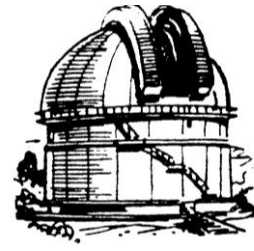

Journal

of the



Nottingham Astronomical Society

February 2003

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Thursday 6th February

Doors open 7.30pm

This evening we welcome
Dr. Alfonso Aragon-Salamanca,
of the School of
Physics and Astronomy, University of
Nottingham

who will be speaking on the subject of

Observing the Universe

THIS MONTH **Saturn** is still nearly as close as it has been for 29 years and, at the same time, has its rings wide open. To add the final touch to this great opportunity to observe Saturn with a small telescope is the fact that it is high in the sky, lying between the constellations of Gemini and Taurus, and is thus seen through a minimum of atmospheric turbulence.

Also in Taurus is the **Crab Nebula**, at the heart of which is a neutron star, the result of the collapse of the original star's core. Although only around 20 km in diameter it weighs more than our Sun and is spinning 30 times a second. Its rotating magnetic field generate beams of light and radio waves which sweep across the sky. As a result, a radio telescope will pick up very regular pulses of radiation and the object is thus also known a pulsar. Its pulses are monitored each day at Jodrell Bank with a 13m radio telescope.

News items from the President

Sherwood Observatory visit

On **Sunday morning, 9th February**, members of the NAS committee and observatory group will be visiting Mansfield & Sutton Astronomical Society's Sherwood Observatory, Coxmoor Lane, Sutton-in-Ashfield, arriving there for a **10.00am** start.

As I am sure you know, our own 24-inch telescope is now under construction. But our observatory dome is in need of mechanisms to rotate it and to open and close the shutter. So the main purpose of our visit to Mansfield & Sutton will be to meet the Sherwood Observatory's engineers and, we hope, gain some benefit from their knowledge of dome mechanisms!

Having said that, the visit is not exclusively for committee and observatory group members. Any NAS member is very welcome to come along. **Indeed, I would encourage you to join the observatory group.** It is a new group aimed at sharing knowledge and skills related to the observatory and the large telescope and we hope to see the group flourish as we bring the observatory into full operation.

Committee members will be offering lifts from various parts of Nottingham to the Sherwood Observatory. There will be further details at the February CTC meeting.

You can find out more about the NAS observatory group by visiting:

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/nottinghamastronomicalsociety/>

Please note that if you want to join the Yahoo group you may need to obtain a Yahoo passport, and applications will be submitted to the NAS Secretary before you can have full access the website. This is merely to check that applicants are NAS members.

Mansfield & Sutton Astronomical Society has a website at:

http://homepage.ntlworld.com/graham.shepherd/Sherwood_Observatory.html

This includes maps of the location of the Sherwood Observatory.

Many thanks to Graham Shepherd of Mansfield & Sutton AS for arranging this visit.

The NAS Annual Dinner

An event to look forward to in the early spring is our Annual Dinner. We are planning to hold the dinner in the second half of March, close to the spring equinox. At the time of writing, full details are being worked out, but I may have some more information at the February CTC meeting.

Full details of the date, venue, cost and how to book for the dinner will appear in the March issue of the Journal. In the meantime, do please think about coming to the dinner, and remember that family and friends will all be very welcome. *No knowledge of astronomy is needed!*

Paul Stocks

Sky Notes

2003 February

Compiled by Roy Gretton

All times quoted are U.T.



THE MOON

New Moon	1d 10h 49m
First Quarter	9d 11h 11m
Full Moon	16d 23h 51m
Last Quarter	23d 16h 46m

THE PLANETS

<i>Positions on February 10th</i>			
	R.A.	Dec.	Mag.
Mercury	19h 53m	-21°04'	-0.1
Venus	18h 26m	-21°04'	-4.1
Mars	16h 57m	-22°22'	1.2
Jupiter	08h 59m	+18°01'	-2.5
Saturn	05h 27m	+22°04'	-0.1
Uranus	Not visible		
Neptune	Not visible		

Mercury reaches greatest western elongation on February 4, when it will be 25° from the Sun, a gibbous disk 6.7 arcminutes in diameter. But the low altitude of the planet above the southeastern horizon means that this will be an unfavourable apparition. Mercury will remain visible in the pre-dawn skies until around February 21.

Venus continues to be a morning object, shining brightly in the southeast before dawn, but moving steadily away from the earth.

Mars is steadily drawing away from the Sun in the morning skies, although its angular diameter continues to be too small for useful observation of surface details. However, “things will only get better” in the coming months as Mars moves to its closest opposition on August 28, when its angular diameter will have increased nearly fivefold!

