

The Denver

OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Denver Astronomical Society
One Mile Nearer the Stars

Image copyright 2008 Philip Good

Monkey Business

The Monkey Head Nebula (NGC 2174) is an HII emission nebula in Orion, and is associated with the open star cluster NGC 2175. It's thought to be about 6400 light-years away. The open cluster NGC 2175 can be seen at the bottom center of the nebulous region of the Monkey Head, and at the upper left side of the image is the emission nebula SH2-247.

FABULOUS FRIGID FEBRUARY

F E B R U A R Y S K I E S

Inside The Observer

Mars glares down at us like an impertinent UFO these evenings. It really is the Red Planet! But it will grow dimmer as the month progresses, getting smaller and farther away as we swing by

on our faster track around the Sun. The Moon, meanwhile, will suffer an eclipse on the night of Wednesday February 20 as it gets to that southeast part of the sky that has Saturn and Regulus, the alpha star of Leo. Saturn is brightest for this year at the end of the month. See how it looks during the middle of the eclipse when the Moon isn't washing it out. This eclipse combination is a great binocular sight and photo op.

The first, or penumbral phase of the eclipse will just be started when the Moon rises at dusk. The real darkening begins with the umbral phase at 8:00 P.M., which we will witness in its entirety of 52 minutes, if weather permits. An evening eclipse can be a lesson in nature lore for the children since they'll still be up at that hour, and a way to get the family away from the TV. If you can't make the special Lunar Eclipse open house at Chamberlin Observatory, set up folding chairs and get out the sleeping bags and binoculars, set up a scope for Saturn and maybe make some hot chocolate. If you feel scientific

Schedule of Events 2

Society Directory 2

David Grinspoon,

February Speaker 3

Messier Marathon Part 1 4-5

Membership Updates 6-5

Membership Info back page

6	.....	New moon
13	.....	First quarter moon
18	.....	Presidents Day
20	.....	Full moon and Lunar eclipse
28	.....	Last quarter moon

Continued on page 2

President's Corner

A good friend, who is a scuba diver and a pilot, taught me to ask myself some questions every now and then. Where have we been? Where are we? And where are we going? Good advice when your feet aren't on the ground, and right now it is good advice for all amateur astronomers. We have to admit we're in the 21st century and fantastic changes in astronomy have brought us to where we are right now.

We are at the point in DAS's calendar when we think about the elections, and importantly, where we want to be headed this year and into the future. This means elections and developing programs for 2008.

Holding a position with the Executive Board of the DAS is a great privilege and often quite fun. You are involved with questions about how to maintain all the community outreach we perform and how to develop interesting and meaningful engagements for the membership. If you are interested in running for office, contact Dennis Cochran, Wayne Kaaz, or Ivan Geisler and toss your hat into the ring.

We are starting a new project to redesign and build a complete telescope around the excellent 17.5" mirror and diagonal we own. This effort focuses on building an instrument. We will decide



Wayne Green, DAS President

where to use the scope in the next step! Members should contact Ron Pearson or any other board member to join in this effort. We are looking for a new chairman for the Edmund G. Kline Dark Site. Candidates should make their intentions known to a DAS board member. Special thanks to Wayne Kaaz, the exiting chair of the EKGDS committee and to the committee members

Continued on page 3



DAS Schdule

FEBRUARY

9-10 EGK Dark Site Weekend
 16 Open House at Chamberlin Observatory (*Begins at 5:00 P.M.*)
 20 Lunar Eclipse Open House at Chamberlin Observatory (*Begins at 6:00 P.M.*)
 22 General Membership Meeting at D.U.'s Olin Hall (*Begins at 7:30 P.M.*)
 29 E-Board meeting at Chamberlin Observatory (*Begins at 7:30 P.M.*)

MARCH

8-9 EGK Dark Site Weekend—
 Messier Marathon 1
 9 Daylight Savings Time Starts (*2:00 A.M.*)
 15 Open House at Chamberlin Observatory (*Begins at 5:00 P.M.*)
 28 E-Board meeting at Chamberlin Observatory (*Begins at 7:30 P.M.*)
 29 DAS Annual Banquet (*Begins at 6:00 P.M.*)

