



mnassa

Monthly Notes of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa
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assa news

Report of ASSA Council 2008/9

Laurie Simone, ASSA Secretary

The ASSA Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on Wednesday, 29 July 2009 at the Auditorium, SAAO, Cape Town where the following report was presented.

Membership (as on 9 July 2009)

Members	261
Honorary	15
New	20

In October 2008 Council received a letter of resignation from Dudley Field. Due to pressure of work it was impossible for him to continue as Membership Secretary. Council expresses their thanks and appreciation to Dudley for his services. Council is most appreciative with the help received from Lerika Cross, Margaret Kumalo and Peter Martinez for keeping the membership database up to date in the absence of a Membership Secretary.

Council Membership and appointees

A proposal was made and approved by Council to start a Cosmology Section. Frikkie de Bruyn from the Natal Midlands Centre was appointed as the Section Direc-

tor. To date, the section has 42 participants. Council thanks Frikkie for his time and effort for the successful implementation of this Section.

During the year Council received an application from John Saunders of the Hermanus Astronomical Club for it to become an ASSA Centre. All the requirements were met and the application was successful. Council congratulates and welcomes the Hermanus Centre to ASSA.

Gerrit Penning resigned his position as Web Master during the year. Council would like to thank Gerrit for his tremendous efforts in keeping the ASSA web site up to date and for all his contributions to the Society. Christian Hettlage was appointed to replace Gerrit Penning. Council welcomes Christian to this position. Christian adapted straight away and has also taken over responding to astronomical questions, much to the relief of the Secretary.

At the Council meeting of 23 June, Lucas Ferreira was officially nominated and ap-

proved as Section Director of the Double Star Section. He replaces Atze Herder who submitted his resignation at the beginning of the year.

MNASSA

At the meeting of 23 June an amount of R16 000 was approved by Council to update the software required for the publication of *MNASSA*. Council would like to thank Willie Koorts for his services as editor.

Sky Guide

Council would like to thank Anthony Jones for his services as editor of *Sky Guide*.

Sections of the ASSA

Council would like to thank all the Section Directors for their tremendous efforts. Their activities can be measured by the 26 recipients of awards for observations. Council thanks Magda Streicher for the design and printing of the awards of which some will be presented later on tonight.

Scholarship

Council would like to thank Maciej Soltynski and the Scholarship committee for their efforts.

Symposia

Council would like to congratulate the Durban and Midlands Centres in Kwa-Zulu Natal for a successful 8th symposium. The 9th symposium has been awarded to the Cape Centre to take place in 2010 on a date still to be determined.

ScopeX

Council would like to congratulate Lerika Cross, the Johannesburg Centre and participants for yet another successful ScopeX.

ASSA Website

The ASSA website is our window to the world and it became a focus of attention in Milan, Italy. An international parallax campaign to measure the distance to the Moon and Mars, submitted by Davide Cenadelli, University of Milan, Italy, to the European Journal of Physics has been accepted. Two members of the Garden Route centre, Lucas Ferreira and Case Rijdsdijk, were contributors to this paper. Council congratulates them on this exciting achievement.

Astronomy Starter Pack (ASP)

Due to work pressure Gerrit Penning has stopped the production and distribution of the ASP. Presently we are waiting for a decision from Durban Centre to see if they will not take on this function. Because of the popularity of the ASP, one way or the other we will need continuity with this project.

Acknowledgements

ASSA Council wishes to express their appreciation and thanks to the following people: Dr Peter Martinez for his contribution to Council as President for the past year, the SAAO for the use of the auditorium, Cliff Turk for his services with the busy port-folios as Treasurer and Business Manager and all Council Members for their contribution during the year.

