



Hermanus Astronomy Centre

2025/'26 Chairman's Report

The 2025 year has continued the slight downward trend in membership, although it should be noted that the core attendees to the physical meetings as well as the Zoom only monthly and special interest groups have been relatively constant over the past few years.

We often discuss this in committee and other meetings, and the consensus is that some of the factors may be that we need to try and focus more on activities that members enjoy, such as stargazing, as well as trying to get speakers to cater more for the beginner end of the spectrum.

Some committee members have been putting a huge effort into outreach, which I am confident will bear fruit in the long term by gradually attracting younger members into the fold. We are very grateful to Mick Fynn and Pierre De Villiers for their ongoing work done in this regard.

We would like the members to convey any additional activities they would like us to focus on, for example the Beginner's observing sessions, as well as the various types of outings to Sutherland Observatory, SKA in Carnarvon, Cedarberg, Cape Town Observatory etc which we have done in the past.

Peter Harvey has decided that 2025 is the last year he could dedicate his time to all the facets he has been taking care of in his capacity as secretary, and we thank him warmly for the massive contributions of quality work he has put in over the years.

There are however a couple of plusses we can draw on, he has agreed to continue with his excellent monthly rendering of the Monthly Sky reports, and Peter Kogel has kindly agreed to step in to his position, for which we are very pleased, as well as grateful. Peter H is quite happy to continue a handover guiding period for as long as Peter Kogel thinks he needs it.

Regarding the attendance issues an analysis of Peter's monthly logs of the stats can be useful and we will look at that now. Here is a summary of the details on the next page:

2025 Annual Summary Statistics
By the end of 2025, the organization
recorded the following cumulative data:
• Total Membership: 48
• Total Attendance: 600
• Total Member Attendees: 374
• Total Visitors: 226
• Average Attendance per Function: 30.0
Average Member Attendance by Category:
• Monthly Meetings: 30%
• Study Groups: 21%
• Cosmology: 19%
• Observing: 8%
• Astrophotography: 7%

2025 Function Attendance Log

Date	Day	Function	Members	Visitors	Total	Attendance (%)	Presenter / Topic
21-Jan	Tue	Monthly	21	10	31	41%	Hennie Mouton: 2024 Mini-Moon
04-Feb	Tue	Cosmology	11	0	11	22%	ep. 26 "How did the Universe Begin?" (Pt 1)
18-Feb	Tue	Monthly	15	0	15	29%	Pierre de Villiers: AGM & GMN update
04-Mar	Tue	Cosmology	7	2	9	14%	ep. 26 "How did the Universe Begin?" (Pt 2)
11-Mar	Tue	Study Group	12	4	16	24%	"What Creates Time?" (Part 1)
18-Mar	Tue	Monthly	18	12	30	35%	JJ van Zyl: "Secrets of the Universe"
25-Mar	Tue	Study Group	11	2	13	24%	"What Creates Time?" (Part 2)
28-Mar	Fri	Observing	4	20	24	9%	Rotary Way with Hikers' Club
01-Apr	Tue	Cosmology	8	2	10	18%	ep. 27 "What is Hidden in the Darkness...?"
15-Apr	Tue	Monthly	15	18	33	33%	Christian Hettlage: "Black Holes"
29-Apr	Tue	Study Group	12	24	36	27%	Paul Kestens: "Introduction to Starship"
06-May	Tue	Cosmology	11	3	14	24%	ep. 28 "Early Life in the Universe"
20-May	Tue	Monthly	15	17	32	33%	Amanda Sickafoose: "Small Body Ring Systems"
27-May	Tue	Study Group	8	2	10	18%	Eric Cline: "After 1177BC..."
03-Jun	Tue	Cosmology	11	3	14	24%	ep. 29 "Are the First Stars still Out There?"
17-Jun	Tue	Monthly	8	11	19	18%	Lindsay Magnus: SKA
24-Jun	Tue	Study Group	10	0	10	22%	Out of Africa Theory Update
01-Jul	Tue	Cosmology	10	6	16	22%	ep. 30 "What did James Webb Really See..."
08-Jul	Tue	Repeat	11	0	11	24%	Amanda Sickafoose: Ring Systems (repeat)
05-Aug	Tue	Cosmology	8	3	11	18%	ep. 31 "Why shouldn't the Universe Exist?"
19-Aug	Tue	Monthly	13	7	20	29%	Clyde Foster: Planetary Photography
27-Aug	Wed	Stargazing	3	3	6	7%	Gearing's Point
02-Sep	Tue	Cosmology	11	3	14	23%	ep. 32 "What is Everything Made of?" (1-3)
16-Sep	Tue	Monthly	17	15	32	35%	Pieter Kotze: Solar Variability
30-Sep	Tue	Study Group	11	1	12	23%	History of Ethiopian DNA
07-Oct	Tue	Cosmology	5	1	6	10%	ep. 32 "What is Everything Made of?" (4-6)
21-Oct	Tue	Monthly	11	14	25	23%	Pieter Kotze: JWST Update
28-Oct	Tue	Study Group	10	2	12	21%	Yuval Harari: Alien Intelligence
04-Nov	Tue	Cosmology	8	4	12	17%	ep. 34 "When Are You Anyway?"
18-Nov	Tue	Monthly	14	21	35	29%	Tim Cooper: Global Meteor Network
25-Nov	Tue	Study Group	10	0	10	21%	Possible Non-Human Intelligence
02-Dec	Tue	Cosmology	12	0	12	25%	ep. 35 "The Biggest Thing in the Universe"

