

Secretary's Annual Report 2008-09

This report should be read in conjunction with that of the Chairman and Treasurer.

Secretary

Eric Walker has held the position of Secretary over the past year and will be standing down at the AGM on 7th April 2009.

Membership

The number of members, by the end of the current accounting session, is 94 consisting of 62 Full members, 12 Family members, 5 Student / Unemployed members, 9 Junior members, and 6 Honorary members.

Numbers attending each monthly meeting including speaker and visitors

(Previous years figures in brackets)

36* (29) (26)	Apr 08	Tim Schroder	<i>AGM + 'The Astronomical Patrick Moore'</i>
42 (45) (39)	May	Chris Stradling	<i>'The Hubble Space Telescope'</i>
54 (40) (36)	Jun	John Eldridge	<i>'Stars in their Death Throes'</i>
50 (27) (28)	Jul	Duncan Lunan	<i>'The Sun and its Interactions with Earth'</i>
54 (43) (40)	Aug	Ross McLure	<i>'Hunting the Largest Redshift Galaxies'</i>
50 (46) (51)	Sep	Colin Donaldson	<i>'Physics of the Extraordinary'</i>
51 (42) (48)	Oct	Maarten de Vries	<i>'Charlie's List'</i>
57 (48) (52)	Nov	Andrew Elliot	<i>'Video Astronomy'</i>
		Bill Leslie	<i>'Comet Making'</i>
38 (41) (??)	Dec	Maarten de Vries	<i>'Traipsing Round the Universe'</i>
47 (32) (53)	Jan09	Bill Leslie	<i>'Mars – How Did They Get It So Wrong?'</i>
48 (49) (48)	Feb	Pauline Macrae	<i>'Galilean Satellites'</i>
56 (47) (50)	Mar	Arthur Milnes	<i>'Powering Satellites and Spaceships'</i>

**April AGM attendance included 4 non-members who had no voting rights*

Thanks are due to all those who help “man the door & tea urn” at these meetings and ensure all the documents are distributed, attendees sign in/out, and that new visitors are chaperoned, fed & watered, and welcomed into our Society.

The format of the monthly meetings was reviewed and altered so they became more “punchy” with more time dedicated to the main elements – presentation, discussion, astronomy updates, and breakout groups.

The “Youngstars” meeting & activities was started, catering for children in the 8 -14 years old age range, and is ably supported by Pauline Macrae, Trina Shaddick, and Emma Tidey for half an hour before each main monthly meeting.

A ballot of members was held at the March 2008 meeting after trialling the NTS Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre as a venue. The result was overwhelmingly in favour of continuing with The Green House.

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Media - Publications (Inverness Courier)

April 2008	Pauline Macrae	<i>'Leo'</i>
May	Antony McEwan	<i>'Naming The Starry Patterns'</i>
June	Pauline Macrae	<i>'Space Missions Update – Inner Planets'</i>
July	Pauline Macrae	<i>'Space Missions Update – Outer Planets'</i>
August	Antony McEwan	<i>'Nature's Own Fireworks Display'</i>
September	Rhona Fraser	<i>'The Pole Star and The Dragon'</i>
October	Antony McEwan	<i>'A Dolphin, Arrow and Little Fox'</i>
November	Rhona Fraser	<i>'The Ram, The Triangle and The Pleiades'</i>
December	Pauline Macrae	<i>'The Fishes Tale'</i>
January 2009	Rhona Fraser	<i>'An Immortal Sea Monster'</i>
February	Pauline Macrae	<i>'The Bull ready to Lock Horns'</i>
March	Antony McEwan	<i>'On The Trail of a Comet'</i>

Media - Features (newspapers & magazines)

BBC Sky at Night & Astronomy Now – various articles on the opening of our new observatory.

Press & Journal and Inverness Courier – several articles leading up to and about the opening of our new observatory.

Press & Journal - featured an article on HAS member Craig Ferguson mentioning his love of astronomy, and his enthusiasm for the new facility.

Media – Television

BBC News - Maarten de Vries was asked to give a live update on BBC News about the observation of the toolbag which was lost during a Shuttle service mission of the ISS.

Reul-Chuirt – a Gaelic television series featuring archeo-astronomy and current interest in general astronomy throughout the Highlands. It was broadcast on STV from Sunday 6th July and consisted of six twenty-five minute long programmes, one of which featured the star party at Eric Walker's observatory in Conon Bridge, and three 'stills' from his astrophotographic collection. The series is regularly repeated on BBC Alba.

Media – Internet

Highlands Astronomical Society is frequently asked for articles to be published on the BBC Scotland News website. In addition to the newspaper articles above, website versions are often also published.

Media – Website

The Spacegazer website continues to receive a high hit rate and also many enquiries throughout the year from potential new members and queries from the general public and media re "sightings", forthcoming events, technical & observing issues, and requests to advertise. The site has a new "home", Spanglefish, which is much easier to update and has a modern look. Antony McEwan again deserves special mention for the professional and diligent upkeep of our website.

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Events

The Society held an Open Day at the Eastgate Centre on Saturday 14th June in order to promote the opening of JSL Observatory which, in addition to bringing HAS and its activities to the attention of the local public, resulted in the recruitment of new members at meetings in the latter part of the year.

Other promotional events included the Highland Games at Bught Park, Inverness and the Black Isle Show at Muir of Ord Showground. Thanks to the members who supported these events.

The grand opening of the new Jim Savage-Lowden Observatory on the 21st June was the main event of the year and is well reported in an article on the website.

A Members First Light Star Party was held on Friday 29th of August at the JSL Observatory. The members who turned out brought food and drink and made the event a night to remember. Once clouds had dissipated, the views from the new telescope were truly remarkable.

Highlands Science Festival events in October and November were well supported and attended by HAS members.

A Society visit to Royal Observatory, Edinburgh on Saturday 15th November was well attended and an excellent report presented at the December monthly meeting and summarised on the website.

The Society held its first Christmas Dinner at The Anderson in Fortrose on Friday 12th December and it was a great success.

Messier Challenge

Maarten de Vries compiled an astronomical observing challenge open to all members. Awards can be made for achieving Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum levels, reflecting the increasing degree of difficulty and opportunity for viewing these objects. To date, Rhona Fraser is the only member to have been presented with a Bronze Level certificate. Others are waiting in the wing eagerly waiting for clear skies to complete their challenges.

Observing Sessions

Observing at Culloden was again difficult this year due to our usual weather problems. The public sessions and members sessions which have been held are always successful and are beginning to stimulate interest in astronomy and attract new members to the Society.

Specialist Support Team

The Society has a team of specialists who are able to assist our members, the public, and the media with queries – both practical and knowledge-based. They are listed on the website.

Members

HAS is all about its members. We are very fortunate to have a sizeable and diverse membership and must continue to utilise this diversity to promote our aims and activities throughout the Highlands. Thanks very much for all the support, attendance, input, participation, and feedback which help this Society meet its aims and keep it at the forefront of UK astronomical societies.

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Committee

I cannot possibly complete this report without acknowledging the tremendous effort put in by all of the Committee. There have been several key personnel changes over the past year and the Society has steered a steady course throughout. The Society is in a great place to focus on its key aims and objectives and ensure that astronomy is enjoyed by people of all ages, background, and ability in our wonderful dark skies location in the Scottish Highlands.

Eric W Walker
Secretary
26 March 2009