



VIA STELLARIS

The Monthly Newsletter of the Von Braun Astronomical Society

VBAS Highlights

Public Programs for March

Our next society meeting will be held on Friday, Mar 19th at 7 PM. VBAS Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7 PM; they're open to the public and are free.

Regular planetarium programs are held on Saturdays at 7:30 PM. This month, we explore the Constellations Cancer and Leo with shows on March 6, 13, and 27th. On March 20th we'll have a special show to explain: "Why Does the date of Easter Keeps Moving". Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, \$5.00 for Adults, \$3.00 for Students, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes will follow planetarium program, weather permitting.

Calendar of Events

On page 2, See what's cooking at VBAS including a Messier Marathon for the next three months in a row.

The Night Sky for March

On page 3, see what's up!

Swanson Observatory Progress Report

On page 4, Progress continues to restore the 21 inch telescope to operational status.

Stellar Events for Feb, March

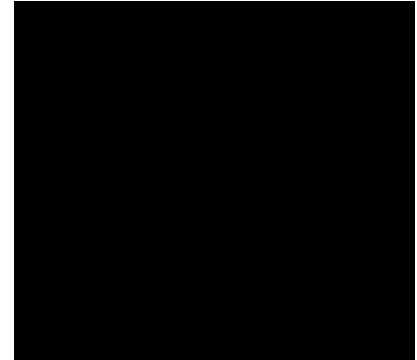
On page 5, Doug Horacek reports on this month's astronomical events

Star Count Underway (Mar 3 to 16th)

On page 5, Globe At Night 2010 global star count.

If you have some astrophotos that you'd like to share, we'd be happy to use them to jazz up the newsletter a little bit.

Richard Norman
Via Stellaris Editor
astrodude@mchsi.com



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Calendar of Events

March and April 2010

Saturday, March 6th, 13th, 27th 2010, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: *Star of Wonder*

Location: VBAS

Join us for a family-friendly program as we explore the Constellations LEO, and Cancer. Weather permitting, we will be viewing the night sky afterwards through powerful telescopes, too.

Saturday, March 20th, 2010, 7:30PM

Planetarium Show: "Why Does the Date for Easter Keep Moving"

Location: VBAS

Join us for a family-friendly program to learn about the Easter Holiday and how it relates to astronomy. Weather permitting, we will be viewing the night sky afterwards through powerful telescopes, too.

Friday, March 12th, 2010, 7:30 PM - 10 PM

Youth and Adult Observing Night

Location: VBAS

Presented by David Lofts and Doug Horacek

Beginning at 7:30, there will be a planetarium presentation on the Constellation Orion by David Lofts and Doug Horacek, followed by observing time to get one last look at the Great Orion Nebula before it fades into West until next fall. Adults can arrive before 7:30 to set up their scopes if needed. David will assist both young and old beginners finding their around the sky, and some of our adult observers will have their telescopes to look through to observe and demonstrate their equipment to the youth. Call David Lofts at 726-0275 or Doug Horacek at 772-6788 for more information.

Friday, March 19th, 2010, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

Location: VBAS

After a short pizza social we'll discuss pertinent society business before moving on to our program. Visitors are welcome!

Saturday, April 3rd, 10, 17, and 24th, 2010, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Constellations

Southern Skies Fall and Winter

Location: VBAS

Join us for a family-friendly program as we explore the universe one constellation at a time. Ever wonder what the night sky looks like this time of year in the Southern Hemisphere? This program will be interesting and fun for all ages. Weather permitting, we will be viewing the night sky afterwards through powerful telescopes, too.

Friday, April 16th, 2010, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

Location: VBAS

After a short pizza social we'll discuss pertinent society business before moving on to our program. Visitors are welcome!

