
ASSA: ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY SECTION ANNUAL REPORT (2016-2017)

STATE OF ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGING

The Astrophotography section (formally known as the Imaging section in the ASSA constitution) was originally created to coordinate and promote the use of astronomical imaging technology in amateur observations, and to collect images created by amateur astronomers. In recent years, more and more South African amateur astronomers have begun using their imaging equipment to collect and provide data to professional astronomers around the world. At the same time, astrophotography seems to be blossoming as an art form in South Africa. The quality of artistic astronomical images produced by both professional and amateur photographers in South Africa continues to improve.

Over the past year, the astrophotography section has focussed on curating the aesthetic and artistic images, and encouraging their creation, while those observers imaging serious science data have drifted more to the other sections relevant to the actual work being with those images.

MEMBER ACTIVITY

The astrophotography section continues to encourage the submission of photographic images of astronomical subjects, which are stored in the ASSA image archive. This archive is kept on Flickr, with all original files kept in a cloud storage folder as backups. The images in the archive are displayed on the ASSA website, under the Gallery section, grouped by photographer and subject. We only accept submissions from South African photographers, or images 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, in terms of general quality of work. The director continues to seek new photographers and encourage them to share their work. Our most notable new member is Martin Heigan, a professional photographer with an ongoing interest in astronomical subjects, and who is producing excellent work despite only have a few years experience as an astrophotographer.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION AT SCOPEX

The section director was on the judging panel of last year's astrophotography competition at ScopeX. In line with the improving quality of South African astrophotography already mentioned, the standard of entries was markedly higher than previous years. Prizes were awarded to Tanja Shmitz, for her wide-field images of Barnard's Loop and the Rho Ophiuchi complex, to Dawie Venter for his deep sky images of the Lagoon Nebula (Messier 8) and NGC 4845, and to Stefanus Potgieter for his montage of images created during a lunar eclipse.

OUTREACH

Last year, a group of ASSA members put together a project to use the partial solar eclipse of 1 September 2016 to promote astronomy in Southern Africa. The astrophotography section's contribution to this project was to run a social media campaign, sharing and soliciting images of the eclipse from the public, and to provide a live video stream so that anybody on Earth could watch the eclipse as it happened from various viewpoints across Southern Africa, over the Internet. The social media campaign was unfortunately a failure, as we badly

underestimated the amount of work required to run such a campaign, but the livestream was a huge success. Despite all but one of our cameras being clouded out (and that last camera providing a relatively poor quality image), our stream still boasted 28933 views, 253 “thumbs up”, and 129 comments. A recording of the entire three-hour stream is available on YouTube, alongside a cleaned-up time-lapse, which compresses the whole event into a single minute.