

SPECTRUM

Northern Cross Science Foundation Newsletter

December 2007

LOOKING UP

December 6 Thursday

General Meeting

No Astronomy 101

7:30 p.m. Business Meeting/
Holiday party

December 20 Thursday

Board Meeting

7:30 p.m.

Home of Jeff & Becca Setzer

January 3 Thursday

General Meeting

No Astronomy 101

7:30 p.m. Business Meeting

January 5 Saturday

Candlelight Hike/Ski

6:00—9:00 p.m.

Harrington Beach State Park

January 7 Monday

NCRAL Planning Meeting

7:00 p.m.

Home of Jeff & Becca Setzer

January 12 Saturday

Mars Opposition Viewing

8—11 p.m.

Harrington Beach State Park

February 2 Saturday

Candlelight Hike/Ski

6:00—9:00 p.m.

Harrington Beach State Park

Deep Sky Objects Book Review

By Justin Modra

The Christmas Tree open cluster isn't in any of my observing logs yet, but David Levy's book *Deep Sky Objects, The best and brightest from four decades of comet chasing* makes it seem like I've already appreciated its beauty. NGC2264 (L159) is a naked eye object, observable from suburban skies in the late winter months. "And binoculars or a small telescope will reveal the spectacle from virtually any location," Levy writes.

This book represents a unique combination of comet masqueraders, personal anecdotes, practical observing tips, historical notes and modern astronomical science. Levy provides 338 targets in the both the northern and southern hemispheres. Some of these are common Messier objects, like the Orion Nebula. However, a new perspective is provided on even this object. Observing the variable stars in the Orion Nebula is given the heading of "A Cosmic Reality Show." I was surprised when Levy wrote that he studied this nebula for three years and watched the new stars in this nebula vary in brightness, some within five or ten minutes!

Other objects in the Levy list are esoteric northern hemisphere NGC objects like the Helix Nebula, which requires a very dark sky. Additional objects described are common southern hemisphere targets like the huge globular cluster Omega Centauri. Either way, I have a list of new objects to check out the next time I get to a dark sky site – or a trip to Australia. And Levy weaves the history of their discovery with his own personal "discovery" of another comet masquerader.

This book has comprehensive star charts,

tables and an index. Amateur and professional photographs are also included for almost every object. The organization of the book is also unique – objects are cataloged by their distance from earth. This is helpful for anyone who has been asked the question, "how far can you see with that telescope?" My only grudge is the lack of sketches and finder-scope views, which are common in other observing guides. In conclusion, I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys looking at the night sky.

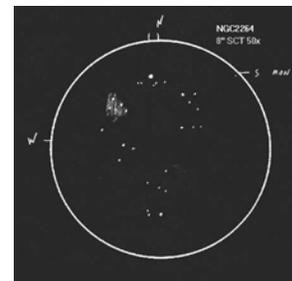
Deep Sky Objects, The best and brightest from four decades of comet chasing

by David H. Levy

ISBN 1591023610

Published by Prometheus Books

Amherst, NY



NGC 2264

Sketch courtesy of John A. Blackwell.

<http://www.regulusastro.com/regulus/sketches/>

November Meeting Minutes

By Kevin Bert

The November business meeting of the Northern Cross Science Foundation was held at the Unitarian Church North in Mequon. Vice President Joyce Jentges opened the meeting at 7:40 pm and welcomed 19 members and guests. She then asked for standard reports.

Treasurer Gene DuPree reported only standard transactions.

Secretary Kevin Bert had nothing to report.

Under old business Kevin said that the Observatory sign would be painted and up soon. He noted that Gene DuPree did a great job making it.

Under new business Joyce explained that three board members terms had run out and that nominations would be open for those positions. Nominees had the option to run or to decline to run if they were present. Of the 4

names that were nominated, Rick Poulin declined to run, Al Steinberg and Gene DuPree agreed to run. Rick Kazmierski was nominated and was not present to respond. With no more names given, nominations were closed. They will be opened at the start of the next meeting just prior to the election.

No Observatory operators had volunteered for the last scheduled members night slated for November 10th. Kevin Bert offered the possibility of canceling the members night and making the 9th and 10th a public viewing night to focus on the bright naked eye comet Holmes. Kevin said he would lead the Saturday night and look for someone to lead the Friday night. The offer was welcomed by the membership. Kevin said that a school group of 50 would attend on the evening of Saturday the 10th and extra help would be needed.

January 11 & 12 Mars viewing nights were also added along with a Saturn viewing on March 7 & 8. All start times would be announced for 8:00 pm. Gene DuPree noted the Harrington Beach Candlelight ski & hike nights on January 5th and February 2nd offered possible outreach & viewing opportunities too. Pike Lake State Park also has their event on the second Saturday in February. With no further new business, Joyce closed the business meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kevin Bert, secretary

December Things to See

By Don Miles

Mercury: Not visible (behind the sun).

Venus: Is the brightest "star" in the southeast rising about 2am. Moves to from Virgo into Libra by months end.

Jupiter: Not visible (behind the sun).

Mars: Rises before 9pm early in the month, but by about 6pm later in the month. Look for Mars at towards the NW twin of Gemini and moves towards Auriga thru the month.

Uranus & Neptune: Still good viewing this month. Best viewed after evening twilight, but will set by about 10pm early in the month, but by around 9pm later in the month. Look for Uranus in Eastern Aquarius, and Neptune in Eastern Capricornus. Use a finder chart and a small telescope or even steadily held binoculars for Uranus. (One place for the finder charts for Neptune & Uranus is the July 2007

Issue of *Sky & Telescope* magazine (page 60). If you would be interested in a copy of this chart, please contact a board member, or ask at the next meeting).