Thanks and appreciation from Council to Lia Labuschagne and the Cape Centre for giving up their Wednesday night meeting to host the AGM for ASSA and to Karen Koch for arranging the tea and biscuits. Council would also like to thank the

Cape Centre and the members who assisted with the bi-monthly open nights. Last but not least, Council would like to thank all ASSA members for their contributions during the year, no matter how big or small. ☆

Report of the Comet and Meteor Section

TP Cooper, Director

Table 1 lists four meteor showers observed by six individuals, totalling 31.4 hours observations.

Table 1. Summary of observed meteor showers

Observer (no. of showers observed)	Showers Observed and duration	Total Time hrs
Tim Cooper (2)	Pi Puppids (1.0), eta Aquarids (8.5)	9.5
Dudley Field (3)	Alpha Crucids (2.1), Pi Puppids (3.1), alpha Capricornids (2.4)	7.6
Koos van Zyl (1)	Alpha Crucids (6.3)	6.3
Karen Koch (2)	Alpha Crucids (2.3), Alpha Centaurids (3.0)	5.3
Magda Streicher (1)	Eta Aquarids (2.2)	2.2
Kos Coronaios (1)	Alpha Centaurids (0.5)	0.5
Total		31.4

Notes on observed meteor showers

Alpha Crucids - Observed by Dudley Field, Koos van Zyl and Karen Koch. Koos observed up to 3/hr under limiting magnitude (LM)=5.8 skies on the morning of 20 January.

April Lyrids - Magda Streicher and Kos Coronaios observed from their northerly vantages. Magda observed best rates on the morning of 22 April, seeing 8 Lyrids in 2.3 hours under LM=5.9.

Pi Puppids - Tim Cooper observed despite poor conditions and a first quarter moon. During periods when cloud allowed observation the shower was found

to be inactive.

Eta Aquarids - Observed by Magda Streicher and Tim Cooper. Normal date of maximum was missed due to cloud. Best rates were observed of 19/hr on the morning of 7 May under LM=5.2 and 24/hr on the morning of 10 May under LM=6.2.

Summary of observed fireballs

2008 saw a total of 4 fireball reports. The full details have been submitted for publication in *MNASSA* as a separate article.

Summary of observed comets

Table 2 lists seven comets observed by six

individuals during 2008. In addition Simon Walsh provided observations of comets 1P and C/2007 E2 made in 2007 and not previously reported.

Table 2. Summary of observed comets

ICQ Observer Code	C/2006 Q1	C/2007 E2	C/2007 N3	C/2007 W1	C/2007 G1	2P	6P	8P	17P
SMI08	*		*	*	*				
WAL		*		*		*			
BEG01								*	*
COO02							*	*	
STR03								*	
CORxx				*					

Key to observers in Table:

BEG01 = Mike Begbie COO02 = Tim Cooper CORxx = Kos Coronaios
 SMI08 = Theo Smith STR03 = Magda Streicher WAL = Simon Walsh

Notes on specific comets observed

C/2006 Q1 McNaught - observed by Theo Smith in July at magnitude 12.

C/2007 E2 Lovejoy - observed by Simon Walsh in 2007

C/2007 G1 LINEAR - observed by Theo Smith in July at magnitude 12.

C/2007 N3 Lulin - observed by Theo Smith in July at magnitude 12.

C/2007 W1 Boattini - observed by Theo Smith, Kos Coronaios and Tim Cooper at magnitude 6 and imaged by Simon Walsh.

2P Encke - observed by Simon Walsh in 2007.

6P d'Arrest - was not observed visually but was CCD imaged by Tim Cooper at magnitude 11.

8P Tuttle - observed by Tim Cooper at magnitude 6.5-8 during January and February. The comet was observed and sketched by Magda Streicher in January.

17P Holmes - Mike Begbie continued to submit observations post-outburst of this comet from his more northerly vantage point in the UK. The comet was then too far north for observation from South Africa.

Summary of asteroid observations

Photometry was conducted by Chris Middleton on asteroid 352 Gisela on 5-6 June. Anna Marciniak has used his data to confirm a sidereal period of just over 7.48 hours for this asteroid.