*Public nights are held every Tuesday and Thursday evenings beginning at the following times: March 9 - April 14 at 8:00 P.M.
 April 15 - September 1 at 8:30 P.M.
 September 2 - March 8 at 7:00 P.M. at Chamberlin Observatory
 Costs to non-members are: \$3.00 adults, \$2.00 children.
 Please make reservations via our website (www.theddas.org) or call (303) 871-5172.*

Society Directory

President:
 Wayne Green (303) 530-1023
Email: president@theddas.org

Vice President:
 Keith Pool (303) 718-7273
Email: vicepresident@theddas.org

Secretary:
 Darrell Dodge (303) 932-1309
Email: secretary@theddas.org

Treasurer:
 Brad Gilman (720) 488-1028
Email: treasurer@theddas.org

Executive Board Members

Jack Eastman	Ron Pearson
Joe Gafford	David Shouldice
Frank Mancini	Bryan Willburn
Ron Mickle	Dan Wray
Steve Solon, Past President	
President Emeritus, Larry Brooks	

Committees

Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship Fund
 Ron Pearson (Chair)
 P.O. Box 150743
 Lakewood, Colorado 80215-0743

EKG Dark Site Committee:
 Wayne Kaaz (Chair) (303) 840-1549
Email: kaazmos@msn.com

IDA Representative:
 Dr. Robert Stencel

Public Outreach Committee:
 Ron Mickle (Chair)
 Bryan Willburn (External Outreach Coordinator)
Email: bwilburn@4dv.net (303) 542-5137

Student Astronomy Committee:
 Naomi Pequette (Chair)

Volunteers or Appointed Representatives

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 Jerry Sherlin
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 Denver Astronomical Society
 Chamberlin Observatory C/O Wayne Green
 2930 East Warren Avenue
 Denver, Colorado 80210

The Executive Board conducts the business of the DAS at 7:30 P.M. at Chamberlin Observatory. Please see the Schedule of Events for meeting dates. All members are welcome.

t h e d a s . o r g

David Grinspoon Will Speak to the DAS in February

by Keith Pool

David Grinspoon is an internationally known Planetary Scientist who is funded by NASA to study the surface and atmospheric evolution of Earthlike planets elsewhere in the universe. Grinspoon was awarded the 2006 Carl Sagan Medal for Public Communication of Planetary Science by the American Astronomical Society. He is Curator of Astrobiology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science Adjunct Professor of Astrophysical and Planetary Science at the University of Colorado. Dr. Grinspoon serves as a frequent advisor to NASA on space exploration strategy, and is lead scientist for astrobiology on an instrument that will fly on NASA's next Mars rover. He is Interdisciplinary Scientist for Climate Studies on Venus Express, the European Space Agency's mission which is currently in orbit around Venus. He has also lectured and published widely. His first book, *Venus Revealed*, (Perseus Books, 1998) was a Los Angeles Times Book Prize finalist. His latest book, *Lonely Planets: The Natural Philosophy of Alien Life* won the 2004 PEN Center USA Literary Award for Research Nonfiction. *Entertainment Weekly* called *Lonely Planets* "proof that life on this planet is both intelligent and funny." Grinspoon's popular writing has appeared in *Slate*, *Scientific American*, *Natural History*, *The Sciences*, *Astronomy*,

the Boston Globe, *the Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*. His technical papers have been published in *Nature*, *Science*, and numerous other journals. Dr. Grinspoon has been featured on numerous television (PBS's *Life Beyond Earth*; BBC's *The Planets*) and radio shows (NPR's *Science Friday* and *Weekend Edition*, Wisconsin Public Radio, BBC World Service), and he is a regular astrobiology correspondent for ABC Radio. He has given invited talks at international conferences throughout the U.S., Europe, and Australia. Grinspoon holds degrees in Philosophy of Science and Planetary Science from Brown University and a doctorate in Planetary Sciences from the University of Arizona.