Saturn: Saturn is still below and to the left of Regulus (the bottom star of the "backwards question mark" that forms the head of Leo. Rises about 12:30am early in the month, but by about 10:30pm late in the month.

Moon:

December 1st: Last Quarter
December 9th: New Moon
December 17th: First Quarter
December 23rd: Full Moon

Notes:

Watch for Comet Tuttle in Cassiopeia late in the month. Specula-

tion is that it may reach naked-eye brightness.

Watch for the Geminid meteor shower the thru the night of the 13th into the morning of the 14th, with the following night being after peak, but still worth watching. Predicted rates at peak (early Thursday a.m.) are 1/min. Remember...the darker skies the better, dress warmer than you think you need, get comfortable, enjoy.



December Meeting

By Joyce Jentges

The December meeting is the one meeting we are required to have during the year. The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. Nominations for the Board of Directions will be opened again, then elections will take place to fill 3 positions on the board. After the meeting is over, we will have a holiday party. Drinks will be supplied. We ask that everyone bring a dish to pass. Some suggestions are dips, appetizers, cookies, cakes, a hot dish, cheese/sausage platter. It's always nice to have more

Public Viewing Night Report

By Kevin Bert

November 10th Public Viewing night follow-up

Weather was not cooperating and an overcast sky ruled the early evening. A school group of fifty 5th graders from Salam School in Milwaukee were scheduled to arrive by bus at 7:00 pm if clear or cloudy. Don Miles was the scheduled assistant and agreed to entertain half the group under the roof with a star chart hand-out and talk while I gave a telescope talk next to the Panarusky with the other half. We would later switch groups and repeat the talks. Gene DuPree and Scott Nehring assisted me with the telescope talk in the ob-

servatory. Tony Marek gave support where needed. As we neared finishing the talks more and more stars appeared and we all scrambled to get objects in the scopes. Don and Gene had lines of students next to their scopes outside the observatory while I was at the ladder of the Panarusky. Over the next hour every student had a chance to view Comet Holmes and some of the more popular sky objects through breaks in the clouds. The general consensus after the bus left was that the kids were a bit on the wild side, but overall things went ok. I was glad I had the help that I did because I earlier told other volunteers

than just desserts. For the program, Jeff Setzer has a DVD on Kitt Peak that explains the history of the observatory. Those who are interested can watch that.

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CURRENT CLACK

New Members:

Thomas Hudson of Port Washington, Terrence K. Knudsen of Bayside, and Marvin B. Olson of Milwaukee.

Public Viewing for Planetary Oppositions

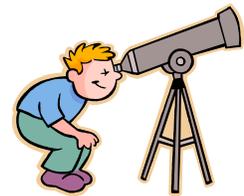
January 12th—8—11 p.m. Mars Opposition

March 8 8—11 p.m. Saturn Opposition

For Sale:

2008 Astronomy Calendars—while supplies last—\$7.00 See Gene DuPree if interested.

that they did not need to come because of the poor weather and slim chance of viewing with a telescope. Other than the 5th graders, no one from the general public came out to the event. By 9:30 everyone was packed up and heading home.



From the Editor

By Joyce Jentges

It's the final month of the year. Hard to believe that 2007 has flown by so swiftly.

I would like to thank Rick Poulin, Gene DuPree and Rob Powell for their service to the board of directors over the past three years. These days when there is so much going on, it is hard to find people who want to get involved, so we are grateful when people do step forward to answer a need we have. Elections will take place at the December meeting. If you have an interest in directing the fu-

ture of our group, please consider becoming a candidate.

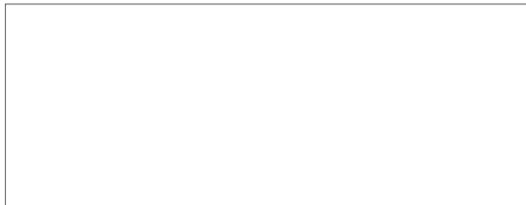
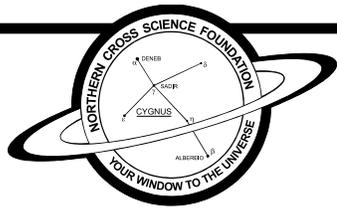
As is our tradition, it is the end of the year, so that means there is a Due's Invoice enclosed in your newsletter. Those of you who have joined the club at some point during 2007, you do not need to renew now. A dues invoice will be sent to you when your membership expires. Please see Gene DuPree at the meeting to pay your dues, or you can send it to him

via the mail. His address is on the back cover.

On behalf of the board of directors, I would like to wish you and your family a happy and safe holiday season. Wishing you clear skies in 2008!



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Monthly Meeting Location
Unitarian Church North
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Mequon, WI 53097

Crystalline Winter Nights

By Jack Kraemer

Reprinted from <http://www.lcas-astronomy.org/>

November and December commonly are the cloudiest months in the Midwest, but January and February sometimes redeem themselves with several crystal clear nights that are great for deep sky observing. To a large extent, these nights are a result of less water vapor in the air, which then minimizes the scattering of light -- both light pollution and the light from deep sky objects. Weathermen refer to the clarity of the atmosphere as "turbidity". The amount of water vapor in the air is sometimes described in terms of the depth of water that would result if the vapor in the Earth's atmosphere were to be condensed into liquid water. Since cold air cannot hold as much water as warm air, the vapor content is lowest on cold, dry winter nights and highest on hot, humid summer nights. On winter nights, the atmosphere often contains less than 0.05 inch of water, while a humid summer night may average 2.5 inches. The vapor present on a humid summer night often steadies the atmosphere and improves the view of bright, extended objects, such as planets. In the winter, we often remark about the bright stars. While they are intrinsically bright and are physically nearer to us, a dry, cold night really does make them appear all the more brilliant.

SPECTRUM

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<http://www.ncsf.info>



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