All observers of comets and meteors are heartily thanked for their contributions. ☆

Report of the Dark Skies Section

Cliff Turk, Director

The Director apologises that there was no report last year due mainly to his own health problems which are now over.

During the extended period since the last report, Nigel Wakefield, our local officer in Natal, has been overseas where he met the Director of the British Campaign for Dark Skies and returned with several useful notes. These included four copies of Bob Mizon's book *Light Pollution*. One of these has since been passed to each of our local officers and to the library of SAAO which didn't have a copy.

We have now acquired a light meter for accurate measurement of sky brightnesses. Quantitative data can now be obtained and the measurements can be repeated in the future. In this way improvement or deterioration in the environment can be monitored. For more info on this meter, see <http://unihedron.com>.

The cost of the items in the above two paragraphs has been covered by funds raised from *SkyWalks* at Kirstenbosch,

organized jointly by the Dark Sky Section and the Cape Centre who share the proceeds of entrance fees and donations.

It has been noted that many street light fittings and those on railway platforms have been replaced with full cut off (FCO) luminaries as the old ones reached the end of their lives. Clearly, the problems of light pollution are being recognized by various authorities even though the general public has been slower to cotton on.

Carol Botha, an ASSA member from Bellville, has reported great success in her efforts to protect Betty's Bay from the effects of invasive light and she has had remarkable co-operation from the local Council. She is now following up on lighting (or the restriction of it) in parks in the Bellville area where the officials concerned are considering establishing dark "observing areas" in at least one park. Thank you Carol for these tremendous efforts – I know only too well how much time and effort it takes. ☆

Report of the Deep-sky Observing Section

Auke Slotegraaf, Director

It is a pleasure to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the Section in the year under review: Magda Streicher, Richard Ford and Gary Lillis.

Magda continues to be a stalwart of the Section. She and Jenni Kay of Australia are still collaborating on writing an observer's book of southern asterisms and open clusters. Richard Ford has submit-

ted regular reports of observations made mainly from the Cape, while Gary Lillis of Walmer (Port Elizabeth) has continued his observations for the “ASSA Top 100” project, including remarkable sketches with his notes.

Astrophotos of deep-sky objects were received from Oleg Toumilovich, Lucas Ferreira, Dany Duprez, Kos Coronaios, Zbig Zembaty, Dieter Willasch and Daan van der Merwe. These images have been indexed for inclusion in the proposed online database.

During the year under review, the *Deep-sky Explorer's Atlas* was produced, a set of 30 star-charts covering the sky visible from mid-southern latitudes. Stars down to magnitude 8.0 are shown as well as several thousand deep-sky objects. These charts are freely available for downloading (see www.psychohistorian.org) and the hope is that they will be useful to novice observers who have not invested in a good star atlas yet. Helpful comments during the design stage were received from Chris Stewart, Kos Coronaios, Gary Lillis and others.

Work continued on the digitization of old deep-sky publications, with selections being made for material not available in the NASA/SAO ADS database.

Several deep-sky articles were published on the Director's website, while the deep-sky observing tutorials continue to be downloaded frequently.

A great deal of effort has been put into the design of a comprehensive web-based database of deep-sky observations. It consists of two components: an astronomical database and software to manage it. The database lists 17 200 objects and over 32 000 observations and comments. As designed, the application software will allow observers to manage and plan their own observing sessions, record and share their observations, and obviously, access all available observations and comments on record. Think of it as a Google for deep-sky observing. Helpful advice regarding the design of the application was received from Magda Streicher and Chris Stewart, as well as several non-ASSA members. The writing of the software to drive the database has, however, been the bottleneck. The main culprit has been the Director's lack of expertise and time. After some discussion, it was decided to approach ASSA for funding to have the software professionally developed. Hopefully by the next AGM I will be able to report on the positive reception of this database amongst deep-sky observers here and internationally. ☆

Report of the Double Star Section

Lucas Ferreira, Director

Having just taken over the directorship of this section, I sadly have very little to report. Recently there has been little reported activity as those who have done some observations have sent them directly overseas.

serving double stars, i.e. digitally vs. micrometer

- make regular contributions to *MNASSA* and the local newsletter on observations or topics of interest

My immediate goal is to:

- identify those who are doing double star work
- inspire others to take an interest in observing double stars
- try and find other methods of ob-

I have updated the website and plan to enlarge the site in the coming months, as well as posting results and items of interest.