For more information, see www.lonelyplanets.net or www.funkyscience.net.



Dr. David Grinspoon

Internationally known planetary scientist to speak at the February 22 General Membership Meeting.

President's Corner (continued)

for greatly improving the site. We are seeing more and more people flee light polluted skies and are happy to provide a great site to support observing.

Darrell Dodge is taking on the role of Astronomical League Coordinator (ALCor) for DAS. He holds a Master Observer certificate with the league. Jerry, our exiting ALCor, is taking on responsibility at the AL regional and national level. The AL MARS region will hold the first election for officers in a long while. I am seeking the position of Regional Director, while our own Ginny Kramer is seeking the

position of Vice Director. Vern Raben of LAS is seeking the position of Regional Representative, and Gene Schermerhorn is running as an incumbent for Secretary/Treasurer.

The league has formed a committee to Envision the League's Future. We are looking for input about what the 21st century amateur astronomer will be doing. We are holding a regional election soon. The AL convention this year is 17-19 July in Des Moines, IA., following the Society for Astronomical Sciences (SAS) (22-24 May) and the Riverside Telescope Makers Conference (RTMC)

(23-26 May) starts of this summer's calendar. Followed by the AAS summer meeting (1-5 June) in St. Louis.

On February 20th we have a lunar eclipse and a special DAS open house as an appetizer. The main meal will be at the DAS annual banquet, end of March. The banquet this year will be held at the Columbine Unitarian Universalist Church starting at 6:00 P.M. It is the same place we held the December Potluck. The food will be catered Italian and the presenter will be Bryan White.—Wayne Green



Messier Marathon!

Part One

by Darrell Dodge

With the new moon coming early in March and April, it will be possible this year to view all or most of the Messier objects on two weekends: March 7th-9th and April 4th-6th. So . . . this year we'll have two Messier Marathon Weekends!

DAS Messier Marathon I will take place at the Edmund G. Kline Dark Site on Saturday - Sunday March 8-9, starting at dusk. Please plan to arrive before dark to get one of the 14 observing pads and have plenty of time to set up.

As previous marathon participants know, early marathons at our latitude are better for catching the tough early objects (like M74 and M77), while later ones are about the only way to get M30. Unfortunately, these dates also mean that doing a complete marathon is pretty much impossible. Last year's DAS marathon champion was Jim Holder, who did the mid-March marathon and racked up 109 of the 110 objects, missing only M30. Five other observers viewed 50 or more objects.

Don't be afraid to bring your go-to telescope to the marathon. While the traditional way to do the marathon is to star-hop, we'll be awarding certificates to all observers who find 70 or more objects, including those found with go-to telescopes. I did a 109-object go-to marathon two years ago and found it to be a fantastic visual experience that was not that much easier than the other marathons I have done. You still have to stay up all night, but there's much more time to look at and compare the objects, jot down some object-finding hints, and more time to rest. Your inner purist may be disappointed (as mine was), but you can always try a star-hop marathon another year!

No matter how many objects you manage to see, the marathon is a challenging and fun activity. We'll have marathon forms for all participants and there should be plenty of good company. Be sure to dress in warm layers and bring food and drink for a long night at the eyepiece.

For new members (of which there are many this year!) preparing for the marathon and getting to the DAS Dark Site will be much easier after a visit to the DAS Web site. Click on the "EG Kline Dark Site" link on the home page navigation bar for Dark Site information, etiquette, driving

Continued next page



Image copyright 2008 Steve Solon

M81 (NGC 3031 and M82 (NGC 3034)

These two beauties are members of the Ursa Major cluster of galaxies. Two of the most easily observed galaxies in the sky, these are visible through a small scope or good pair of binoculars (*The Peterson Field Guide Series: A Field Guide to the Stars and Planets.*)

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Image copyright 2008 Chris Tarr

Swimming with the Swan Nebula (M17)

Also known as the Omega or the Horseshoe Nebula, this Sagittarian object is a favorite Messier target for many observers.

directions, and weather forecasts. There are also links to the March and April newsletters (which have articles on last years marathon) on the *Observer* page at www.thedas.org/observer.html.

