Clear Sky Virus

President's Message

I took my mount out of its travel cases and set it up in my living room. I wanted to tune up a couple things and then take it outside on a clear night to calibrate the auto-guider. That was almost two months ago. Still it sits in my living room, waiting for that clear night. If this keeps up we may not be able to do astronomy, but at least we’ll have a very nice local rainforest to explore.

Next week is our first, and hopefully annual, trip up to the dark skies of Dummer, NH for a little star party.

Great Northern Moose Lodge

With family members included, it looks like about 20 of us are going and the extended forecast is clear, but with afternoon thunderstorms possible. Are your fingers crossed?

Finally, we have a real treat scheduled for the meeting this Friday. Our evening presentation will be on recent discoveries in the outer solar system, given by none other than Dr. Brian Marsden of the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Dr. Marsden is the director of the IAU Minor Planet Center and ran the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams for over 30 years. Rumor has it that given any two observations of an object; Dr. Marsden can calculate the orbital parameters in his head :). See you there!

Matthew Marulla
NHAS President 2006

Highlights for this Month

The radio astronomy group did another field trip. Read about it on Page 4. We also have a comprehensive report on the New England Astro Imaging Conference (NEIC) on Page 2. This event occurs just before the NEAF event that several NHAS members attended.

I have a friend who has a background in civil engineering and he shared me a story while working with a long time geologist. He explained that Hoover Dam will eventually collapse. Might be 1000 years from now, but it will collapse. What does this have to do with Astronomy you may ask? The answer to both questions is “perseverance”. Water is persistent so eventually it will win. Just like some of our brave Astrophotography buffs that have managed to get some great shots even with the horrible weather. Read about it on page 3

Rich DeMidio
NHAS Secretary 2006

Clear Sky Virus

Have you noticed your spouse or significant other complaining lately? Questioning you on why you seem crabby or irritable. Have your work colleagues been avoiding you or keeping their distance? Have you felt recently like you have been back in the 60’s with monotone and no color? Have you just felt plain down in the dumps?

Well, take notice since these can be all symptoms of the Clear Sky Virus, which has been circulating rapidly over the past few months in New England. Since this virus has attacked us, I have managed to observe once and that was from my deck with the Pronto. I am challenged to find another time in which this virus caused as much disruption in recent time. What makes it worse is that the Sun will come out at times during the day teasing us, but then sure enough it clouds over again at night. So, to lighten things up I thought it might be fun to list my top 10 symptoms on whether you are suffering from the Clear Sky Virus.

1). You are applying on the web to various sky watch events over the next year across the country
2). You are looking at real estate ads in the desert southwest
3). You have cleaned the optics on your telescope
4). You have purchased more magazines or books
5). You have dusted your telescope
6). You have upgraded accessories for your scope or have built them yourself
7). You are looking at all the latest telescope advertising and considering a purchase
8). You have cleaned your eyepieces
9). Your wildlife photography has vastly improved
10). You are applying on the web to purchase

And the number one reason to tell that you are suffering from this virus.

You have already purchased or are considering a subscription to

www.slooh.com

There is no formal cure that I am ware of relating to medicine. What I can tell you is that the best cure is sunshine and clear skies at night. The virus will lose its punch at the first sign of sunshine and rapidly departs on two consecutive clear sky nights.

Rich DeMidio

On the web at http://www.nhastro.com/
NEAIC

Editor’s Note: This article is a report from the recent New England Astro Imaging Conference. The author of this article Tom Cocchiaro provided all the pictures. Those who missed the first New England Astro Imaging Conference lost out on a chance to rub elbows with some of the giants in the field who were as good onstage as they are behind the camera. Not only did they provide a special insight into their motivation and technique, they also hung around for the two days to talk to the more than 150 enthusiasts, including myself, who wanted to learn even more from this first-ever gathering of star shooters.