I sincerely hope that by this time next year I will be able to give members a more positive report. ☆

Report of the Education and Public Communication Section

Case Rijdsdijk, Director

General

Though the situation is much better than last year, it is still disappointing that the director has received so few details from Centres about their activities. Partial statistics have been received from several Centres. As mentioned on several occasions, the time will come when ASSA wants to start fund raising and, invariably, any proposals that are submitted to potential funders will be more favourably received if there is some evidence of public outreach, particularly amongst the educational community. It is known that all Centres have frequent activities and it is a mystery as to why information on these cannot simply be collected, kept and sent to the director in time for the annual report, or simply sent to the director as and when

they happen. Thank you to those who sent in details.

Last time it was suggested that a “form” be filled in and mailed back, but there was a “cyber” moan about bureaucracy! This year the director will send out a digital “form” to all Centres so that they can simply fill in the details and e-mail them back. Centre representatives, I will be mailing you the form for distribution – sorry about the extra work!

Activities

The **Cape Centre** has been very active and several successful public events were held. The International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) was launched at the SAAO and the Cape Centre was very involved

in that. As they do every year, they assist the SAAO staff with the monthly Open Nights, which this year, because of IYA2009, have become bimonthly! In addition, members have addressed organizations such as ProBus (PROfessional and BUSiness), U3A (University of the Third Age) as well as school groups, both at schools and at the MTN Sciencentre, with whom excellent relations exist. Several societies and schools were also visited and the Cederberg Observatory again hosted a number of school groups.

The **Johannesburg Centre** again organised ScopeX this year which was extremely successful with an attendance of well over 1 000 people. The evening session was particularly well supported. During the day, nearly 300 school children were bussed in and they attended an assortment of activities. Again the event was generously supported by SAASTA (South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement) and the Director of Science Awareness, Mr Shadrack Mkansi, presented the prizes for best photographs and for the best telescopes. In addition Auke Slotegraaf, ASSA Deep-sky director, and the EPC director were flown in to give assorted presentations and judge the astro-photography exhibition. Other activities included science demonstrations by Experilab and the SA Rocket Society. There were also exhibitions by book publishers and a wide variety of telescope distributors, camera, binocular and optical accessory manufacturers. In addition, the Centre has been very active in getting

many prominent speakers to address the Centre members and the public.

The **Pretoria Centre** has also had a good year addressing schools, ProBus, Rotary, school groups, Westrand Astronomy Club and various youth organizations, all of which have been well attended. In addition they have organized a number of out-of-town excursions to, amongst other places, Tswaing Crater and a Karoo Star party in Britstown. Details available in their Annual Report.

The **Garden Route Centre** (GRASSA) organized a viewing session in the George Botanical Gardens during the eclipse which was well attended and a display in the George Library to celebrate IYA2009. Good relations have been established with the SA Institute of Electrical Engineers (SAIEE) and a joint meeting was held. This was very successful and will be repeated on an annual basis. The highlight was the publication of a collaboration with the University of Milan and two members, Lucas Ferriera and the director, to measure the parallax of the Moon and Mars in the *European Journal of Physics*.

The **Director** has had a busy year attending SciFest Africa again where he delivered a talk. In addition he has addressed several groups during the year, including the Cape Centre and the MTN Sciencentre. Locally he has delivered a series of lectures on astronomy to U3A, in both George and Knysna, and has spoken twice for the monthly general meetings on astronomy.