Category Comparison

Category	2025 Attendance	2012–2024 Historical Range	Observations
Monthly Meetings	30%	23% to 33%	Remained on the high end of historical averages, similar to the 31% seen in 2024.
Study Groups	21%	8% to 31%	Shows a slight recovery from 2024 (18%), though still below the 2014 peak of 31%.
Cosmology	19%	18% to 23%	Remains highly consistent ; this exact percentage was recorded in seven different years since 2012.
Observing	8%	0% to 22%	Experienced a notable decline from the recent highs of 2023 (22%) and 2024 (16%).
Astrophotography	7%	0% to 24%	Remained low but present , matching the 2024 level after several years of 0% engagement.

Key Trends

Membership Decline: Membership reached a historical low of 48 members in 2025. This continues a long-term downward trend from the 2012 peak of 82 members.
Consistency in Core Interests: Despite the drop in total members, the percentage of members attending Monthly Meetings and Cosmology sessions has remained remarkably steady over the last 13 years.
Volatile Outdoor Activities: Attendance for Observing/Stargazing continues to be the most "hit-or-miss" category, fluctuating significantly year-over-year, usually influenced by Hermanus weather.

In 2025, the topics that drew the highest individual attendance varied depending on whether you measure by **total people present** (including visitors) or by the **percentage of the membership** in attendance.

Top Topics by Total Attendance (Members + Visitors)

The functions with the largest overall crowds were often driven by a high number of visitors:

- **"Introduction to Starship"** (Paul Kestens): **36 total attendees** (12 members and a record 24 visitors).
- **"GMN"** (Tim Cooper): **35 total attendees** (14 members and 21 visitors).
- **"Black Holes: The Dark Mysteries of the Universe Unveiled"** (Christian Hettlage): **33 total attendees** (15 members and 18 visitors).
- **"Small Body Ring Systems"** (Amanda Sickafoose): **32 total attendees** (15 members and 17 visitors).
- **"Solar Variability Secrets in Baobabs"** (Pieter Kotze): **32 total attendees** (17 members and 15 visitors).
- **"2024 Mini-Moon"** (Hennie Mouton): **31 total attendees** (21 members and 10 visitors).

Top Topics by Member Attendance Percentage

When looking strictly at which topics most engaged the official membership, the rankings change:

1. **"2024 Mini-Moon"** (Hennie Mouton): **41%** of members attended.
2. **"Solar Variability Secrets in Baobabs"** (Pieter Kotze): **37%** (recorded in September).
3. **"Secrets of the Universe"** (JJ van Zyl): **35%**.
4. **"Black Holes"** and **"Small Body Ring Systems"**: Both reached **33%** member attendance.

Notable Observation

The event **"Rotary Way with Hikers' Club"** is also noteworthy; while it only had a 9% member attendance rate, it drew **20 visitors**, making it one of the largest combined groups of the year with 24 total people.

It seems that guest speakers like **Paul Kestens** and **Tim Cooper** were particularly effective at attracting outside interest (visitors), whereas **Hennie Mouton** and **Pieter Kotze** drew the strongest turnouts from your internal membership.