Jupiter is excellently placed for observation this month. It rises in the early evening, positioned between the sickle of Leo and the large open cluster M44 in Cancer. Opposition takes place on 2 February, when the planet attains an apparent angular diameter of 46 arcseconds.

Saturn remains high in Taurus, a beautiful object with its rings wide open. Late in the month the asteroid Massalia, magnitude 9, passes north of Saturn, with its closest approach on the 25th at a distance of just 12 arcminutes. It should be visible in the same low power field as Saturn.

“Business is Looking Up” – for bird-watchers as well as astronomers!

National Nest Box Week - 14 - 21 February

Each year the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) runs National Nest Box Week from 14 - 21 February. St Valentine's Day marks the start since this is the traditional date when birds pair up for the new breeding season. The aim is to urge everyone with nest boxes to clean them out and check that they are in tip-top condition for the coming breeding season. This is also the very best time to put up new boxes.

Nest Boxes are important for birds and other wildlife - including mammals like bats and hedgehogs and insects like bumble bees and hornets - because modern habitats are often very short of the holes and cavities they need to nest and roost safely. The best boxes for an ordinary garden are those for tits - they have a very good chance of being occupied. In many gardens, particularly those in modern developments, these nest boxes are the only places for these birds to nest safely.

Making Boxes: The design and materials of a nest box are important since it needs to be well insulated and of the correct dimensions for the birds to be successful. Unfortunately some boxes are not well made and many do not last long.

Making boxes is easy and an excellent family activity. Details of how to make standard tit boxes, and how and where to erect them, are available free-of-charge from: NNBW, Freepost 1155, CANTERBURY, Kent CT3 4BR. The same address can be used to order the 'Official Nest Box' and to find out about others that are available for birds, bats and even insects! Nest box-making events will be taking place all over the country organised by county Wildlife Trusts, RSPB local groups and others and they should be contacted for details of local events.

The Official Nest Box: The BTO has adopted the special 'woodcrete' nest box of Jacobi Jayne & Company, the founding sponsors of National Nest Box Week, as the Official Nest Box for the Week. Made from a unique combination of sawdust, concrete and clay, it is very sturdy, has excellent insulating properties, is readily occupied and is now guaranteed for 25 years against damage in ordinary use! It sells for £17.95 (UK sterling).

About the BTO: The BTO is the UK's leading bird research organisation. It has over ten thousand members who are mainly skilled birdwatchers. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 75 at its HQ in Norfolk, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations.

BTO, The Nunnery, THETFORD, Norfolk IP24 2PU. Tel: 01842-750050

DIARY DATES, by Carl Brennan

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE NOTTINGHAM ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

February 6th OBSERVING THE UNIVERSE
Dr. Alfonso Aragon-Salamanca, School of
Physics and astronomy, University of
Nottingham

February 20th Informal Meeting
7.30pm to 9.00pm at the home of Stuart Atkins',
356 Loughborough Road, West Bridgford,
NOTTINGHAM, NG2 7FD,

March 6th EINSTEIN VERSUS STAR TREK
Les Jepson, Bassetlaw Astronomical Society

OTHER EVENTS

7th & 8th February AstroFest Europe's Leading
Astronomy Show. Kensington Town Hall,
London.

8th February Totality Day An event being
organised by the OU at Milton Keynes.
http://solareclipsewebpages.users.btopenworld.com/TD_files/TD2003.html

**14th & 15th FEBRUARY PLANETARY
GEOPHYSICS MEETING, GEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY LECTURE THEATRE, BURLINGTON
HOUSE, LONDON**
<http://bullard.esc.cam.ac.uk/~nimmo/bgaras.html>

**1st March Northants Amateur Astronomers
celebrate their 20th birthday.** They have a special
one-day conference planned. Tickets cost just
£4.00 for the whole day, or £2.00 for just the
morning or afternoon session. The event will be
held at the Masque Theatre in Barton Seagrave
near Kettering on Saturday 1st March, between
9.30am and 5pm and we would like to invite
members of your astronomical society to attend.

8th & 9th March Liverpool AS public Star party
will be held at Croxteth Park & Hall

**9th April (Wednesday) Sir Patrick Moore's 80th
Birthday Tour – Mars: The Next Front Ear**
7.30pm Derby Assembly Rooms (£11, £9, (Cons
£7)). Patrick talks about his planned holiday to
Mars using his bus pass. 01332255800
www.assemblyrooms-derby.co.uk . If you want to
be entertained then this is a "must" night out.

25th to 27th BAA Winchester Weekend.
<http://www.ast.cam.ac.uk/~baa/baa200203.htm>

9th/10th/11th May Autographica 2003 'The Worlds
Largest Autograph Show'. At the Northampton
Moat House Hotel. Tickets can now be booked on
our **new telephone number 01227 762392** during
normal office hours only, or visit
<http://www.autographica.co.uk/> for full details.