March 19th, April 16th, & May 14th, 2010, 7 PM

Messier Marathon Observing Nights

Location: VBAS

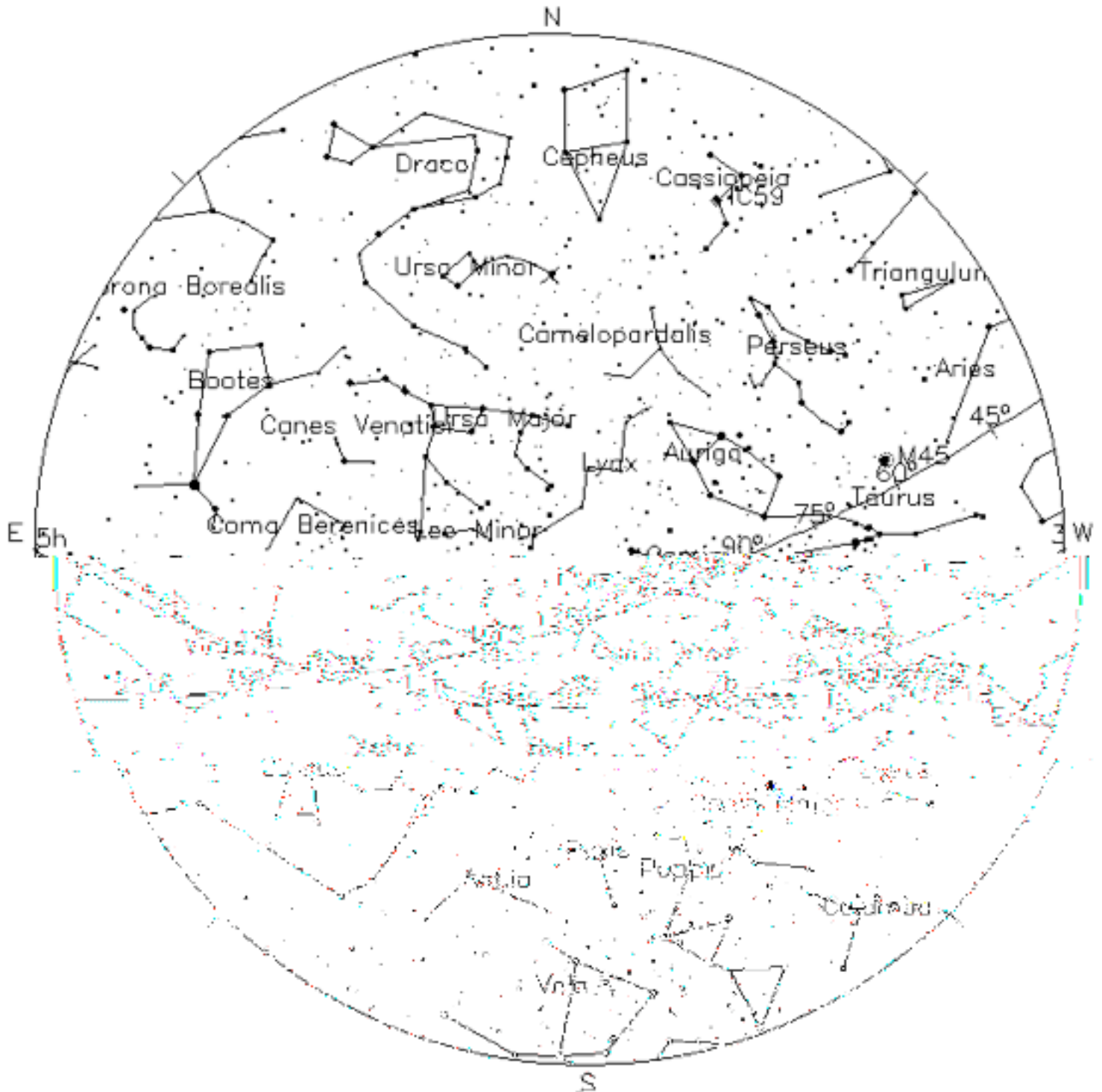
This year we will try the Messier Marathon 3 months in a row. March and April, events will be the same evening as the Society Meeting and May is the same as Youth and Adult Observing evening.

...And as always, for the most up-to-date information about VBAS events, be sure to check the web site at vbas.org.

The Night Sky for March, 2010

Here is the view at 9 PM in March 9, 2010, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude.

Map courtesy of John Walker and YourSky (<http://www.fourmilab.to/yoursky/>).



Progress Continues for Swanson 21 inch

by Richard Norman

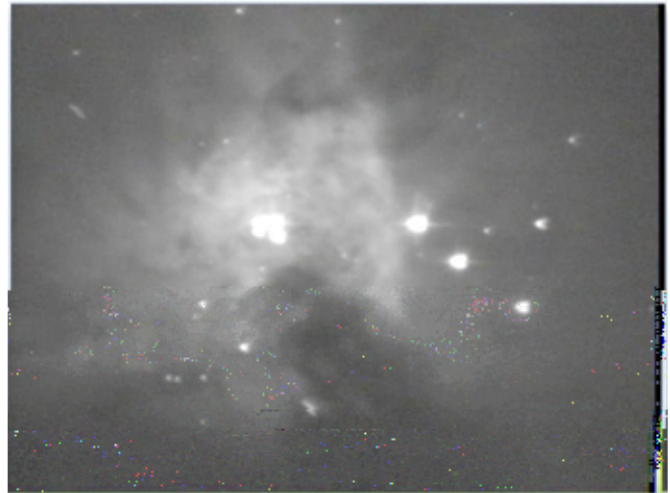
Although the cold and rain have slowed things down, progress is still being made. We have had a couple more successful observing sessions and have been able to image down to about Mag 16 so far with the stellacam. More tuning work is needed on the scope alignment and movement. It tracks well, but when slewing it usually needs to be resynchronized after long moves to get better pointing accuracy. Still it is plenty good enough to find objects. We have imaged Copeland's septet, and Hickson Compact Group 31. The focuser has a lot of play in it and will have to be replaced in order to improve collimation and allow remote focusing of the camera.

