

THE RIVER RIDGE OBSERVER

The newsletter of the *Central Arkansas Astronomical Society*

JULY - AUGUST 2011

Welcome to the July – August 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.

PARTY UNDER THE STARS WITH CAAS!

The 2011 Star Party season is in full swing! This Saturday evening, July 30th, CAAS invades beautiful Woolly Hollow State Park, under dark skies near Greenbrier, Arkansas, for the park's Summer Star Party. This is typically one of our most popular and widely attended events of the year. The fun starts just before sunset and runs until 11 p.m. Clouds permitting we will have outstanding views of Saturn, the Summer constellations and Milky Way, galaxies, star clusters and double stars. Then on August 20th 9-11 p.m., we return to Pinnacle Mountain State Park for our last star party of the summer.

No one is under qualified to be star party volunteer. A star chart and sharing your passion for the night sky with the guests is all it takes. Come join the fun!

“OBSERVING METEORS” AT THE AUGUST 13TH CAAS MEETING

Please join CAAS at its August 2011 meeting on August 13th 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 and Bill Sanders will make a presentation on “Observing Meteors.”

Rocky and Bill will discuss how to observe meteors including when and techniques to see the most, how to record your observations so that they are technically valuable, and where to submit them. They will also present a short history of meteor observing, how to draw meteor trails, and earning the Astronomical League Meteor Award.

Rocky also recently visited the Meteor Crater in Arizona and will give a report on his visit.

Clouds permitting we will adjourn to the observing field for fun and fellowship under the Full Moon and possibly a Perseid meteor or two! We hope to see you there!

YOUR ASTRONOMY CLUB NEEDS YOU!

CAAS is a small organization with a big mission - to connect the people of central Arkansas with their universe! Despite our “astronomically” large mission, CAAS is run entirely by volunteers. Here are two great opportunity for you to serve CAAS. First, on the afternoon September 10th at 3 p.m., we will have a grounds and building clean-up day. We will get the grounds ready for the busy Fall observing season and give the buildings some much needed TLC. After the clean-up and before the meeting, we will have a “Star”-B-Que on the grounds. Also, this fall the Nominating Committee will meet to determine next year's leadership for CAAS. If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors or as an officer in 2012, please speak with President Jim Fisher, Past President Carolaina Ferren, or Vice President Eric Walker, who are the members of this year's Nominating Committee.

UPCOMING CAAS EVENTS

- July 30th - Star Party at Woolly Hollow State Park, 9 - 11 p.m.
August 13th – CAAS General Meeting, River Ridge Observatory, 7 p.m.
August 20th - Star Party at Pinnacle Mountain State Park, 9 - 11 p.m.
September 10th - River Ridge Observatory grounds and buildings clean-up & BBQ, 3 p.m.
September 10th - CAAS General Meeting, River Ridge Observatory, 7 p.m.
September 17th - Star Party at Pinnacle Mountain State Park, 8 - 10 p.m.
October 1st - Star Party at Pinnacle Mountain State Park, 8 - 10 p.m.
October 8th - CAAS Board of Directors Meeting, River Ridge Observatory, 6 p.m.
October 8th - CAAS General Meeting, River Ridge Observatory, 7 p.m.
October 29th - Star Party at Woolly Hollow State Park, 8 - 10 p.m.
November 12th - CAAS General Meeting, River Ridge Observatory, 7 p.m.
December 10th – CAAS Annual Meeting, location and time TBA

LATE JULY – AUGUST OBSERVING HIGHLIGHTS

- July 29th – Delta Aquarid Meteor Shower
July 30th – New Moon
August 1st – Mercury 1.5 degree north of the Moon
August 6th – First Quarter Moon
August 13th – Perseid Meteor Shower and Full Moon
August 20th – Jupiter 5 degrees south of the Moon
August 21st – Last Quarter Moon
August 22nd – Neptune at opposition
August 25th – Mars 3 degrees north of the Moon
August 27th – Mercury 3 degree north of the Moon
August 28th – New Moon
August 31st – Saturn 7 degrees north of the Moon



Photo by John Reed

2011 MSRAL CONFERENCE A "SOGGY" SUCCESS

The 2011 conference of Mid States Region of the Astronomical League (MSRAL) was held at the Mulberry Mountain Resort near Ozark, AR, May 20th and 21st, under clouds and sometimes heavy rain. Although the clouds washed out the planned coinciding 4th annual Mulberry Mountain Star Party, spirits were high and mostly dry during the MSRAL daylight gatherings. Fifty plus AL members from around the region gathered at the scenic Ozark Mountains retreat to hear addresses on variable star observing, astrophotography, the life and work of Gerard Kuiper, and responding to myths and misconceptions about astronomy.

