

OBSERVATIONS

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE CHESTER COUNTY ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 1994

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▲ acting president, edwin lurcott ▲ acting vice president tim ryan ▲ acting treasurer steven lurcott

Meeting Notes

The next meeting of the Chester County Astronomical Society will be on February 8, 1994 from 7:30 to 9:00 PM at the planetarium room of the Schmucker Science Center at West Chester University. Schmucker Science Center is located at the corner of Church Street and Rosedale Avenue in West Chester, PA. The following meeting will be held on March 8, 1994.

Old Business

The January meeting of the Society was held at the planetarium room of the Schmucker Science Center at West Chester University. The meeting was surprisingly well attended in spite of bad road conditions. Ed Lurcott showed two video tapes of the total solar eclipse of July 11, 1991. The video contains the entire eclipse, viewable in a comfortable amount of time thanks to the wonders of time lapse photography. The second video was from an associate of Ed's (William Hathaway of Baltimore) taken of the astronomers on hand to watch the eclipse and their impressions immediately afterwards.

New Business

The guest speaker at the February meeting will be Guy McCann who is pursuing a Masters degree in Physical Science at West Chester. His talk is entitled "Sir John Herschel and the Birth of Celestial Photography". Many of us know Sir John Herschel as a great astronomer of the early 1800's. He also pioneered some of the photographic chemical procedures still in use today. This presentation will be particularly interesting to our resident astrophotographers.

A contest is being planned to come up with an appropriate logo the Society can use on membership cards, stationary, etc. To all those graphic designers out there, get busy! Prizes and deadlines will be announced at a later date.

April 16, 1994 has been designated Astronomy Day by the Astronomical League. This represents a good opportunity to increase both the Society's profile and membership. We would like to get some volunteers to set up a display in one of the local shopping malls. Contact Ed Lurcott if you have any ideas or would like to participate.

In The News

Hubble Update Part II - Capping an 11 day mission in mid-December, astronauts from the shuttle *Endeavor* successfully completed repairs on the orbiting telescope. The astronauts attached a telephone-booth sized corrective optics package dubbed COSTAR (Corrective Optics Space Telescope Axial Replacement). The COSTAR module is expected to restore most of the telescope's optical capabilities. NASA scientists are now in the midst of a 13 week test and calibration period in order to ensure the optics and other refurbishing work.

The news is less good for the Mars Observer spacecraft. Using the scant evidence available, mission planners suspect that the craft experienced a "massive rupture of propulsion system tubing due to a highly energetic chemical reaction". In nontechnical terms, the craft experienced an on-board explosion when attempting orbital insertion at Mars. Although still believed to be in space orbiting the Sun, the craft is apparently in a "catastrophic spin", unable to reacquire its signal lock with Earth, and probably tearing a few extended components off. Diligent observers at NASA concluded that these events would "render the spacecraft useless". Oh, mission price tag: \$900,000,000 (for those of you who pay taxes and underwrote this fiasco).

Worth Seeing

The evening sky for February and March are planet poor. You may glimpse Mercury in the SW immediately after sunset in the first week of February. Understandably, Mercury is a particularly challenging subject. Jupiter rises in the SE at about local midnight, but is viewable until dawn.

The Orion Nebula (M42) continues to be the brightest deep sky object at this time. However, there are a number of other clusters (M36, M37, M38) which are all easily visible with binoculars.

Alpha Gemini is more challenging and will require a telescope to see the two major components of this 465 year period binary. They are presently separated by 3 arc-seconds.

The companion galaxies M81 & M82 are rising in the NE in Ursa Major. They have a magnitude of 6.8 and 8.4 respectively. Locate them by drawing a line from gamma UMA to alpha UMA and extending it an equal distance NW past alpha UMA. Both can be seen in the same low power eyepiece. They are reported to be 11 million light years distant.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Chester County Astronomical Society was formed to provide a local organization dedicated to promote an interest in Astronomy through meetings, discussions, speaker programs. Observations with a variety of telescopes. All individuals with an interest are encouraged to join. There are a variety of membership plans available. Please note that these initial membership rates do not include a subscription in Sky and Telescope. As membership grows, we hope to incorporate a subscription to this publication with each membership. If anyone is interested in membership, contact Edwin Lurcott at (610) 436-0387. and active

- Regular \$20/year
- Student \$15/year
- Junior \$10/year (18 years or younger)
- Family \$30/year

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO OBSERVATIONS

Members are welcome and encouraged to contribute articles to OBSERVATIONS. The deadline for the March edition is February 22, 1994. Contributions should be sent to:

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Every effort will be made for the timely inclusion of submitted articles.