Lars Werner and Mimo Demartino have fine tuned the new cable to open the dome doors. It is working a lot smoother now, but in warmer weather we may install a fresh cable since this one got nicked a few times while trying different things.

Mimo has added a LED light to the back of the secondary mirror. With a flip of a switch in the control room we can illuminate the dome opening long enough to realign it with the scope. These little details make operations more smooth, but take time to implement.

We have added a splitter and cable to allow the computer monitor to be shown split screen with the telescope image on the wide screen monitor in the lobby. This will allow us to provide visitors with more information on the object being viewed. There is still more work to be done routing cables and figuring out how to get the most out of the cameras. If you would like to get involved, contact Jeff Delmas.

Expect to see more images in upcoming news letters as we get time to process them.



Raw video image of M42, Orion Nebula from the Swanson 21" using a Stellacam II Notice the two geosynchronous satellite streaks (upper left and bottom center).
Nov 25, 2009



New WideScreen Monitor for the Swanson Lobby installed during a work party by (left to right) Richard Norman, Mimo Demartino, Doug Horacek, and Jeff Delmas. Photo by Jared Cassidy.

Stellar Events for March 2010

by Doug Horacek

1st: Saturn is 8 degrees to the left of a waning gibbous Moon just past full

3rd: Spica is 4 to 6 degrees above the waning gibbous Moon.

7th: Antares is 4 to 6 degrees to the right of the last quarter Moon. Last Quarter Moon occurs at 9:42 A.M.

13th: Early morning the Gamma Normid Meteor Shower peaks at rate of 8 meteors per hour. At 6:11PM CST the eta Virginid Meteor Shower peaks at 2 per hour, and is associated with comet D/1766 G1 (Hel-fenzrieder).

14th: SPRING AHEAD! Daylight Savings Time begins at 2:00 AM 14th of March.

15th: new moon occurs at 4:01PM CST

16-17th: Thin waxing crescent Moon will be to the lower right of Venus on the 16th and above Venus on the 17th.

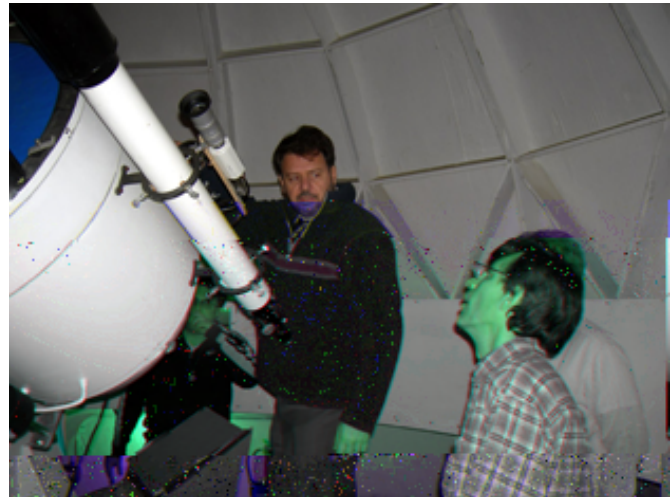
20th: the Pleiades will be close to a waxing crescent moon, closest approach will be 8:00 P.M. CST

21-22: Saturn will be at opposition.

23-25: the Moon passes beneath an arc formed by Mars, Pollux and Castor.

29th: Full Moon Occurs at 9:25 P.M. CST.

30th-to-April 6th: look for Mercury 30 to 45 minutes after sunset 3 to 4 degrees to the lower right of Venus.



Aligning Finder Camera on 21" Scope

Star Count Underway

by Richard Norman

The 2010 globe at night star count started March 3rd and runs until March 16th. Anyone can participate and you don't even have to have a telescope. Just find the Orion constellation and compare the number of stars that you can see from your location to the star charts at <http://www.globeatnight.org/> You can become a citizen scientist by filing your results at the same web site, and join folks from around the globe helping to map our levels of light pollution.

Contributions to Via Stellaris

We welcome contributions to our newsletter that may be of interest to the astronomical community. Contributions are best sent by email to Richard Norman at editor1@vbas.org.

Membership and Renewal

The VBAS currently has four categories of membership. All four include free admission to the planetarium shows; subscription to this newsletter; membership in the Astronomical League; and use of VBAS library and equipment. The four categories of membership, and the dues for each, are: REGULAR at \$24.00 per year, FAMILY at \$36.00 per year, STUDENT (must be full-time student) at \$12.00 per year, and LIFE at \$500.00. Newsletter Only is also available for \$12.00 per year. Membership renewal occurs for all members annually on March 1st.

All VBAS memberships came up for renewal on March 1, 2010. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact a VBAS officer.

Please send your renewal to the Membership Secretary at VBAS, P.O. Box 1142, Huntsville, AL 35807. Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society.

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Via Stellaris



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| *Richard Norman, Via Stellaris editor*
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