

The River Ridge Observer

The newsletter of the *Central Arkansas Astronomical Society*

FEBRUARY 2011

Welcome to the February edition of **The River Ridge Observer**. This newsletter is meant to give you the latest and greatest news and information about CAAS and its members.

“CONSTELLATION HUNTER” AT FEBRUARY 12TH GENERAL MEETING

Please join CAAS at its February 2011 meeting on February 12th at 7 p.m. in the classroom on the grounds of the River Ridge Observatory. Please email info@caasastro.org if you need the link and password to the directions. After a short business meeting, Rocky Togni will make a presentation entitled “Constellation Hunter.”

Knowing the sky gives us a great deal of personal satisfaction and is an area often neglected when people are starting out in Astronomy. Telescopes, astrophotography, deep sky viewing, planetary and Lunar viewing are some of the exciting areas that people initially want to learn more about. Before the advent of all this technology came constellations with its mythologies, stories and characters. The movement of the planets, moon, and sun against this unchangeable background was studied by many civilizations. Our program will deal with some constellation history, a method to start learning the constellations, starting the Constellation Hunter Observing Award by The Astronomical League, and the latest Stellarium updates.

Weather permitting we will adjourn to observing field for fun and fellowship under the stars where we can test out our constellation spotting skills!

CAAS BOARD TO MEET AT FEBRUARY 12TH, 6 P.M.

The first meeting of the year for the CAAS Board of Directors is scheduled for February 12th, 6 p.m. in the classroom at the River Ridge Observatory (RRO). All CAAS members are welcome to attend the Board meeting, but only Board members are eligible to vote on motions before the Board. The general topic of the meeting will be River Ridge Observatory grounds security and visitor safety with the aim of establishing a policy on who may access to the RRO grounds and buildings during non-meeting or event dates and how members may achieve observatory status. Also, the Board will appoint members to the Observatory Committee under the leadership of Vice-President Eric Walker in the capacity as Observatory Chair. The Observatory Committee will likely be called on to develop future RRO grounds policy and make recommendations for maintenance and upgrades. If you are interested in serving on the Observatory Committee please email President Jim Fisher at jrfisher7@gmail.com

WELCOME NEW MEMBER ROBERT BROWN

Well, sorta new. Robert is an old friend of CAAS having been active back in the days when we were known as MARS. Welcome home, Robert!

MSRAL CON 2011/ MULBERRY MOUNTAIN STAR PARTY

The Mid-States Region of The Astronomical League (MSRAL) will hold its annual convention in conjunction with the fourth annual Mulberry Mountain Star Party on Friday, May 20 and Saturday May 21, 2011. The event location is the Mulberry Mountain Lodging and Events (MML&E) resort north of Ozark, Arkansas, on Arkansas Highway 23 (I-40 exit 35) - the world renowned "Pig Trail Scenic Byway." Located in the heart of the Ozark National Forest, MML&E boasts some of the darkest skies in Arkansas. MML&E also offers cabins, pull-through RV sites, and improved tent camp sites with water, electricity and showers. Virtually unlimited primitive campsites are also available with limited water and electricity, with no shower hookups. MML&E's website is at: <http://www.mulberrymountainlodge.com> You may also contact MML&E by phone at 800-667-1919 or 479-667-1919 or email at mulberrymountain@aol.com for further information or to make reservations. Other lodging options are found in relatively nearby Ozark (20 minutes), Clarksville (40 mins.), and Van Buren (40 mins.).

Our friends at Arkansas – Oklahoma Astronomical Society are hosting the event, but they are counting on our assistance and support. If you are either interesting in presenting a paper to the conference attendees or volunteering your time in assisting with planning the event or working during the event itself, please send an email to AOAS President Dave Grosvold at dgrosvold@aoas.org and to Jim Fisher at jrfisher7@gmail.com.