He also addressed the SAIEE in George. He is much in demand for giving talks to schools, tourists and other local organizations. Earlier in the year he visited the Bloemfontein Centre at Boyden Observatory and discussed several issues about the Visitors' Centre and gave a talk in the evening and visited the Vredefort Dome – possible venue for an excursion in future. He also visited Mthatha as part of the SciFest Af-

rica outreach programme. He continues to write for several newspapers and popular magazines, promoting astronomy.

Finally the director would like to congratulate and thank Tony Jones for doing such an excellent job on producing the annual *Sky Guide Africa South* – great job and it makes a significant contribution to raising the awareness of astronomy. ☆

Report of the Historical Section

Chris de Coning, Director

Introduction

During the past year (calendar year 2008) the following has happened concerning the History of Astronomy Section.

Website

The Website has undergone a major change. In 2007 the look and layout was totally changed. In 2008 more content was added to the website. This process is ongoing.

Archive

Due to the complexities and scope of the task, indexing the archive will still take some time.

Publications

Individuals in their private capacities wrote articles with historical content. Please note my appreciation to the following people:

- I.S. Glass for *PROXIMA The nearest star (other than the Sun)*, Mensa, Cape Town, 2008.
- P.E. Spargo for “The History of the Hoba Meteorite” Part I (*MNASSA* Vol. 67 nos 5 & 6, June 2008); Part II (*MNASSA* Vol. 67 nos 9 & 10, October 2008); Part III (*MNASSA* Vol. 67 nos 11 & 12, December 2008)
- H.J. van Heerden for “Boyden Observatory, then and now” published in *MNASSA* Vol. 67 nos 7 & 8, August 2008.

Obituaries

MNASSA published obituaries on the following astronomers:

- Peter Smits: *MNASSA* Vol. 67 nos 9 & 10, October 2008.
- Arthur C Clarke: *MNASSA* Vol. 67 nos 5 & 6, June 2008. ☆

Report of the Imaging Section

O.R. Toumilovitch, Director

The second active year of the Imaging Section has proven that astro-photography is a fast growing and very important sector of astronomy – professional and amateur. Here is the summary of the Section's activities.

The Imaging Section website, hosted for a second year by FOTON Optoelectronics, has been the main channel of communication between our astro-photographers and those who are interested in Section's activities. It has provided a good platform for the exhibiting the work of South African astro-photographers. Unfortunately, during one of their meetings in September/October 2008, ASSA Council has requested me to remove the line "This web page is proudly sponsored by FOTON Optoelectronics" from the bottom of the page. This came as a real surprise to me as the whole ASSA Imaging Section website is based on FOTON Optoelectronics website, as we had enough space available. Furthermore, everything was confirmed and agreed upon by the council representatives back in August 2007, prior to establishing the website. At the moment of writing this report, half-a-year later, the issue still stands unresolved.

The highlights of the section activities during the year are:

- Participation in the live web-cast on the Moon Shadow website during the 26 January partial Solar eclipse.

- Extensive observations and imaging of Comet C/2007 N3 (Lulin).
- Participation in and images of the Earth Hour initiative.
- SOHO team has kindly provided the ASSA Imaging Section with the weekly updates of the latest most interesting images of their solar observations for display on our website.

Every small contribution in the form of images, articles or reports are important to the Section. I would like to specially mention several active photographers for their persistence and support, as well as achieving wonderful results in astro-photography during the past year. They are:

- Kos Coronaios, who has regularly provided his excellent astro-images and reports of public events.
- Dieter Willasch for his outstanding set on images of the Comet Lulin.
- Carol Botha whose solar system images have been published twice in the *BBC Sky at Night* – a great achievement in promoting the ASSA internationally.
- Greg Roberts who has contributed a number of very interesting images and video clips of man-made space objects, as well as deep-sky objects.

They have been nominated for Director's awards:

- Kos Coronaios – Directors Award (2008/2009) for continuous support

and contributions to the Imaging Section.

