

Stargazey Pie!

A slice of Highlands astronomical life!

Tues 1st April 2014

HAS Meeting Notices April 2014

1. Current News and Dates for your Diary

- HAS celebrates its 20th Anniversary in April 2014 – we are arranging for a special speaker in the summer, details to be announced
- We are working on the questionnaires – thanks to those of you who have offered to help as volunteers, and for the good ideas that have been forward. We will report the findings via Stargazey Pie. If you have still to return your questionnaire, it's not too late but please get it to a committee member as soon as possible. Thanks very much to everyone who took time to respond.
- We are still looking for volunteers to help out with some one-off tasks such as the annual spring-clean of the observatory. If you think you might be able to help, please contact one of the committee members at the tea/coffee break. Putting your name down does not commit you to anything!
- Programme of events for 2014/15– this is being worked on and we hope to have a new programme as soon as possible.

2. Reciprocal Membership Arrangement with Sigma.

The Astronomical society based in Elgin, "Sigma" and HAS have agreed that there will be reciprocal membership between the two societies. This means that if you want to attend a talk at Sigma, you can turn up, say you are from HAS, and you get in for free. Likewise, Sigma members can attend HAS talks for free. It is also hoped to develop links between the societies in relation to inviting speakers north.

3. The next meeting is on Tuesday 6 May - this will be a talk by Denis Buczynski entitled "Comets and the Amateur Astronomer in the Digital Age" followed by a break-out beginners session.

4. Aurorae and Telephone alerts – should you see an aurora, noctilucent clouds, or anything else of astronomical interest, please alert Paul (01667 456789) or Pauline (07751 112 586). It is never too late at night to let us know.

5. Subscriptions – these become due once the level of fees is agreed at the AGM. Forms are available from Liz and Christine at the front desk during tea break.

Arthur opens the meeting reminding us all that our Society, the Highlands Astronomical Society, was formed 20 years ago and it is gratifying to see it still going strong with membership numbers growing year on year. Starting in Jim Savage-Lowden's house, the club moved into the Spectrum Centre, then the Green House and finally where to our present venue of the Smithton-Culloden Free Church.

Main Event

Tonight we had our AGM.

Our Chairman, Arthur Milnes, was voted in for a further year.

Paul Jenkins, our Treasurer, had to step down after five years taking care of our money and Ronnie Fraser has been elected in his place.

Liz Grafton, who has been doing a great job as acting Secretary, was voted officially into the role after Caroline Woods was unable to continue due to moving to Glasgow.

Our financial performance has been good over the past year and the planned loss was less than budgeted for. Paul said there was no point in accumulating funds when the bank doesn't give interest. The extra money came from increased membership and the raffle. It means that subscription rates can remain the same.

The Auditor was happy and signed off the accounts.

To mark our 20th anniversary and because the raffle has reached £4000, it was decided to have a special raffle prize of a book called 'Universe'; which was won by Barbara Cohen. We also had a special cake made for us by Dows, which was delicious. Don't worry, the rest has been frozen for you to sample at the next meeting.



Heavenly Highlights or things to look out for by Antony McEwan

Mars is reaching opposition and will be at its closest point to Earth on 8th April. It is bright with a distinctive orange/red colour rising in the east at about 21.00 and nicely placed, although low in the south at midnight. Using a telescope it is possible to see quite a bit of detail. Information about observing Mars can be found on the front page of our website. Mars can be seen just above Spica, and if you follow the handle of the Plough downwards in an arc you come to Arcturus, keep going and you reach Spica passing Mars on the way. There may be crazy stories on the Internet about Mars – just ignore them.

There are lots of galaxies to be found in both Virgo and Leo but as the nights are getting shorter you'll have to stay up later to look for them. The Lyrid meteor shower is at its most active over the night of 22nd /23rd April and shouldn't be affected too much by the Moon. Keep a look out for the aurora whilst the nights are still dark enough.

Finally, Solar Saturdays are starting soon so keep watching the website.

We promised you we would bring you the results of the **questionnaire** after Maarten, Liz and I had looked through them and here they are:

The results are based on a small sample of questionnaires as only 25% were returned. That said, the survey has provided a lot of information as to what people are interested in and we will use the findings when planning talks and activities. Remember you can always bring ideas to committee members on meeting nights or via the website and we will take suggestions on board wherever possible.

The questionnaires revealed that we have some very long standing members (five for over 15 years) and a high number of people (17) who have joined more recently. Most are in the older age groups, i.e. over the age of 46, and half are female.

Most members attend the meetings regularly with some travelling a long way to our venue (40 miles for one member). The majority of members are beginners or have a basic knowledge of astronomy and although most find the talks challenging, they enjoy being 'stretched'. The quality of the speakers and subjects covered were considered mostly excellent. Subjects enjoyed most were deep space, the solar system, observing and learning basic skills followed closely by cosmology, Earth's atmosphere, equipment and astro-imaging. Thank you to everyone who suggested subjects for possible talks, and we will see what we can do.

Breakout groups tended to score highly. Some members were unable to attend due to distance travelled, other commitments or simply 'brain strain' after the main talk, which is also a very valid reason.

The observatory sessions were usually attended once or twice by members with just a few attending regularly. Overall the sessions were rated as good although most members found them excellent. Barriers to attending again included distance travelled but also work the next day, transport difficulties, other commitments. Some didn't attend because they had their own telescopes; other members were new and hadn't yet managed to come along. Remember, your own equipment can be brought along to a members' night with help and advice available to beginners. Supervisors are there to help you look through the large telescope and point out constellations in the night sky, binoculars are available for anyone to use and a computer planetarium programme is usually running during the session. The observatory is for your enjoyment and amazement. Once you have seen a dark sky full of stars with the Milky Way stretching overhead and views of deep sky objects that can only be revealed through a large telescope, you'll want to come again and again.

Additional events were always enjoyed by those who attended them but those who didn't attend, generally did not have the time or had other commitments.

The website was visited regularly usually to find out if an observing session was on, to find out about the next meeting or to read about the latest news and current events. Some good suggestions have been made as to how we could improve the website and these will be put to the Webmaster.

Thank you very much for your feedback and to those of you who volunteered to help out. There are a few projects coming up soon and we will be in touch. It was good to see that the overall satisfaction with the Society was excellent (mostly) or good. Thank you to everyone who took part – your responses are valued as it is the only way we can improve the Society and give you what you want.

If you didn't manage to complete the questionnaire but would like to do so now, please just fill it in or ask for a copy and then hand it in at the next meeting.

Pauline

Next time, we have a guest speaker talking about comets and the amateur astronomer as well as tea and biscuits followed by a beginner's break out group.