The 2026 statistics started with a strong turnout for the first monthly meeting, despite a significant drop in total membership.

January 2026 Attendance Details

Based on the latest reports, January had two scheduled functions:

- **Monthly Meeting (Jan 20):** This meeting, presented by Christo Venter on the topic of "**Gamma-ray pulsars**," was highly successful.
 - **Members:** 21
 - **Visitors:** 10
 - **Total Attendees:** 31
 - **Member Attendance Rate:** 40%.
- **Study Group (Jan 27):** This session was cancelled.

Membership and Context

The most notable change at the start of 2026 is the further decline in total membership. The organization's membership dropped to **39 members**, down from 48 in 2025.

Comparison to Previous Years

While the total number of members is at a historical low, the **40% attendance rate** for the January monthly meeting is exceptionally high compared to previous years:

- **2025 Monthly Average:** 30%.
- **2024 Monthly Average:** 31%.
- **2012–2024 Historical Range:** 23% to 33%.

This indicates that while the club is getting smaller, the remaining members were very engaged at the start of the new year. Following January, the first February session (Cosmology on Feb 3) saw **13 members** (25%) attend a session on "Free Will".

Based on the sources, the Study Group session with the highest visitor engagement by a significant margin was "**Introduction to Starship**" presented by Paul Kestens on April 29, 2025, which drew **24 visitors**.

For context, this specific session had more visitors than all other recorded Study Group sessions combined. Most Study Group sessions typically see between zero and two visitors.

Top Study Group Sessions by Visitor Engagement

Date	Topic	Visitors
29-Apr-25	"Introduction to Starship"	24
11-Mar-25	"What Creates Time?" (Part 1)	4
28-May-24	Stonehenge & Inca Stone Walls	2
27-Aug-24	Consciousness	2
25-Mar-25	"What Creates Time?" (Part 2)	2
27-May-25	"After 1177BC..."	2
28-Oct-25	"How can We Control an Alien Intelligence?"	2

Key Observations

- **The "Starship" Outlier:** The April 29 session was a major anomaly for the Study Group category. Not only did it have the highest visitor count for a Study Group, but its 24 visitors also represent one of the highest visitor turn-outs for **any** function across the 2024–2025 period.
- **Outreach:** Activities which do not form part of the monthly meeting statistics will be covered in Mick Fynn's Outreach presentation to follow later.

To comment on attendance and meetings in general, we are grateful to Onrus Manor for accommodating us for many of our meetings, and to David and Elaine Sykes for all the effort they put in to makes this work (and our secretary for his efficient communicating).

Report on Outreach and GMN from Pierre De Villiers

After losing a duel with a tiny scalpel my activities in 2025 were limited.

Outreach

The only outreach activity that I participated in was the **re-painting of the Sun model** by the Executive Mayor Archie Klaas, the principal of Lukhanyo Primary School Morris Tshabalala and Zimkhitha Buyile and learners from Lukhanyo Primary. It was a great success.

The Mayor wants to participate in re-painting the Lukhanyo Analemmatic Sundial in 2026.

Zimkhitha arranged a visit to the **Caledon wind farm** on her own, which was a commendable first.

Maintenance

There was considerable maintenance done during 2025.

1. The **planet models** all got new artwork at the top of the plinths to replace vandalized or stolen displays, which elicited positive response from the Cliff Path Management Group.
2. The illegible granite engraving on the **Swallow Park sundials** were replaced with chemically etched Stainless Steel plaques. Sadly, the SS gnomons of these sundials – 1 mm thick and 28 mm high! - were promptly stolen and will be replaced by plastic gnomons, which hopefully does not have any recycling value.
3. The **Perspex plaques** that were badly cracked by whale-watchers leaning against/on them to stabilize binoculars or cameras were removed, the colour Reverse Printed diagrams cut out and epoxied directly onto the SS tablets with flexible expansion joint Den Braven silicon. This method has withstood the differential expansion and contraction of the stainless steel and epoxy through the heat of the summer.

All the panels on the Western side of the GPAED have been fixed and the Eastern side will be tackled during 2026.

Global Meteor Network

Other than one joint training session at Touwsrivier, **activity was limited** by my immobility and poor communication from the schools.