ASTEROID OCCULTATION – MARCH 11TH

On the night of March 5 there will be an occultation of an 11.0 magnitude star by 14.6 magnitude Asteroid (877) Walkure. The path of the occultation passes just south of Little Rock. Paul Maley with the NASA Johnson Space Center Astronomical Society, Houston TX, has asked for our assistance in his attempt to video the occultation. Paul is seeking someone with a Celestron 8 or equivalent scope to which to attach a low light video system in order to try to videotape the event and a place to observe the event. The event occurs at 11.17.21pm on March 5 with the target star at elevation 72, azimuth 141. Star charts can be found (along with other details) at: http://www.asteroidoccultation.com/2011_03/0306_877_23549.htm We may plan a formal get together for anyone with large aperture equipment.

VOLAUNTEES NEEDED FOR SCIENCE OLYMPIAD – APRIL 16TH

UALR is hosting the 2011 Arkansas Science Olympiad tournament on April 16, 2011. The Science Olympiad is a completion among K -12 grade students with the goal of improving the quality of science education, increasing male, female and minority interest in science, creating a technologically-literate workforce and providing recognition for outstanding achievement by both students and teachers. Dr. Eric R. Kaufmann, the State Director for the Science Olympiad, asked for our assistance with two of this year's Olympiad's events; "Astronomy" and "Solar System." Dr. Kaufmann is seeking 2 to 4 CAAS members to help write the tests and supervise these portions of the competition. Dr. Kaufmann will supply examples of the tests from past completions. This is a great opportunity for us to let the greater science community know about CASS and to help promote astronomy to our future scientists. Please contact Dr. Kaufmann at erkaufmann@ualr.edu with a copy to Jim Fisher at jrfisher7@gmail.com if you would like to volunteer.

FEBRUARY 2011 OBSERVING HIGHLIGHTS

All month – Saturn is in the east in the late evening and begins the month at magnitude +0.7 and rises to magnitude +0.5 by the month's end. Brilliant Venus rules the pre-dawn sky at magnitude – 4.3 fading somewhat to magnitude -4.1 by the end of the month.

Feb 4th – New Moon

Feb 6th – Jupiter is left of the crescent moon in the west just after sunset.

Feb 11th – First Quarter Moon

Feb 18th – Full Moon

Feb 20th – Saturn and Moon together after 11 p.m.

Feb 24th – Last-Quarter Moon

Feb 28th and 29th – Waning crescent Moon and Venus are together in the pre-dawn eastern sky.

MY FIELD OF VIEW - BACK TO BASICS

Although it was not “new” news to those of us in astronomy circles, the media recently made a huge story out of the fact that the astrological zodiac, in addition to being skewed by the wobble of the earth's axis, now contains a 13th constellation: Ophiuchus. I have known for some time that the ecliptic – what astrologers call the zodiac - passes through Ophiuchus in addition to the “classic” 12 zodiac constellations. But I was more than unprepared when someone asked me where in the sky Ophiuchus resides. Nor did I recall the mythology behind the constellation. (For the record, Ophiuchus resides just to the east of Sagittarius and directly above the scorpion's head of Scorpius and below Hercules. In mythology Ophiuchus was the serpent bearer. The brightest star in the constellation is Ras Alhague which shines at an unimpressive magnitude 2.08+ .).

At least once a public star party I am asked to point out a guest's astrological sign constellation. If it is an evening object, I am more than happy to oblige. Although the person's motivation maybe based upon a misplaced faith in *astrology*, their impression of *astronomy* may change for the better when they actually see “their” constellation. We also get frequent requests to point out other “old friends” such as Orion, the Big and Little Dippers, and the North Star. At a recent Woolly Hollow State Park star party I pointed some less conspicuous constellations to a young couple and happened upon Delphinus, the Dolphin. The woman was suddenly thrilled by the sight. Turned out her name is Delphine and she had no idea she had a namesake in the heavens.

So it is time to put away the Sky Scouts and turn off our GoTo's and really learn the night sky. It is what got us into astronomy in the first place.

Clear, dark skies! - *Jim Fisher*