
ASSA President's Report for the 2023/24 Year

Dr. Daniel Cunnama, ASSA President

Introduction

I would like to thank our AGM Host, Matie Hoffman

Good evening all and thank you for joining us for this year's AGM. I would like to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Council members, the section directors, and all the contributors who have played a significant role in making this year a success. The dedication and passion that each of you brings to the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa (ASSA) are what keep our community thriving.

Council and Section Highlights

Astrophotography Section:

- Under the leadership of Martin Heigan, the Astrophotography Section has continued to grow and support the vibrant community of astrophotographers across Southern Africa. The section's primary goal has been to coordinate and promote astronomical imaging technology while collecting and showcasing the impressive work of amateur astronomers.
- **International Recognition:** Our members have gained international recognition, with Tiaan Niemand being "short-listed" in the Optolong Astrophotography Competition. This highlights the growing quality of work being produced by our members, which is now gaining global attention.
- **Initiatives:** The section has also encouraged the submission of photographic images to the ASSA Flickr Gallery, with contributions eligible for publication in the Sky Guide. Furthermore, the "2024 ASSA Astrophotography Competition," generously sponsored by Celestron and Sky-Watcher, has attracted numerous entries. The winners will be announced on 21 September 2024, with the top three entries featured in the Sky Guide and other media

Comet Asteroid Meteor (CAM) Section:

- The CAM Section, directed by Tim Cooper, has had an exceptionally productive year. The section focused on observations of comets, asteroids, and meteors, providing valuable data to the global astronomical community.
- **Comets:** Observations included Comet 12P/Pons-Brooks, which became visible to the naked eye from dark locations in early April 2024. This comet, along with others like C/2023 A3 (Tsuchinshan-ATLAS), was imaged and observed by several members, and detailed reports will be published in MNASSA.
- **Meteors:** The section recorded significant meteor shower activity, with over 44 hours of observations conducted by Tim Cooper and Magda Streicher. Notably, the

Cameras for Allsky Meteor Surveillance (CAMS) operated 16 cameras, capturing 8,140 meteor orbits during the year. Since its inception in 2019, CAMS@SA has captured over 49,000 meteor orbits, contributing to the recently published 'Atlas of Earth's Meteor Showers.'

- **Outreach and Education:** The Global Meteor Network (GMN) Outreach Project, which aims to promote STEM education, saw the installation of cameras in schools like Touwsrivier Primary School and Laingsburg High School. These initiatives help bridge the gap between amateur observations and professional research, while also inspiring the next generation of scientists

Thank you Tim and team for the excellent work

Cosmology Section:

- The Cosmology Section, led by Derek Duckitt, has continued its popular "History of the Universe" video series, which now includes 33 episodes. Each episode tackles fundamental questions about the universe, ranging from its origins to the nature of space and time.
- **Engagement:** Despite attendance being modest, ranging from 8 to 12 attendees per session, the series has sparked lively discussions and has been a valuable educational resource. The July 2024 session saw a peak attendance of 18 participants, indicating growing interest.
- **Future Plans:** Derek plans to continue with the series, expanding the topics covered and seeking to increase participation. This ongoing effort reflects the section's commitment to making complex cosmological concepts accessible and engaging for all members

Thanks to Derek Duckitt for his hard work on this.

Country Membership Report:

- The membership of ASSA has grown to a total of 121 valid members for the 2023/2024 year. This includes 100 standard members, 13 honorary members, and others in various categories.
- **Database Upgrade:** The membership database was upgraded from a standard spreadsheet to an online membership website. This new system allows for more efficient management of member details, including tracking deliveries of the annual Sky Guide, which continues to be an essential resource for our members

Double and Variable Star Section:

- Led by Dave Blane, the Double and Variable Star Section has had a productive year, with significant contributions to the American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO).
- **Variable Stars:** Berto Monard reported 285 photometric observations, bringing his total to nearly 3 million observations. Dave Blane contributed 913 observations and collaborated on a published paper regarding the 2022 outburst of the nova U SCO. Preparations are underway for observing the 2025 periastron passage of eta Carinae.

- **Double Stars:** While there were no reported double star observations this year, the section remains active and engaged with the broader astronomical community

History Section:

- Chris de Coning has led the History Section through another successful year, focusing on the preservation and documentation of the rich history of astronomy in Southern Africa.
- **Archive Development:** A significant achievement has been the successful establishment of a cloud-based digital archive. This archive not only ensures the preservation of ASSA's historical documents but also makes them accessible to future council members and researchers.
- **Publications:** The section contributed several articles to MNASSA, chronicling important historical events and paying tribute to distinguished astronomers. These efforts underscore the section's role in maintaining the legacy of astronomy in the region

Thank you Chris

Instrumentation Section:

- The Instrumentation Section, under Chris Stewart's guidance, continues to be a cornerstone for those interested in the technical aspects of astronomy, particularly in the realm of Amateur Telescope Making (ATM). The ATM class has been active since 1991 and remains a vital part of the section's activities. The Director extended his congratulations to Vicus Cruywagen for the exceptional quality of his first telescope.
- **Community Engagement:** The section supports its members through various online platforms, including Facebook groups, WhatsApp, and email lists. These platforms facilitate the exchange of ideas, technical assistance, and the sharing of innovative approaches to telescope making.
- **Outreach and Education:** The ATM class, which has been active since 1991, remains a vital part of the section's activities. The section's efforts in refurbishing and donating telescopes to youth organizations further highlight its commitment to promoting astronomy among the younger generation

Thank you Chris for leading this endeavour and empowering amateur astronomy through instrumentation.

