

Observer Staff
Editor & Publisher:
Michael Frascinella

Contributors:
Larry Lopez, Barbara
O'Connell, Tim Printy,
Mike Stebbins, Ed Ting,
Jim Warena

The N H A S observer

Newsletter of the New Hampshire Astronomical Society

"All the news that fits in print"



Volume 2002 No. 4

April 2002

Telescopes in Review

President's Message

Being active in NHAS is very rewarding. Every one of us is learning and teaching astronomy and that is why we joined NHAS. At the April 19th business meeting, there will be another opportunity to share your knowledge with others members. We are asking for volunteers to bring in a telescope and give a 5-10 minute talk on it. We can take five volunteers (since we only have an hour).

Please contact me (via e-mail at president@nhastro.com) or any of the officers if you are interested.

Preferably, we'd like to schedule different kinds of telescopes. If we don't have enough time to let all the volunteers talk, we will consider doing it again in one of the following months.

Spring has finally sprung! The vernal equinox occurred on a cloudy March 20th. Luckily, we had fine weather for the Messier Marathon (great job hosting by Linda and Larry!). More events are on the horizon.

This year we have one Astronomy Day in April and one in May. NHAS will have exhibits at the Museum of Science (<http://www.mos.org>) Astronomy Day in Boston on April 20th. On May 4th, NHAS and Christa McAuliffe Planetarium (<http://www.starhop.com/>) join forces for a "Space Spectacular". Many of you have signed on as volunteers for one of these events. Bravo! I encourage other members to attend these events as part of the audience. It will be a day of fun for all!

Clear Skies,

★ Barbara O'Connell
NHAS President

Public Observing Highlights

The Messier Marathon on March 16 was well attended. I counted 28 people at one point, and when I left at midnight, there were still over half that number observing in the field. Many thanks to **Larry and Linda Lopez** for allowing NHAS to invade their home for an entire evening.

The CMP Equinox event on March 20th was snowed out. But 31 people braved the cold and snow for the Equinox show under the CMP dome.

★ Ed Ting

Comet Ikeya-Zhang

Recently discovered Comet Ikeya-Zhang is putting on quite a show for amateur astronomers and should continue to do so through April. The comet is moving through Andromeda in early April (passing near M31 on the 4th and 5th) and becomes a circumpolar object shortly thereafter.



As of this writing it is apparent the comet should be a naked eye object for at least the first half of the month and, since the comet is moving closer to the earth, it should have a significant tail for everyone to see. More information can be found on the web in the usual locations.

Prior to the moon interfering in mid-March, I took a few trips (March 11 and 14) out to the YFOS site where I managed to get some good observations of the comet and some photographs as well (shown here). The comet at the time was about magnitude +4 and sported a 5-10 degree ion tail with short dust tail.

(Cont'd p. 2)

Feature Story

Messier Marathon 2002.....Page 2

Comet (cont'd from p. 1)

The comet's ion tail and nucleus seems to be very active with many streamers and several disconnection events being seen of the past few weeks. My photographs on the evening of the 11th showed a major disconnection event towards the ion tail's end. By the end of March, the comet brightened to about +3 and from my suburban home in Manchester could make out a 2-3 degree long dust tail in my 7X50 binoculars. The ion tail was too washed out by city lights and moonlight. But I was able to readily see the comet's head with my naked eye.

The photos on page 1 were taken using a 200 mm F2.8 lens, Kodak Law Enforcement 400 film, and an exposure time of 8 minutes. As a bonus, the galaxy M74 is located in both images. I labeled it for those who might miss it. Comet Ikeya-Zhang has the makings to be an impressive little comet. Don't miss it!

★ Tim Printy

Messier Marathon Results

On Saturday March 16, **Linda** and **Larry Lopez** hosted the event at their house where it has been hosted for a number of years.

Ed Ting took charge of monitoring the weather reports. We had clear weather all night long. Some suggested a big payoff to Boston Meteorologist **Todd Gross**.

We had no snow on the observing field and the road was wonderful. Last year we needed 16 hours of snow blowing to get the observing field clear.

This year was a real trial for us as far as the donated food and munchies, since we are both on diets! And the spread was large and varied.



We counted about 28 people in attendance, and at one point five of them were asleep in the living room!

It should be clearly understood that not everyone stayed all night or was actually engaged in the Messier Marathon. We received the following observing reports that summarize the number of Messier objects observed:

Herb Bubert - 106 objects
 Bill Babineau - 104 objects
 Roger Greenwood - 101 objects
 Joe Dechene - 100 objects
 Chase McNiss - 93 objects
 Joe Derek - 92 objects
 Joel Harris - 75 objects
 Vignesh Srinivas - 68 objects
 Linda Lopez - 68 objects
 Mike Stebbins - 57 objects
 Rich DeMidio - 53 objects
 Larry Geary - 40 objects
 Michael Aramini - 28 objects
 John Scott McLean - 27 objects
 Barbara O'Connell - 25 objects
 Brian, Joyce, and Allison Icaza - 20 objects
 Larry Lopez - uncertain
 Ed and Cindy Dougherty - uncertain

Bob Sletten wrote that he spent a few hours that weekend with the 14-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain (on loan from Larry) that is installed at YFOS. He really liked the telescope. It was easy to

use and, at 14 inches, had plenty of light gathering power. He saw plenty of Messier Objects (but didn't keep count). Photos below are courtesy of Chase McNiss.