With two options for a marathon this year, we'll have a better chance of getting at least one good-weather marathon weekend.

Check out the revamped
Astronomical League
website for observing
ideas, information on
observing awards and
access to the new online
store!
www.astroleague.org

M42

The Great Nebula in Orion lies at a distance of 1,500 light years from Earth. Although Orion has no walk of fame, it's the kind of place where stars are born. Taken on October 8, 2007 from David's Chainlube Observatory in Englewood, this image was made with a modified Canon Rebel XT and an Orion 80ED @ f/6.



Image copyright 2008 David Wolf



New Member Area Opening Up on the DAS Web Site

by Darrell Dodge

In response to requests from many members, a new area on the DAS website will provide a place for members to show off their favorite scope or piece of astronomical equipment and tell the world about their interests, achievements, and favorite observing experiences.

Members can access the “under construction” area by going to the URL www.theddas.org/members.html. There, you’ll find a description of what to submit to the Webmaster for your Web listing and links to several pages of photos of members with their telescopes and observatories. Please go to the author’s listing (Darrell Dodge) for an example of the types of information that can be provided.



From the Web site:

DAS Member Submission Information

If you are a DAS member and would like your photo or information added, updated, or deleted, please contact the Webmaster at: secretary@theddas.org. It is your responsibility, once the information is posted, to make sure it is up-to-date and to inform the Webmaster of any changes. In addition to a photo of you with your favorite telescope and/or piece of astronomical equipment, please limit submissions to basic data, without extensive narratives, in the following categories:

- * Main Telescope(s)
- * Activities in Astronomy (may be professional or amateur)
- * Astronomical League or AAVSO Observing Awards & Other Citations

Bring it on!

Introduce yourself and your equipment, experiences and interests to your fellow DAS members on the DAS website.

- * Favorite Observing Experience
 - * Personal Web Site (need an EBoard decision on Commercial Sites)
- Remember that images and information provided on these pages will be accessible through all Internet search engines.

From the Editor

For the last three months, Steve Solon's imaging articles graced the pages of the *Observer* as a prequel to a monthly column to be called "Ask the Photographers" (or something else you think would be more "catchy"). Beginning next month, the *Observer* will begin introducing some of the DAS's fabulous astroimagers. If you are one of many who wish to expand on your photography/imaging skills, please email your questions to the editor at p_kurtz@comcast.net. Feel free to ask a specific photographer your question, or just submit it as a general request. Why reinvent the wheel? With all the talent available in the DAS, you might benefit from the experience of another. We will publish questions and answers in upcoming newsletters.

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February Skies

(continued)

Continued from page 1

you can time the beginning and end of umbra—see page 70 of February's *S & T* for how to do it and where to send the results, and its historical significance.

Then turn from the southeast to the south. With Mars overhead and Orion under it and brilliant Sirius in Canis Major southeast of Orion, we will have an opportunity for a celestial view in either good or bad seeing conditions. M42 is the main attraction as well as Mars, which seldom looks as good as M42. And if the seeing is bad, Sirius is your target as it glides through the soup of the atmosphere low to the horizon sparkling in rainbow colors. As we used to say in psychedelic days, "Far out, man!"

If the seeing is good, Sirius B, the white dwarf companion of Sirius, is now visible. It takes 50 years to circle Sirius A. Canis Major yields other sights, like NGC 2283, a spiral galaxy just below Sirius. Below that is open cluster M41, this constellation's

Messier object. A bit to its left are two dimmer clusters, Tom 1 & 2, discovered by Clyde Tombaugh as he searched for Pluto.

Two more star clusters are in the area of the Hunter and his two dogs, between the stars of the Winter Triangle. M50 is a third of the way from Sirius to Procyon, the bright star in Canis Minor (the two-star constellation east of Orion), while NGC 2244 is a third of the way from Betelgeuse in the upper left corner of Orion, to Procyon. NGC 2244 is surrounded by the beautiful Rosette Nebula, well known from photographs, but you'll need a biggish scope under dark skies to catch it visually. To the west of Sirius and below Orion is Lepus the Hare—perhaps being chased by Orion and the dogs. Directly below Lepus's two vertically-aligned brightest stars is M79, the only winter globular cluster. Look for some of these things on Saturday, February 16 at the Chamberlin Open House.