10th May 2003 Eclipse 10.30am to 4.15pm
National Maritime Museum. A simple day course
to look at this natural phenomenon and the science
we can learn. Interesting collection of speakers.
Cost £28.00 (£16 concessions). More information
on 02083126747/6648, E-mail
openmuseum@nmm.ac.uk , lstone@nmm.ac.uk or
visit [ww.nmm.ac.uk](http://www.nmm.ac.uk)

6th June 2003 Extraterrestrial Life 10.30am to
4.15pm National Maritime Museum. Cost £28.00
(£16 concessions). More information on
02083126747/6648, E-mail
openmuseum@nmm.ac.uk , lstone@nmm.ac.uk or
visit [ww.nmm.ac.uk](http://www.nmm.ac.uk)

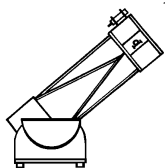
The next National Astronomy Week. On 27
August 2003 the planet Mars will come to a
particularly good opposition. To celebrate this
event, Britain's astronomers are planning another
National Astronomy Week
<http://www.astronomyweek.org.uk> see also
<http://basic1.easily.co.uk/057044/04D005/about.html>

If you are able to visit the Royal Observatory
(Greenwich/London) there is a special exhibition
running from December 2002 until August 2003
about the Beagle 2 mission to Mars.

Small Advertisements

David Lukehurst

Astronomical Telescope Maker



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For details & price list:

Tel: 0115 9602266

gildor@ntlworld.com

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The Nottingham Astronomical Society: E – SERVICES

The Journal

To register for your FREE Journal, just E-mail the secretary at carl.stella@virgin.net - You don't have to be a Society member to take advantage of this service.

Observatory Group

A web group page and message service has been set up at <http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/nottinghamastronomicalsociety/>

It will be used for circulating information about the observatory construction and projects, large telescope up-dates, and use of the site by members of the Observatory Group. Please visit the web site and E-mail on line if you wish to join (NAS Members only)

Minute Reports

If you wish to receive E-copies of the draft minutes of the committee let the secretary know at carl.stella@virgin.net . This service is open only to Society members.

Nottingham Astronomical Society

The Nottingham Astronomical Society, and/or the Editor accept no responsibility for any errors that may occur within this publication. Any views expressed in the NAS Journal are those of the individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the Nottingham Astronomical Society, it's Committee or Members.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

If you would like to join the Nottingham Astronomical Society, please complete and tear off this slip. Make your cheque/postal order payable to:

THE NOTTINGHAM ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Then send the slip and payment to Carl Brennan, Hon. Secretary, **Nottingham Astronomical Society**, 40 Swindon Close, The Vale, Giltbrook, Nottingham NG16 2WD.

Alternatively you may hand the slip and payment to the Secretary or Treasurer at one of the Society's regular meetings.

Your name _____

Full address _____

_____ Postcode _____

I wish to join the Nottingham Astronomical Society and enclose the membership fee for

(please tick appropriate box)

- Full Adult £22
- Junior (17 years or under) £11
- Concession (*full time student, UB40, Senior Citizen*) £11

Nottingham Astronomical Society

Affiliated to the British Astronomical Association
Member of the Federation of Astronomical Societies
Member of the Society for Popular Astronomy
Supporters of the Campaign for Dark Skies
Registered Charity No: 1066645

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e-mail: stocks_paul61@hotmail.com

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Dr Roy Gretton

e-mail: roy_gretton@peoples.ac.uk

Alan Heath (Ex. Dir. BAA Saturn Section)

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CURATOR OF INSTRUMENTS

David Lukehurst

e-mail: gildor@ntlworld.com

CAMPAIGN FOR DARK SKIES:

Greg Eisenhauer

ORDINARY COMMITTEE MEMBER:

Richard Evans

Meetings

Formal monthly meetings, with speakers, are held on the first Thursday of each month (except August) at

Djanogly City Technology College

Sherwood Rise, Nottingham NG7

Doors open	7.30pm
Meetings Start	7.45pm
Meetings end	10.00pm

Non-members are very welcome at our meetings and there is no charge for the first meeting. We make a small charge of £2.50 adults, £1.25 juniors to non-members after their first attendance. Invited guests are admitted free of charge.

Annual Subscriptions, 2002-03

Full Adult:	£22
Junior (17 years or under)	£11
Concessions	£11

(Full time student, UB40, Senior Citizens)

Subscriptions become due on 1 October. Half-price subscription is charged if joining after 1st April. Please make cheques payable to:
Nottingham Astronomical Society.

If you would like further information about the Nottingham Astronomical Society, or would like to become a member, please

- contact the Honorary Secretary, Carl Brennan, at the address given above or
- speak to any NAS committee member at one of the regular monthly meetings.

A membership application form appears inside this issue of the Journal.