Before joining NHASstro, I thought I was going to have to mortgage the house to get the equipment necessary to produce show-stopping images. After the NEAIC conference, and seeing what the veterans are using, I feel more hopeful about getting those images on a modest budget. In fact, Reeves, a Dennis Weaveresque Texan from San Antonio (and author of several books on traditional and digital astrophotography) has been using the same Celestron 8-inch and Nikon equipment for some 20 years.

As a newcomer to the hobby, I felt especially fortunate to hear stories of the “old days” when the equipment was hand-guided and good results came only after hours, days and sometimes years striving to capture a subject in just the right way. I feel fortunate to live in a time where an astrophotographer can plan a session, and with the right equipment, put everything on “autopilot,” eliminating the drudge work and making more time for creative interpretation and discovery.

Astrophotographer and Author Don Parker, talks about the finer points of planetary imaging and post processing using K3 CCD Tools

During his entertaining presentation, he talked about being a “day late and a dollar short” in being the discoverer of Jupiter’s second emerging “red spot.” Said he got beat out by just a couple of hours. I was impressed by slide after slide of formulas he used to mix and match a careful balance of magnification, camera resolution and telescope to get the most out of an image. And the Ron Dantowicz show, well, let’s just say you had to be there. Part showman, part scientist, part technician, part educator, he showed you why video was the only way to go in imaging deep sky objects—and some shallow sky objects like the International Space Station. Yeah, he pointed a 10-watt “death ray” green laser at the orbiting streak to lock imagers on the target for some of the sharpest ground-based pictures of the station ever taken. And he lives in our back yard. I think we should try to get him to the planetarium some time for his entertaining program, or take a field trip to his observatory at The Clay Center in Brookline, Mass.

And if you use AIP4Windows you missed a chance to talk to the creators Jim Burnell and Richard Berry. The duo spent an hour providing an insider’s view of the most current version of their software, which provides just about every feature you’d want, in an affordable package, to get every last usable pixel out of a photo session—and at 16-bit resolution.

I also learned that astrophotography is more about the post processing than it is about taking the actual picture, not to say that pointing, aligning, focusing and waiting out good seeing conditions
Ending his presentation, Rob Gendler demonstrates the power of Adobe Photoshop with a cartoon.

As a longtime photographer and photojournalist, I have always been good at pre-visualizing an image, and orchestrating light, positioning and timing to put me at the place I believe “the” image is going to happen. In astrophotography the image is never at the eyepiece given the human limitations of our seeing, but in the mind which sees beyond that faint gray fuzzy—through a truckload of filters, drive motors, OTAs, CCDs, software, and how-to books—to that finished work of art. Art that has been teased out of near nothingness into a spectacular vision of the heavens. In the military, we called the process behind technology-driven wonders “FM” (not frequency modulation). I think it’s more like alchemy—getting gold from lead.

From the feedback the organizers received after the NEAIC, the program will likely be offered again next year, so if you’re interested in astrophotography mark your calendars now for two days of inspiring presentations on astroimaging immediately preceding the NEAF event.

I recorded audio at most all the sessions. If anyone is interested in getting a CD copy of the presentations in mp3 or .wav format, and some photos from the conference, just shoot me an email at tomcocchiaro@comcast.net.

Tom Cocchiaro

Astro Photons

Gardner Gerry – Photo by Chase McNiss

I have no formal report as we have not had a meeting at YFOS due to the uncooperative weather. However, that has not stopped several folks from sneaking in some time with pictures at odd hours so enjoy what follows.

Gardner Gerry

It stopped raining!! Huzzah! Jupiter has been calling for quite some time, and now that it is past opposition, the weather finally cleared up enough last night to grab a few frames.

5/28. I went to YFOS last night. The seeing wasn’t that good but it was clear and there was good transparency. I revisited the Swan and Dumbbell at 800 ISO as well as some globulars and M64 (still have some work to do).

These are from stacks of 5 min frames. For higher resolution images go to last page at:
http://community.webshots.com/album/230997590rTvFLv

Both images are the same with some slight mods to the post-processing phase to show different details.

John Blackwell

I need to revisit this one and get some longer exposures to pick up the spiral structure around the core but here’s what I got so far.