—Dennis Cochran

Officer and E-Board Nominations for 2008-2009

The following nominations were made at the January 18th meeting. Additional nominations may be made at the February 22nd general meeting or by contacting a member of the nominating committee: Wayne Kaaz (303-840-1549) or Dennis Cochran (720-870-0465).

President:

Wayne Green

Vice President:

Keith Pool

Secretary:

Ron Pearson
Darrell Dodge (declined)

Treasurer:

Brad Gilman

Executive Board:

Chuck Carlson
Darrell Dodge (declined)
Jack Eastman
Joe Gafford
Stuart Hutchins
Frank Mancini
Ron Mickle
Bill Ormsby
Dave Shouldice
Bryan Williams
Dan Wray

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**What's on
YOUR
Bucket List?**

Welcome to These Recent New DAS Members:

Jack Harper
Alfred L. Armstead
Mark Levinson
Delbert (Del) E.
Maxfield
Michael Backes
Liane Bennett
Michael Frost
Richard A. Johnson
Danny J. Lesandrini
David Pinsinski
William Travis

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About the Denver Astronomical Society

Membership in The Denver Astronomical Society is open to anyone wishing to join. The DAS provides trained volunteers who host educational and public outreach events at the **University of Denver's Historic Chamberlin Observatory**, which the DAS helped place on the National Register of Historic Places. First light at Chamberlin in 1894 was a public night of viewing, a tradition the DAS has helped maintain since its founding in 1952.

The DAS is a long-time member in good standing of the **Astronomical League** and the **International Dark Sky Association**.

The DAS' mission is to provide its members a forum for increasing and sharing their knowledge of astronomy, to promote astronomical education to the public, and to preserve **Historic Chamberlin Observatory** and its telescope in cooperation with the University of Denver.

The DAS is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation and has established three tax-deductible funds: the Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship Fund, the Public Outreach Fund, and the Edmund G. Kline Dark Site Fund. To contribute, please see the bottom of the membership form for details.

More information about the DAS, its activities, and the special tax-deductible funds is available on the DAS web site at www.thedas.org.



**APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP TO THE
DENVER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY**

New Renewal

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone numbers: Home () Work ()
 E-mail Address: _____
 Occupation: _____
 Other Interests: _____
 (Students Only) School: _____ Grade: _____

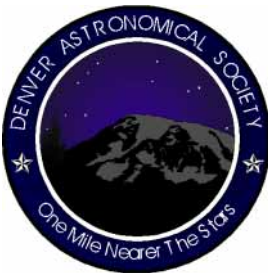
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 Yes No

Do you want the above information excluded from the yearly roster?
 Yes No

Please Circle All That Apply:

Regular Membership: \$35	Students: \$12 (<i>Students under age 23</i>)	\$ _____
<i>Astronomy Magazine</i> /\$34 and/or <i>Sky & Telescope Magazine</i> /\$32.95		\$ _____
Van Nattan Scholarship Fund		\$ _____
Public Outreach Fund		\$ _____
DAS Dark Site Fund		\$ _____
Total Amount Paid		\$ _____

Please send all checks to Brad Gilman, DAS treasurer, 7003 S. Cherry St., Centennial, CO 80122-1179. Please make donations to the DAS Dark Site with a separate check, payable to the "DAS Dark Site Fund." For DAS Membership and other funds, including new-member magazine subscriptions, please make amounts payable to the "Denver Astronomical Society." DAS RENEWALS ONLY: you may now send your Sky & Telescope subscription funds directly to the magazine's subscription service, using the renewal form sent to you.



Denver Astronomical Society

c/o Chamberlin Observatory
 2930 East Warren Avenue
 Denver, Colorado 80210