Considerable efforts has been spent on **enrolling more schools**, with positive responses from Hermanus High School, St Andrews College (Bloemfontein) and Curro High School Hermanus. York High School in George has also expressed interest in participating in the GMN Outreach Project.

Mick Fynn's report of 2025 activities of OUTREACH

Outreach in 2025 was mainly concerned with Maintenance of the growing number of structures astronomy has erected and maintaining the activities of the outlook ventures.

The ward council has continued to put pressure on astronomy to maintain our cliff path solar model and the GPAED structures at Gearing Point.

Efforts in this regard were tempered by the maintenance that Dr Pierre de Villiers and Michael Fynn were having surgery done to their back and knees respectively

which hindered the engineering skills that were taken for granted from Pierre when he's fit. But Derek was always there to help with Deon when absolutely necessary.

The problem with having astronomy in Ward 3 is that so many of the members are from fancy first world portfolios like arts, business forums, Fernkloof nature reserve, tourism signage, tourism centres and cliff path; all these represent the tourism opportunities exclusively at the expense of the scientific development of our youth. So, a lobby has been steadily growing to force us to get our structures up to the artistic tourism aims rather than appreciating the efforts of our Zwelihle youth who painted the planets and were integral in the whole education effort put into these projects by the municipality.

To this effect we met with Dr Els Vermeulen who is investing in a whole whale museum initiative and were keen to use the 6 blank tablets on the GPAED that SANSA were keen to use until they found they had no budget. So, we had an "on site" with Dr Els and the whale team and shared the experiences of what paints and metals were most resilient to the varied weather that pounds Gearing Point. They promised to keep us appraised of their project as it progressed and likewise the cliff path asked to be involved along with the signage standardisation.

A highlight of the maintenance initiative was to have the Mayor, Archie Klaas, come along to paint the Sun on the equinox as the Sun returned to the southern hemisphere on 21 December 2025, when he donned his overalls and painted the Sun along with the Lukhanyo Headmaster, Morris Tshabalala, and selected staff and students from his school. Archie emphasised to the school that they were the original ambassadors and that they are the custodians of the Cliff Path Solar Model and have been for the last ten years since launching it.

It's therefore important that they continue to be involved with the latest initiatives.

Besides the normal school tours Lukhanyo extended their energy excitations from the Palmiet electricity tours to do Caledon Wind farm tours and now they are doing the Fernkloof nature tours organised by Cathy Bulie.

This increase in independent organisation by the school through the appointment of Zimkhitha to the role of Coordinator for the school tours. Pierre has generously sponsored her membership of our astronomy club to assist with her school ventures.

The final highlight of 2025 was the appointment of Indiphile as Ambassador for the Global Astronomy Conference held at the CTICC. Duduzile was the host for the world astronomers and Indiphile was a special guest visiting all the NASA, EEC, SANSA, Italy, Africa and all the other countries that attended. It was a proud moment for Hermanus as we hosted tours from there to Hermanus as well.

Seestar donation for outreach:

Assa has generously donated more than half of the cost of a Seestar S30 Pro which will be used by Lukhanyo school for astronomy outreach purposes. The HAC outreach committee is in the process of demonstrations of its use to the Lukhanyo staff involved and an official hand over ceremony will be held soon.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to express our deepest gratitude for the selfless and hard working efforts of the committee members, in particular the many functions which we have relied on by Peter Harvey (thankfully he is continuing with his superb monthly rendition of our Sky Maps); as well as the extremely important job done by the Treasurer, Elaine Sykes, who has dedicated many hours to sorting out banks and optimising our systems. Pierre is supposed to have retired from the committee multiple times in the past few years, but we have thankfully, and with very little persuasion been able to use his dedicated inputs into cliff path Solar model, GPAED exhibition and sundial maintenance, as well as some very important outreach efforts. In the latter there has been some wonderful energy injected by Mick Fynn as well, besides his support for all things astronomy from his seat on the Ward committee.

Pierre, of course, has been deeply involved as well in the national Global Meteor Network outreach effort in his capacity as a senior member of the ASSA family.

As a founder member of Hermanus Astronomy, be warned that we have no intention of letting you go either!

Once again, we are deeply grateful for all the efforts of the committee in keeping the HAC wheels turning, and we welcome Peter Kogel to the fold and look forward to fresh inputs from him.