

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, June 8, 2011, Meeting

In attendance:

- Benjamin Ashley
- Barton & Linda Billard
- Scott Busby
- Don Clark
- George Clarke
- Joe & Sherry Francis
- Rob Friedel
- Leigh Gettier
- Ranny Heflin
- Glenn Holliday
- Jerry Hubbell
- Mike Masters

President Mike Masters began the meeting at 7 p.m. Fourteen members were present. Before the program, Mike covered some items of old business.

Program

Glenn Holliday talked about “Presenting Astronomy to Groups at Events.” He showed notes he uses for putting on an astronomy event, with checklists and ideas to use as appropriate. His tips include setting an alarm in your cell phone for events like an International Space Station pass, and with groups like scouts, scheduling some teaching before sunset to get people there on time for the whole program. He also offered some one-word goals (with explanations as needed) to build upon: “Observe, spread (our interest), excite (hope to hear some “wows”), encourage, inform (reward curiosity), promote (let people know how RAC can help them), fix (dispel misconceptions).”

He gave examples of types of objects to observe and present. Magnify a big globular cluster to fill the field of view. Show the Perseus Double Cluster. Include interesting asterisms like the “coat hanger” or “wedding ring.” If a partial phase of the Moon is visible, you can show them shadows moving. Glenn reminded us to consider non-telescopic targets, especially constellations. He said the *Backyard Astronomer’s Guide* has a list of sources for stories to tell about them near the end of the book.

Glenn talked about questions to expect, some of which were familiar to the members listening. Many questions relate to the life cycle of stars. Most frequently asked about equipment is, “How much did that cost?” Scott added a frequent question that he gets: “What magnification is that?” He has made himself a cheat sheet to keep track of the magnification of the various combinations of telescopes and eyepieces that he could be using.

Old Business

- Treasurer’s report—Mike presented Tim’s report for May 31, 2011. Tim was away on travel for work. To date we have 29 paid Club members plus some members who have paid dues for next year or more. A vote was taken to reimburse Mike for the purchase of knobs for the two new tripods by extending his membership for another year.
- Status of Club loaner equipment—Mike demonstrated the Celestron altitude-azimuth tripod adjustment using the new adjustable handles as altitude locks. When unlocked, the tripod is free to roughly align over the full range of motion. When locked, the tripod allows fine adjustment to view and track over a limited range.
- Events—Mike discussed the policy on cancellation decisions for star parties, in light of some recent calls that had to be made under uncertain weather conditions. The Club has determined that we need to decide by noon on the date of the event because we need to consider members, Caledon staff, and visitors. The noon cutoff allows notice by email to the Club list and through an update of the Club website, and gives Caledon staff time to record a message notifying visitors. When the weather improves after the decision, a formal star party is no longer possible, but individual members could contact Caledon to arrange for observing. Weather forced cancellation of both primary (May

28) and backup (June 4) star party dates at Caledon. Plans for the Space Day outreach at Conway Elementary were scaled back to solar observing from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., with Mike Masters taking his solar scope and Don Clark taking the Club Personal Solar Telescope. The next outreach is June 25 at Westmoreland. Mike requested volunteers; Bart, Scott, and a couple of others planned to attend. The next Club star party at Caledon is July 2. Scott Busby will present a program, "About Light Pollution," for the Club meeting at CRRL/HQ on July 13.

- Heart of Virginia Star Party—Scott sent information about this event in Goochland County to be held on November 18–20. It might be an event suitable for group participation. Glenn said he is making plans to go.
- Email aliases for Club officers and points of contact—Ranny Heflin's email aliases still need validation. He and Don started talking about what is needed.
- Raclub.org website versus rac_group—The intended usage patterns for the two websites and lists have been posted.
- Stratford Hall point of contact requests—Mr. Bachman wishes to schedule events for 2012–2013. Mike indicated to him that this Club is unable to make such long-term commitments. He encouraged Mr. Bachman to consider contacting Richmond Astronomical Society as a better match for such advanced planning. The contact may have been successful, because Mike has not heard from Mr. Bachman lately.
- Alternate meeting location committee—Scott indicated the committee is getting started, and that they may have some new possibilities to evaluate.

New Business/News Items

- Bart related some items from a NASA press release about the papers presented at the American Astronomical Society meeting in Boston at the end of May. One is on estimating the age of stars from their rotation rates. The study used Kepler photometry of members of the open cluster NGC 6811 to extend data on the relationship to star ages of about 1 billion years. Previous data covered stars from the Hyades and Praesepe clusters with ages of about 600 million years.
- Equipment upgrade committee—Mike established a new committee to research equipment for purchase by the Club. It is to be a standing committee with membership that can vary from year to year based on the type of equipment to under consideration. As standing members, he named the President (as chair), Vice President, and Treasurer. Other Club members will augment the committee as appropriate. For the first project, Mike proposed a modest astrocamera with a price under \$500. Criteria should emphasize ease of use so that it would be a good camera for getting started in astrophotography. He also suggested that, for simplicity, a color camera would be preferable to monochrome with filters. Scott Busby and Jerry Hubbell agreed to participate in the astrocamera task.
- Scott noted that a supernova in M51 made the news. It occurred just a couple of weeks after Ranny made his image of the galaxy.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is July 13, 2011, 7:00 p.m., at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library Headquarters, 1201 Caroline St., in Fredericksburg. Introductions will begin at 6:45 p.m.

Submitted by Bart Billard, Secretary