

Astrophotography Section Report - 2014/15

Current status

The astrophotography section of ASSA has grown steadily over the past 12 months. Twenty seven active members who have submitted images to the ASSA image archive. Since the last report, they have collectively submitted 555 astronomical images.

At least one of the members has joined ASSA specifically because of his contributions to the Astrophotography Section.

We would like to welcome Neil Viljoen as our newest section specialist. He joins Dale Liebenberg, Brett du Preez, Hannes Pieterse, Jerome Jooste, Kos Coronaios, Martin Lyons, Gary Els in this role.

Recognition

Two members have been recognised outside of ASSA for their imaging:

Clyde Foster is a planetary imager working from the suburbs of Centurion, outside of Pretoria. He shares his images with several dedicated planetary observation networks. He has been credited with being the first observer on Earth to observe new dust storms on Mars, and has recently been monitoring atmospheric features on Saturn.

Richard Ford has been sharing his vast image collection with the British Astronomical Association, and recently had his image of the Omega Centauri Globular Cluster featured in their deep sky section's newsletter.

Congratulations and Well Done to both of them!

Collaborations

AP section members have been involved in several international collaborations over the past year.

The close encounter between Mars and Comet C/2013 A1 Siding Spring was a major event, leading Dr Padma Yanamandra-Fisher of the Space Science Institute (the same body responsible for the science operations of the Cassini probe currently exploring the Saturn system) to initiate a Professional/Amateur collaboration project to collect images of the comet for a period of about a month before, during and after the encounter. Observations were primarily received from Australasia, South Africa and South America. South Africa was primarily represented by Kos Coronaios and Allen Versfeld. Our efforts were covered in the international press.

An asteroid occultation was recorded using video equipment on 20 July 2014. Paul Maley of Eclipse Tours travelled to Culinan, outside Pretoria, to observe asteroid Patientia occulting a star with the help of local volunteers stationed at several observing locations and equipped with video cameras fitted to small telescopes. The event was written up for MNASSA, and the results were reported to IOTA (International Occultation Timing Association).

Finally, the section director has given talks on astrophotography, both at ScopeX in 2014 (where he moderated a discussion panel), and for the West Rand Astronomy Club, speaking to some of the top astrophotographers in the country.

Failures and Successes

Early last year, the section kicked off an email discussion group, and took over the running of the ASSA flickr account. The mailing list has had very poor engagement, with the last message being sent many months ago. Presumably it does not meet the needs of the South African astrophotography community, and will likely be disbanded soon. The flickr page serves as an image archive, and astrophotographers are encouraged to submit copies of their images – both good and bad! This has been a big success, and has attracted over a thousand images in a little over a year, from more than twenty contributors. Images from the archive are automatically displayed on the ASSA gallery page, organised by photographer. Several photographers have joined ASSA after being solicited to share their images with the archive, and the use of flickr to store the archive has put these images on display to an international audience who would never have visited the ASSA gallery page.

Awards

Clyde Foster (Observing Certificate) for his consistent high quality observations of the Moon and planets.