Swan Nebula - Photo by Herb Bubert

Dumbell Nebula, Photo by Herb Bubert

M64, Photo by Herb Bubert

Blogs extracted by Rich DeMidio
Antenna by Bob Sletton

Editor’s Note: I was unable to attend the tour, so I am including the pictures provided by Dave Weaver. Is there a technical reason related to signal acquisition on why the dish is enclosed?

On May 27th, the radio astronomy group went on another field trip, this time to Haystack Mountain Observatory. Our own Phil Shute arranged for the tour in which several NHAS members attended. The group received a briefing and then a tour of the facility.

Before the tour, Phil provided a briefing to the attendees regarding the configurations.

The view of the telescope from within the dome.

The sub-reflector and dish front-surface.

Group picture taken under the edge of the dish.

Recall from previous articles that the facility was recently acquired by the US Air Force and utilizes both Radar and Astronomy mode capabilities.

Location of site: Myles Standish Forest, S Carver MA US (Lat 42N, Elev 5m)
Site classification: Exurban
Sky darkness: 6.5 <Limiting magnitude>
Seeing: 6 <1-10 Seeing Scale (10 best)>
Moon presence: None - moon not in sky
Instrument: 8x25 handheld binoculars
Magnification: 8x
Filter(s): None.
Object(s): M39
Category: Open cluster.
Class: III 2 p/III 2 m
Constellation: Cyg
Data: mag 4.6 6.83m*; size 32'
Position: 2132.2 +4827
Description:
Taking a break from observation with Steve Clougherty's fine 17.5" dob, I swept the lovely Milky Way north of the Swan's tail tonight with John Bishop's fine little 8x25 binoculars. Quite by accident, I happened on this little fuzzy, and realized it was M39... Rarely does M39 hold much interest for deep-sky observers as it is sparse and essentially lost in bright field stars. But tonight, with this tiny aperture, it stood out quite intriguingly in the field, showing a very nice (if tiny) assortment of resolved pinpoints, amid a clumpy haze of unresolved stars. Worth a look in small binoculars!

* Lew Gramer

Deep Sky Object of the Month

Observer: Lew Gramer
Your skills: Intermediate (some years)
Date/time of observation: 19 June 2001 00:30 Local
Paul showed the scope in its packaging along with its 20mm Kellner eyepiece, TV mount adapter (extra), the tuner and focuser. Paul noted that although it is only a 40mm scope it shows granulation and prominences very well. Paul noted that for only $500 it is a good way to get into solar Hydrogen-Alpha observing.

Public Observing. No report

Book of the Month. None

Committees. Photo Club Gardner

Gerry noted that the weather has been the primary reason the Photo Committee has not met in the month of May and with the last weekend being the Memorial Day weekend that will probably not meet this month. Gardner commented that the committee will meet and plan to fine tune the Titan mount at YFOS using the drift alignment method. Gardner also noted that there have been some requests from the membership to have a beginner’s course in Astro Photography. Gardner noted that Dave Weaver has volunteered to help with the program, which is expected to happen some time in the fall of this year. Web: Matthew Marulla no report. ATMs: Don Ware reported that the ATM Committee has not been active. YFOS Chase McNiss noted that with all the recent rain the mud season has surely returned to YFOS Membership: Bob Sletten commented that the Membership Committee is still looking for a new leader.

Miscellaneous. Mike Townsend gave a report regarding his attendance to the Northeast Astronomy Forum that took place in Suffern the same weekend as the CMP Astronomy Day. Mike reported that there were numerous new vendors at the show and there was plenty of new equipment to drool over. Mike noted that he went to the show with Todd Miller and Chase McNiss who both reported that the speaker agenda was also very educational and entertaining.

A-Day Feedback. Paul Winalski reported that A-Day actually took place over 2 days. Paul reported that the skywatch that took place the Friday evening before the Saturday festivities was well attended with at least 75 people. Paul reported that prior to darkness setting in they were entertained by a brass band and that once darkness set in the skies were clear and steady. It was overall, a good session. Paul reported that on Saturday the weather was drizzly and cloudy. Paul reported that we had a good location with more traffic than we have had in the last few years. Paul reported that he got in a little bit of lunar observing with his 14” dob, “Mt. T” Paul also reported that there was a climbing wall close by and it brought a lot of people past the NHAS area.