Veteran planetaria director, college astronomy instructor, science writer and blogger, and Arkansas native Larry Sessions traveled from Denver, Colorado to deliver the outstanding key note address "Cosmic Questions: Dealing with Myths and Misconceptions." Mr. Sessions' very entertaining speech covered topics such as how to address common misconceptions that the general public have about astronomy and space and how to respond to pseudo-sciences such as UFO-ology and astrology. Mr. Sessions said he prefers the title "Cosmic awareness facilitator" to "amateur astronomer" to accurately describe our role when engaging the public.

Featured speaker Dr. Derek Sears, W. M. Keck Professor of Space and Planetary Sciences, University of Arkansas, presented a fascinating biographical sketch on planetary science pioneer Gerard Kuiper. Professor Sear's presentation was entitled "Gerard Kuiper and the Origins of Modern Planetary Sciences." Professor Sears reported that Dutch born and American citizen Kuiper made many significant planetary discoveries and proffered important theories on the make-up the solar system. Kuiper discovered Uranus's satellite Miranda and Neptune's satellite Nereid. In addition, he discovered carbon dioxide in the atmosphere of Mars and the existence of methane in the atmosphere of Titan. However, Kuiper is best known for his theory that outer solar system contains the foundation materials of the comets. Hence today the region of space beyond the orbit of Neptune is named in his honor as the "Kuiper Belt."

A trio of CAAS's home grown talent rounded out the event. Rocky Togni, who is also the AL Variable Star Observing Club Coordinator, started the morning session off with an excellent program on how to observe variable stars. John Reed followed with an informative, hands-on presentation on wide field astro-photography using an off-the-shelf digital single lens camera. John has quickly established himself as one of the region's top astro-imagers. His presentation showed both his finest work and his tricks of the trade of digitally processing wide field astro-images. Jim Fisher made a "pinch hit" presentation on Saturday evening not because of a speaker cancellation, but because of the star party wash-out. During his fascinating presentation of the lives and careers of Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler called "CSI: Uraniborg!", Mr. Fisher reported on the ongoing investigation into the possibility that Kepler killed his mentor Tycho. Mr. Fisher presentation was based on the book Heavenly Intrigue: Johannes Kepler, Tycho Brahe, and the Murder Behind One of History's Greatest Scientific Discoveries by Joshua Gilder and Anne-Lee Gilder.

Near the close of the conference the indomitable Cook Feldman of St. Louis Astronomical Society (SLAS) was named the Mid States Region "Amateur Astronomer of the Year." This award recognizes one MSRAL astronomer for outstanding accomplishments and service. Mr. Eric Balcom of the Omaha Astronomical Society and last year's recipient presented this year's honor to Mr. Feldman. Mr. Feldman recognition as astronomer of the year is well deserved. He has logged more than 280 hours of public outreach service since 2007. He said that he participates in up to 50 SLAS star parties, meetings, and programs per year! In

addition, Mr. Feldman has been awarded numerous AL observing awards and is an accomplished telescope maker. He is also a founding member of the St. Louis Science Center monthly telescope viewing sessions.

The 2011 MSRAL conference was hosted by the AOAS with the assistance of CAAS. AOAS President (and CAAS member!) Dave Grosvold admirably served as the conference chair. Other highlights of the conference included the Saturday evening "Starless"-B-Q and a near endless stream of awesome, unique and valuable door prizes that were accumulated by AOAS member Leonard Lynch. Despite the disappointing clouds, the conference amenities and the southern hospitality could not have been better!



"Ursa M." was itching for clear skies!



Key note speaker Larry Sessions



Dr. Derek Sears addressing the 2011 MSRAL Conference

Article and photos by Jim Fisher