★ Larry Lopez

Astronomy Day 2002

CMP has announced their plans to have Astronomy Day from 2 p.m. - 9 p.m. on May 4th. The planetarium will be open earlier, and we will run our regular schedule of an 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. shows. This is later than we are used to, but they feel we all have a better chance to retain people through the afternoon break than in the past.

Our CMP liaison, **Tanja Diederich**, will meet with us at our April 19 meeting to talk about CMP activities on Astronomy Day.

★ Ed Ting

ATM True Grit

We will have an ATM meeting on Sunday April 7, 2002 at my house in New Boston at 1 p.m.. This will be the first meeting this year and will be subject to my road being passable.

★ Larry Lopez



NHAS Is Such a Deal

NHAS is cheap to join. A comparison of clubs in the area that list their annual membership dues on the web shows NHAS is the best deal around. Things are better in New Hampshire.

NHAS \$15

North Shore Amateur Astronomy

Club \$20

Astronomical Society of Northern New England \$25

Vermont Astronomical Society \$18

Boston Amateur Telescope Makers \$25

★ Mike Stebbins

YFOS

On March 30 the observing field was holding up pretty well. No telling if we'll have a mire or not. Be gentle. Joel Harris and Larry Lopez drift aligned the C14 scope in altitude. The YFOS 16-inch DOB is being taken offsite to replace altitude bearings with Teflon.

We may have a severe fire hazard this year if the drought continues. I'm looking for people who are interested in mowing. We've got to keep the grass down. If things get really bad we may need to ban ignition sources.

★ Larry Lopez

The Bottom Line

Bank balance: \$9,380

2002 members: 130

★ Jim Warendo

Looking Back at Last Month

Opening. Barbara O'Connell

reviewed items in the mail.

Book of the Month. none this month.

Scope of the Month. none this month.

Club scope is still with Barbara.

Committees. Web: Barbara discussed the new mailing list and would post explanations for all lists on the web site. ATMs: Larry Lopez said they would meet after Messier Marathon.

Astrophoto: Joe Malinowski reviewed past activities and Chase McNiss spoke of member interest in CCD imaging. A meeting on Sat. March 16 would try to identify a new chair and activities.

Membership - to be resumed; Bob Sletten was to provide a master member packet.

Public Observing. Ed Ting reviewed the past month's events. He would send out a final notice for Messier Marathon in the next week. After the two CMP

skywatches in March, public events should taper off.

YFOS. Larry Lopez said the site is clear but parking may be soft and muddy. He also talked about repairs to the club 16-inch Dob. Next he reviewed parking and food details for Messier Marathon. YFOS would be the backup site if his place was inaccessible.

Treasury. Jim Warendo reported a balance of \$9400 and 125 members. He also read a letter from Arizona member Mike Felong.

Astronomy Day. Ed Ting reviewed the events that needed staffing and asked for volunteers to sign up. Volunteers get free admission to the Planetarium show. Todd Miller offered to do the artwork for the t-shirt. The final design will be chosen at the April meeting.

Astronomy Day Boston. Mike Stebbins said they will do solar observing and provide the public with several hands-on exhibits. They plan on submitting a small budget.

Insight Technologies Field Trip.

Barbara O'Connell circulated a signup sheet. The visit to the optics lab will be during a work day at change of shifts (4 p.m.?).

Evening Program. Ed Ting explained that by some strange twist of circumstances, there is a short time period in late March when it is technically possible to see all 110 Messier objects. Some are big like the Pleiades and Orion nebula but 39 objects are galaxies.

Ed reviewed the difficult objects first, then those that are close enough to the North Pole to be visible all night.

Although Charles Messier discovered several comets (his primary interest), he is most remembered for the Nuisance objects that he cataloged.

Ed then proceeded to work through objects in groups. He recommended taking a break before midnight or else you might fall asleep.

The best scopes to use would be those with short focal length and



wider field of view. A chair is essential to extend your ability to observe. Dress warmly so the cold doesn't chill the bones. Bring binoculars to help find faint objects, and bring something to deal with dew on your optics.

In closing Ed suggested eating light snacks to avoid that sinking feeling, work from a list, and have fun.

★ Michael Frascinella

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E-mail your articles to the Editor. Phone if you have a late submission.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Notify the Treasurer. Include your full name and new street address. If changing an e-mail address, specify whether you want to add, modify, or delete an e-mail address.

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New Hampshire Astronomical Society
P.O. Box 1001
Manchester, NH 03105-1001

Telescopes in Review, CMP

NHAS Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Time	Location
CMP Skywatch	Apr. 5	7:30 p.m.	Planetarium, Concord, NH
ATM Meeting	Apr. 7	1:00 p.m.	Lopez Mirror Barn, New Boston, NH
Coffee House	Apr. 12	7:00 p.m.	YFOS
April meeting	Apr. 19	7:30 p.m.	Planetarium, Concord, NH
Astronomy Day	May 4	all day	Planetarium, Concord, NH
Coffee House	May 10	8:00 p.m.	YFOS
May meeting	May 17	7:30 p.m.	St. Anselm's College, Goffstown, NH