A member in attendance asked if there were any comments or suggestions regarding this years A-Day event. One member commented that they were disappointed by the lack of effort by many of the members in attendance to interacts aggressively with the public and take the time and effort to engage the public. The same member commented that many of the members grouped together and talked amongst themselves. Another member commented that they were disappointed by the low number of t-shirts sold and wondered if the design was the reason the shirts did not sell. Another member commented that they did not think the sales were poor because of design but had to do with the poor initiative of the members in attendance. One member commented that they were ashamed by the lack of enthusiasm of the astronomers and the poor overall organization of the activities.

Scope of the Month. Paul Winalski brought in his new Coronado PST Solar Scope. Paul denied that all the recent rain was his fault, even though he has only logged about 15 minute’s usage on the scope. Paul and Joyce Icaza mentioned that they have recently purchased the same scope and if there was any blame they would be willing to share it.

Donations None

File Photo of VP. John Bishop

Looking Back at Last Month

Editor’s Note: My thanks to Chase McNiss who graciously volunteered to take notes at the last business meeting since I was unable to attend.

Opening. Matt Marulla was not in attendance for the meeting; so VP John Bishop led the meeting. John commented that he was using a less technical presentation medium, specifically the overhead projector.

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The NHAS Observer
New Boston: Dave Weaver
commented that while looking over the
New Boston town website he noticed
that the tracking station was holding
and environmental meeting and was
inviting town residents to attend. Dave
stated that he attended the meeting and
then got Mike Pellitier to contact the
tracking station and was glad to report
that Mike will be meeting with
representatives from the tracking
station in the next week.

Evening Program. No report

Member Blogs

May 28th. A friend was visiting and we
decided to use Jean's Orion 6 inch Dob
and my pronto on my deck since it was
nice and cool and no bugs. Conditions
were good but my neighbor had their
light on so that messed up things a bit. I
must say how impressed I am with the
Orion products given their cost. Very
happy I got that scope for Jean as her
starter scope.

I started off looking at Jupiter and
ended up looking at it for quite a while.
Conditions were quite good and I was
easily able to see the North and South
bands. Now I looked again and again to
verify but I swear that I saw the red
spot on the south band (inverted on this
scope it would have been on the top). I
said nothing to my friend Jeremy and
when he looked at it he also commented
about its presence. I used my 12mm
Lanthanum eyepiece for viewing. The
four moons were visible but one was
about to go behind the planet.

Was able to see M13 and M92 easily
and even M57. Was able to make out
the shape of M57. Both 13 and 92
resolved individual stars. At this point,
I let my friend Jeremy take the helm
and he had a ball with the scope. I setup
my Pronto and did some double star
hunting from Sky and Telescope
articles. Was able to resolve several in
Lyra and Hercules. I also found a very
red star in Lyra which could be "T
Lyra" which I believe is a carbon star. I
have to look on my map to verify but
can also show folks when we are
together again.

Albireo was beautiful as usual and was
looking in the M39 region of Cygnus. I
also found the globulars in Ophiuchus
but cannot remember their names. Have
to look those up as well. Most of time, I
was just panning with my 32mm Plossl
finding several doubles and small
clusters.

The clouds rolled in from the East (very
wierd) just before midnight so I packed
it in. Hoping to go to YFOS Sunday if
others decide to go.

© Rich DeMidio

May was not at all kind to astronomy:
weather! Arg 🙁 Here is an image
showing the school observatory
masquerading as a beach! We were
within one vertical foot of being
flooded.
New Hampshire Astronomical Society
P.O. Box 5823
Manchester, NH 03108-5823

2006 Officers
President: Mathew Marulla
Vice President: John Bishop
Treasurer: Chase McNiss
Secretary: Richard DeMidio

Recent discoveries in the outer solar system

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