
ASSA: ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY SECTION ANNUAL REPORT (2015-2016)

MEMBER ACTIVITY

The astrophotography section continues to encourage the submission of photographic images of astronomical subjects, which are added to the ASSA image archive. This archive is hosted on Flickr, and the images within the archive are displayed on the ASSA website, under the Gallery, grouped by photographer and subject. We only accept submissions from South African photographers, or that were captured in South Africa. We do not require the photographer to be an ASSA member, nor do we refuse submissions based on quality, in line with the requirement that the section work to promote and encourage the art of astrophotography.

Submissions continue to improve, though, both in the number of regular contributors and the general quality of work. Richard Ford remains the top submitter by volume – by his own count, he has submitted almost a thousand images to the archive. His nearest competitor is Clyde Foster, who can be relied upon to provide consistently excellent planetary images, which he also shares with international collaborators to monitor Martian weather patterns.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION AT SCOPEX

The section director was on the judging panel of last year's astrophotography competition at ScopeX. The winning entry was a very impressive image, submitted by Neil Viljoen, printed on large format glossy paper. The quality of his work was so high, representing a considerable investment in equipment and time, that some questioned whether we should allow "Professional" images in an amateur contest. However, we decided to allow the entry and grant first prize for two reasons:

1. The rules of the competition make no distinction between "Professional" and "Amateur" images.
2. It was objectively the best entry by far

Hopefully the excellent quality of the winning image will raise the bar for the local astrophotography community and inspire us to raise our own standards.

ASTRONOMICAL VIDEOS

An ASSA YouTube channel has been created, which will serve to publish different kinds of relevant video content:

1. Time-lapse videos: examples include Martin Heigan's video of the recent Mercury transit, and the Section Director's videos demonstrating the rising and setting of constellations

2. Live Streamed videos: Starting with the September Eclipse, but hopefully extended to include
3. Presentations: Video recordings of talks given at Symposium, ScopeX, etc.
4. Educational videos (animations demonstrating how the inclination of the Earth's orbit leads to the seasons, for example).
5. Member submissions of Video Astrophotography work

WEBSITE

A new section has been added to Astrophotography Section page, to teach newcomers how to become an astrophotographer. The content of this section began life as a series of pages originally written for Urban Astronomer, but it will now be hosted on the ASSA website where it will be more useful in service to South Africa's growing astrophotography community.

PLANNED ACTIVITY

The section will be producing a guide on how to image the Sun, as part of ASSA's outreach program for the September solar eclipse, with a focus on photographing images produced by pinhole projection. The general public will be invited to share their photos, and we will publish a selection of the most noteworthy on the ASSA website.

AWARDS

The Director of the Astrophotography Section of the Astronomical Society of South Africa would like to award a Director's Observing Commendation to John Gill, for recently having completed a photographic survey of all objects on the ASSA Top 100 Deep Sky Objects list. The full set of these images will be added to the archive, on its own page.