- Dieter Willasch – Directors Award (2008/2009) for outstanding work in the field of deep-sky objects and Comet Lulin imaging.
- Carol Botha – Directors Award (2008/2009) for achievements in the Solar System photography and contribution into promoting the South African astro-imaging internationally.
- Greg Roberts – Directors Award (2008/2009) for providing the Im-

aging Section with the set of outstanding images and video clips of man-made space objects, as well as deep-sky objects.

I'd like to thank everyone who has supported the Imaging Section by providing their images, ideas and willingness to participate in the Section's activities during the past year. The Imaging Section of ASSA is always open to suggestions and joint projects. We are awaiting your contributions in the form of interviews, reports, stories and astronomy related images. ☆

Report of the Occultation Section

Brian Fraser, Director

Once again we had a year with very little positive to report.

Kos Coronaios in Louis Trichardt has been experimenting with photographing lunar occultations of bright objects and has obtained some interesting results.

A few minor planet occultations were attempted by our regular group of observ-

ers but no positive events were observed. We have again relied on the minor planet predictions provided by Steve Preston and have used the *Occult4* software for lunar occultation predictions.

Thanks are due to the following members for their continued support: Magda Streicher, Tim Cooper, Jannie Smits and Kos Coronaios. ☆

Scholarships Report for 2008

Maciej Soltynski (Convenor, ASSA Scholarships Committee)

The ASSA Scholarship was established in 2000 to encourage the study of Astronomy at any Southern African university at the 2nd and 3rd year level. The Scholarship is funded by ASSA with significant financial

support from the ASSA Endowment Trust.

In 2008 the ASSA Scholarship was awarded to Daniël Olivier, a second-year BSc Astronomy and Physics student at UNISA.

Daniël is involved with the ASSA-Johannesburg Telescope Building group.

The holder in 2006 and 2007, Wendy Williams, obtained her BSc(Hons) in Astronomy with distinction at UCT in the National Astrophysics and Space Science Programme (NASSP). She plans to undertake an MSc in Astronomy at UCT in 2009.

Renée Holzek, holder of the ASSA Scholarship in 2005, completed her MSc in Cosmology at UCT. She was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship and started her DPhil studies in Cosmology at Oxford in October.

South African Astronomical Observatory - Astronomical Society of South Africa Scholarships

The purpose of the SAAO-ASSA Scholarships is to encourage current or intending undergraduates (i.e. 1st, 2nd or 3rd year) studying for a B Sc degree at any university in South Africa, who have a stated interest in astronomy, to prepare for furthering their interest. The Scholarships are financed by SAAO and are administered by ASSA.

2008 saw a second SAAO-ASSA Scholarship being made available. Mpati Ramatsoku, who held the Scholarship in 2007, was re-awarded the Scholarship. She is 2nd year undergraduate student at the University of Cape Town, studying for her BSc degree, which includes Astrophysics. The other SAAO-ASSA Scholarship was awarded to Rocco Coppejans, a 2nd year BSc student at the University of Pretoria who is focusing on physics.

2009 will see a third SAAO-ASSA Scholarship being made available, so that from then on in any year there may be a maximum of three Scholarships awarded. The value of each Scholarship in 2008 was R4 000.

Expression of appreciation

During the year, Dr Ian Glass was invited to join the Scholarships Committee. He, Andrew Gray, Dr Abe Mahomed and Kevin Govender are thanked for their valued inputs in the evaluation and selection of candidates during 2008. Thanks go to Cliff Turk for dealing with the financial administration of the Scholarships and to the university lecturers who supplied assessments of candidates. ☆

Report of the Trustees of ASSA Endowment Trust

Cliff Turk, Trust Secretary

At the end of the last financial year, total funds had increased to R116 950 of which R36 340 was capital, with R76 950 in the distributable reserve. At that time there were estimated liabilities of R3 660.