Observing Section/Deep and Shallow Sky:

- Colin Steyn has led the Observing Section in organizing numerous successful events, fostering a deeper appreciation of the night sky among both ASSA members and the public.
- **Observing Highlights:** The section hosted multiple star parties and public observing sessions at locations such as the Sterland Observatory and Boyden Observatory. These events featured observations of deep sky objects like the Sombrero Galaxy, Jewel Box, and the Tarantula Nebula, as well as comets and other celestial phenomena.

- **Collaboration:** The section has strengthened its collaboration with the University of the Free State and the Friends of Boyden Observatory, enhancing public outreach and educational efforts. The partnership has attracted increasing numbers of attendees, contributing to the growth of interest in astronomy in the region

Thank you Colin for taking over the reins so successfully.

Outreach Section:

- The Outreach Section, led by Pierre de Villiers, focused on leveraging the vast experience and expertise within ASSA to enhance public engagement and education in astronomy.
- **Initiatives:** The section encouraged the sharing of successful outreach experiences, particularly highlighting the activities of Touwsrivier Primary School's Maths & Science Club as a model for other schools. The Hermanus Centre followed this example by forming a Science & Technology Club, which has already seen success with various educational workshops and excursions.
- **Global Meteor Network (GMN):** The section also assisted Tim Cooper in identifying participating schools for the GMN project, helping to install cameras that contribute to global meteor tracking efforts. This project exemplifies the section's commitment to fostering interest in astronomy and STEM subjects among young learners.

Scholarships Committee:

- The Scholarships Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Claire Flanagan, plays a crucial role in supporting aspiring astronomers through financial assistance.
- **2024 Awards:** This year, the ASSA Scholarship was awarded to Isabella Goodwin, a second-year student at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and the Cooke Scholarship to Liam Harris, a third-year student at the University of the Witwatersrand. Both recipients are committed to pursuing careers in astrophysics research.
- **Past Achievements:** The 2023 awardees: Adnaan Nauthoo and Carys Gilbert, successfully completed their degrees, with Adnaan obtaining his BSc(Hons) in Physics. The scholarships continue to be a key part of ASSA's efforts to nurture the next generation of astronomers

Thank you Claire and the committee.

Solar Section:

- Jacques van Delft has revitalized the Solar Section, marking a year of significant achievements and growth.
- **Key Developments:** In June 2023, the section launched the ASSA Solar Bulletin, a monthly publication that has quickly become a valuable resource for solar enthusiasts. The section also upgraded its website, making it a central hub for solar observations and collaboration.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborations with the Mexborough and Swinton Astronomical Society (MSAS) and the British Astronomy Association (BAA) have flourished, leading to joint solar observations and imaging initiatives. These partnerships have

strengthened the section's outreach and educational efforts, particularly through the establishment of the ASSA/MSAS/BAA WhatsApp group, which has facilitated real-time communication and coordination.

Thank you very much, Jacques

Spectroscopy and Photometry Section:

- The Spectroscopy and Photometry Section, overseen by Dave Blane, has continued its efforts in these specialized fields, despite some challenges.
- **Photometry:** The section reported 913 photometric observations submitted to the AAVSO by Dave Blane, in addition to 285 observations by Berto Monard. These contributions are crucial for understanding variable stars and other astronomical phenomena.
- **Spectroscopy:** Amateur spectroscopy remains an area with room for growth. Currently, Percy Jacobs is one of the few active contributors in this field within South Africa. The section is actively seeking to encourage more members to get involved and to take up leadership roles in this important area of study

ASSA Planetary Section

This is a new section to be led by Clyde Foster who will introduce and explain more about what he would like to achieve with the Section.

General Thanks

I'd like to express my thanks to everyone on Council, to our Section Directors, to our Centre committees as well as all those supporting them in the background.

- Andre Bruton, our Membership Secretary.
- AJ Nel, our Treasurer.
- Case and the Editorial team Ian and Willie.
- But then there is the SAAO IT team for all their willingness to help ASSA - and Christian,
- Lerika Cross, our Secretary
- Our past presidents for their wisdom and ongoing support of the Council

Conclusion

As my two-year term as President of ASSA comes to an end, I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to each and every one of you. Your hard work, dedication, and passion have made these past two years incredibly rewarding for me. I have thoroughly enjoyed the journey, learned a great deal, and have been inspired by the commitment of this community to our shared goals.

It is now time for me to hand over the reins to a very capable and enthusiastic new President, who I am confident will continue to lead ASSA with excellence. I will remain on as outgoing President, offering my ongoing support and advancing the interests of ASSA through my work across the South African astronomy landscape.

Thank you all for your unwavering support, patience, and understanding. The excellent work you are doing in reaching our goals—to encourage and stimulate the study of astronomy in Southern Africa, to associate and organise observers in astronomical observation and research, and to disseminate current astronomical information—will continue to shape the future of astronomy in our region.

I look forward to seeing all that we will achieve together in the years to come. Thank you once again.