

ASSA: ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY SECTION ANNUAL REPORT (2019-2020)

THE STATE OF ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGING

The Astrophotography Section (formally known as the Imaging Section in the ASSA constitution) was 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. The quality of artistic astronomical images produced by both professional and amateur photographers in South Africa continues to improve.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY AND COVID-19

Even though many Star Parties were cancelled due to the lock-down restrictions, it is encouraging to note that the Astrophotographers were far from inactive. More people attempted imaging from home, and reduced pollution was ideal for Astrophotography. There was a notable shift to Narrowband imaging, as it reduces the impact of light pollution when imaging from less than ideal skies.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

During the past year, members received International recognition for their contributions. Clyde Foster's prolific contribution to Planetary imaging continues to inspire. Clyde has been recognised for his work by NASA, and his discovery on Jupiter was named "Clyde's Spot" in his honour. Other members that received accolades include a credit for Angus Burns on the Celestron Facebook page, and several APOD GrAG images by Martin Heigan. The narrowband image of Sharpless 308 made it to the top 25 photos on Flickr in 2019 and is approaching 10 million views.

MEMBER ACTIVITY

The Astrophotography Section continues to encourage the submission of photographic images to the image archive on Flickr. We link to the photos on the ASSA website in the Gallery section, grouped by photographer and subject. We only accept submissions from Southern African photographers or of images captured in Southern Africa. We do not require the photographer to be an ASSA member, nor do we refuse photo submissions based on quality. The requirement that the section works to promote is simply to encourage the art of Astrophotography.

NEW INITIATIVES

An ongoing collaboration between the Astrophotography Section and the Deep-Sky Section helps us to get more members to submit their images for possible publication in Nightfall Magazine. A word of thanks to Douglas Bullis for all his hard work in this regard. A few new members submitted work to the gallery this year, and it is interesting to see that this field keeps on attracting new people as equipment becomes more accessible.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION AT SCOPEX

The ScopeX 2019 Astrophotography Competition was a huge success, and a lot of competition entries were received in all categories. We allowed digital entries for the first time, eliminating the need for expensive printing. We also opened the competition for National participation, to attract a larger amount of Astrophotographers from across the country. The categories included "Beginner", "Mobile Phone" and "Advanced" Astrophotography". Relevant prizes from Celestron were sponsored by G & L Agencies for each category. I would like to thank Lerika Cross and Chris Stewart for all their hard work to ensure that we get great prizes sponsored for the competition, and of course G & L Agencies for sponsoring very exciting Astrophotography prizes.

SECTION DIRECTOR

The current Section Director is Martin Heigan.