The Trust continues to grow slowly but there are few calls for its assistance with projects to be supported. There have been a few tentative enquiries but one was not fully and clearly motivated and two others

fell outside the scope of the Trust's objectives. Applicants are requested to contact the Trust Secretary in the first instance for some guidance.

New tax regulations have enabled the Revenue Service to demand tax on our interest earnings, but we will again apply for tax exemption. ☆

Treasurer's Report

Cliff Turk, Honorary Treasurer

During the last financial year the Scholarship Fund has been increased to R70 000 and the income therefrom is available for disbursement.

Total funds held at the year-end were just over R350 000 of which R85 000 is allocated for the Scholarship Fund and small amounts are held for future Symposia and some Sections.

The growth in assets is mainly due to sales of the popular *Sky Guide 2009* which will provide a nett income of around R77 000 but this is partly offset by the usual loss on *MNASSA* which should be approximately R25 000. There are still outstanding amounts both due and payable for both publications.

Council has committed funds to provide the *MNASSA* Editor with an updated package of computer programmes which will also ensure we are not breaking any copyright restrictions unintentionally. This is likely to involve a cost of about R10 000.

The loss of Membership Secretary during the year has created a situation where some amounts received into our banking account have remained unidentified and this has resulted in some members not receiving publications. It cannot be stressed too much that when members make payments directly to the banking account, they MUST notify the Membership Secretary with a breakdown of what the funds are for – or the renewal of their membership will not be recorded. This also applies to some Centres and other organisations which make bulk payments on behalf of members.

Overall, the Society is in a very healthy position and is able to meet all its commitments for the coming year from present funds. It is unlikely that there will be any increase in subscriptions or the price of publications in the foreseeable future. This is especially pleasing when we remember that as recently as 1999 and 2000 we had to borrow several thousand Rands each from three of our members to avoid being unable to meet our liabilities at the financial year-end. ☆

ASSA Awards for 2008/2009

ASSA and its sections issue rewards to members who actively partake and submit their observations. These rewards will hopefully encourage recipients to continue their good work but also those who have made casual observations but did not send them in or others who are still considering it but have not yet got so far as actually doing some observing. The following rewards were made during 2008/9.

Long Service Award

Pat Booth

Honorary Awards

Case Rijdsdijk, Magda Streicher and Maciej Soltynski.

Merit Awards

Chris de Coning, Kos Coronaios and Greg Roberts

Comet and Meteor Section

General Observer's Certificates to: Dudley

Field, Koos van Zyl, Karen Koch, Magda Streicher, Kos Coronaios, Simon Walsh, Theo Smith and Chris Middleton.

Cosmology Section

Director's Certificates to: Case Rijdsdijk and Maciej Soltynski.

Deep-sky Section

Merit Certificates to: Richard Ford, Gary Lillis, Dany Duprez, Lucas Ferreira, Kos Coronaios and Kerneels Mulder.

Imaging Section

Director's Certificates to: Kos Coronaios, Dieter Willasch, Carol Botha and Greg Roberts.

Variable Star Section

Director's Certificates to: Berto Mondard and Tim Cooper.

General Observer's Certificates to: Brian Fraser, Michael Poll, Jan Smit, Peter Wedepohl, David Blane and Percy Jacobs. ☆

news notes

Anniversaries in 2009

The Year of Astronomy 2009 celebrates Galileo's telescopic discoveries four hundred years ago. The precise dates of his epoch-making observations of the Moon are controversial but we can be reasonably sure they began some time in 1609. His famous publication, the *Sidereus Nuncius* or *Sidereal Messenger* was of course published in 1610. For the history of this

topic see http://www.pacifier.com/~tpepe/Moon_Page.htm. The engraving on the front cover of this issue shows him at the age of 40, and was supposedly copied in the nineteenth century from a long lost painting. However, the engraver seems to have added a telescope, which did not exist in 1602, the claimed date of the original!