

PAS-Times



The newsletter of the Pontchartrain Astronomy Society
visit us online www.astronola.org

October 2020
Volume 61, Issue 10



Next PAS General Meeting
Friday, October 2nd - 7:30pm
Zoom meeting due to COVID-19

Identifying UFOs
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President's Message

By: Bill Johnson

Greetings! October is here, and it brings wonderful things with it. It's the first full month of Fall, and cooler weather is now very noticeable. The sky is full of wonderful things to observe. Mars is prominently in the sky and at opposition. As you remember several years ago, the last Mars opposition was highly anticipated, and let us down with massive dust storms. That's not the case this month, and I've seen wonderful pictures of Mars. Spend some time looking at our nearest neighboring planet. You will be well rewarded! The Constellation Cygnus the Swan is also directly overhead in the Milky Way, and delivers many wonderful objects to view. Two Open Star Clusters-M29 and M39, Dumbbell, Veil and Pelican Nebulas, as well as many other treats to satisfy your viewing efforts. Now if we can only get some clear skies to help us out.

I'll also mention that the Deep South Star Gaze is still a GO for November. Attendance is limited to meet the restrictions of Covid mandates. If you plan to attend, you need to get your registration in soon. Details also available on the PAS Web site. If you need a little time under the night skies, this is a great opportunity for you to do so.

Our next General meeting of the PAS will be on Friday, October 2nd at 7:30PM. We are still dealing with Covid. While the rest of the state has finally moved to Phase 3, we are still in Phase 2 in New Orleans. So we will continue to hold meetings via Zoom, until this changes. Zoom details will be on the PAS Website (Astronola.org) Forum. All are welcome and encouraged to attend our virtual meeting. I hope to see everyone there. We hope to meet live soon, but for now we Zoom.

Bill Johnson PAS president 2018-2020



Staring at the Milky Way in Trysil, Norway-a family wrapped up for a very cold winter! - photo courtesy Wikipedia user Timothy Boocock

Secretary's Report September 2020 General Meeting **By: Jeff Best**

16-members plus 1-guest were in attendance for our 5th virtual meeting

Bill Johnson opened the meeting at 7:32 pm, welcomed everyone

Held an open discussion on the following topics: StarLink, recent SpaceX launches, & impacts to astronomy

Jack Huerkamp shared a couple of photos showing Starlink Sats crossing the sky

SPMOS, our dark sky site, and the need to do some tree trimming

Annual Deep South Star Gaze - Scheduled to begin on Tuesday, November 10th and run to Sunday, November 15th
Several members are planning to attend this event at the White Horse Christian Retreat Camp in MS - Approx 2-hours away from the NOLA metro area - One of the very few star parties that have not been cancelled due to Covid
See our forum page for registration information - Jeff Best will also repost the link on Face Book

Some fun Targets this month are Mars, M15, & M2

John Martinez presented a discussion on the James Webb Space Telescope - October 2021 current planned launch date
European Space Agency to provide launch services aboard an Ariane-5 It is 3-times the size of Hubble and will have an orbit at the second Lagrange point (L2) approx 1-million miles from earth
See <https://jwst.nasa.gov/content/about/launch.html> for more information

Need more volunteers & topics for future meetings

October topic will be: Options for remote control of Nexstar mounts presented by Jeff Best

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:04 pm

Next Meeting – October 2nd - Will again be virtual so look for an invitation coming soon

Winter Stargazing Tips: Stay Warm and Cozy!

Some parts of the country feel as if the winter will never end. Massive snows, polar vortexes, arctic winds...it's almost enough to make you forget that a spring thaw will eventually arrive! One thing that is guaranteed to warm an astronomer's heart in these cold winter nights: the beautiful, sparkling skies!

Orion, Taurus, the Pleiades, Sirius, the Andromeda Galaxy, the Double Cluster in Perseus: these are just a few of the gorgeous sights that are at their peak in the winters of the Northern Hemisphere, not to mention the clockwork actions of the Moon and planets. But how can you observe and stay comfortable outside when the weather seems determined to turn you into a popsicle?

1. Layers are your friend!

You may already know this, but remember to wear multiple layers of clothes! A super warm coat won't help that much if all you are wearing underneath is a t-shirt. At the same time, moving around during your setup and observing may actually heat you up to an uncomfortable degree, so being able to peel off a sweater or overcoat would be very welcome.

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2. Warm, wool socks

Thick cozy socks are a must, especially as the night wears on. Your feet will thank you, especially if you are wearing good boots! Which brings us too...

3. Waterproof boots

You will want warm boots, and if there is snow, make sure your boots are also waterproof. Any water soaking through your shoes to your boots is a sure way to make your toes icy and prematurely end your observing.

4. Clear out your observing area

Is there snow on the ground where you usually set up? Bring a shovel and clear it out, even if there is just an inch or two of the white stuff. Your equipment and toes will thank you.

5. Blankets

Did you bring a blanket? Good. Even if you think you won't need one...you very well may want one after the first hour or so, especially if you are seated very still.

6. Gloves

Pack your gloves! Some astronomers prefer fingerless gloves that allow them to work on their instruments while outside, while others prefer combo mitten-gloves that allow you to flip the ends of the mittens off for fingerless glove access. Remember, you will be handling lots of cold metal as you set up your equipment in the cold so if you don't want your fingers going numb within minutes, gloves are a must!

7. Heat pads

Chemical heating pads are your friend. Stick these little beauties into your gloves and boots to stay warm. Some heating pads now offer rechargeable electrical heating-just make sure they are charged before you leave the house!

8. A big goofy hat and earmuffs

A hat with ear flaps? Big fuzzy earmuffs? You will definitely want these! While they may look a bit silly, you will be toasty inside, with nice warm ears rather than frigid lobes in danger of frostbite. Besides, you will be in the dark: who cares what you look like?

