Jupiter still bear the scars of the comet impact when it reappears?

Finally, please consider serving as a club officer in 1995. Elections will be coming up soon, and it gives you an opportunity to be a leader.

Happy Holidays!

Russ Waugh
President