9. A warm thermos

A thermos full of your favorites warm liquid-hot chocolate, soup, coffee, tea- is your best friend during these long winter nights.

One final thing to remember: however cold you think you are, there is probably someone somewhere else who is in an even colder location...like, say, an amateur astronomer in Antarctica:



*Picture on right....
Karim Agabi bundled
up for some observing
in Antarctica*

Identifying UFOs

The planet Venus shining brightly right above the horizon. Venus shining bright and low has been reported many times as a UFO.

Do you think you have spotted a UFO? We have some tips to help you identify that unidentified light in the sky below. Many folks have spotted something in the sky that may not be able to easily explain at first, but careful consideration and investigation will often help you to both identify that mystery light and help you become a better stargazer. Venus is one of the most



confused objects in the sky, especially when it is low to the horizon, as it will be later this month. Sirius and Jupiter are also often reported as UFOs, as well as Mercury. When bright planets are in alignment near the horizon they can appear to be a formation of "strange lights"!

Other "UFOs" can be rocket launches, comets, military jets, weather balloons, sounding rockets, satellites, meteors and fireballs, experimental craft (if you are lucky) and odd clouds (such as lenticular clouds) and be confused, as well as artifacts from photographs that are actually lens flare or aberration. Remote control aircraft can also be confused for a UFO; in fact some models explicitly look like "flying saucers" just to make things tricky!

If you have a good description of the object, as well as the date and time, you may want to try using a planetarium software such as Stellarium to plot the sky at the indicated time and date.

We have a few more resources and tips courtesy of the fine folks at the North Colorado Astronomical Society:

If you saw the mystery object long after sunset it is less likely that the sun would have illuminated a weather balloon or unlit aircraft. Contact your local astronomy club and have the following information handy to help the more experienced observers identify the object:

1. Date and time of day.
2. How long did you observe this object?
3. How long did it take to travel along its path?
4. Any apparent drift of the object? If so, what direction ? What speed did it travel?
(eg, 10 min to go from straight up to 30degrees from vertical)?
5. How did the brightness compare to the brightest stars (i f in twilight)? Did its brightness vary?
6. Where were you when you saw this object?



An example of an experimental rocket test over Scandinavia which triggered reports of UFOS in 2009.

If you're an amateur astronomer, you are probably asked about aliens and UFOs quite a bit. Many of us have been observing Venus when a call or message comes through, asking us, "What is that bright light in the southwest?" Or folks see something unusual and ask you what the strange light in the sky was. It is easy to be dismissive with these reports, but it is very important to be respectful. In fact, if you have looked at the sky for any length of time you too have likely seen things that you couldn't readily identify, at least not right away. Use this opportunity to turn their curiosity into a new hobby!

So, how do you identify UFOs when asked? Be polite and patient. If the "UFO" is visible and the person inquiring is there in person, you can turn your telescope on the object to reveal the truth! The star Fomalhaut, visible in the Northern Hemisphere low in the south for only a couple of months out of the year in an otherwise sparse section of the sky, can be reported as a UFO as well. This often does not happen, of course. Be aware of recent meteor showers, as well as common phenomena in your area. If you're not sure, it's likely someone in your club can help.

With these tips, you are now well-armed to help turn a report of an UFO into an IFO (Identified Flying Object!) Your visitor may be disappointed that you didn't see any alien space ships, but their knowledge of the wonders of the night sky will be magnificently increased!

Upcoming Events

PAS General Meeting Friday, October 2nd. Virtual online due to COVID-19

Deep South Stargaze November 10th-15th, 2020 - Camp Whitehorse

Visit the PAS website and forum for COVID-19 info, virtual meeting information and outreach updates....

www.astronola.org

On the Cover

Image of a classic saucer-shaped lenticular cloud from Damascus, Syria.

On the Back Cover

Constellation Orion from Urania's Mirror - A View of the Heaven

The PAS is a proud member of these organizations:



PAS 2020

General Meetings

ZOOM

October 2

Picnic TBA

November 6

December 4

Holiday Party

November 2020 PAS-Times Deadline

Sunday, October 25th
Please submit all things astronomical to be included in the next edition of PAS-Times to the editor at the following address:
pas2vp@astronola.org

2020 Membership Renewal Form
Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ St _____ ZIP _____

Home Phone* _____

Work Phone* _____

Occupation _____

E-mail Address _____

*Check here if you DO NOT want your phone numbers published.

Membership Dues:

(Calendar year per household) \$40.00 _____

(Calendar year per Student) \$20.00 _____

Optional Subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope \$32.95/yr \$65.95 two years

____ New ____ Renewal _____

Astronomy \$34.00/yr or \$60.00/2years

____ New ____ Renewal _____

Mailed Newsletter \$20.00/yr _____

SPMOS Key Deposit \$25 _____

Only pay this if you do not have a Dorm key and want to obtain one.

Optional Donation: _____ (Tax Deductible)

Total Amount: _____

(Make check payable to PAS)

Mail to:

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Members can also renew their membership and pay dues on the website. Here is the link: <http://astronola.org/join.php>

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The Pontchartrain Astronomy Society, Inc. is an organization of amateur astronomers representing the greater New Orleans area, southeastern Louisiana and adjacent parts of Mississippi. Our members come from many walks of life, and have a common interest in astronomy and observing the sky. The PAS aims to enhance the study and enjoyment of astronomy among our members, and to promote an understanding of astronomy in our local community.

The constellation Orion is host to the star know as U Ori.
This long period "Mira" variable reaches mag. 4.8 at maximum
and at minimum about 368 days later it dims to mag 13.0