

The High Desert Observer

April 2021

This Month's Meeting - April 23, 2021

Meeting will be virtual via Zoom®, to be held on Friday, April 23rd at 7 p.m.

Speaker for the Month - Brandon Hamil
The Traveling Astronomer

This entertaining and fast-paced astronomy talk will center around unique astronomy experiences that anyone can participate in if they just venture out onto the road. This country is big and filled with amazing astronomical experiences that simply await your arrival.



Throughout the course of Brandon's extensive national travel, he has met many astronomy celebrities, leading authorities in our field, and owners and leaders of a wide-variety of astronomy companies.

During this presentation, you will hear about some of these people, several unique telescopic observing experiences that you too can seek out, and numerous astronomy related facilities that you simply must visit! Bottom-line: traveling can add adventures to stargazing and offer dividends to your hobby that are simply not available in your own backyards!

Future meetings will continue to be virtual until the Covid-19 situation allows us to meet safely in person.



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Coming Events (postponed due to Covid-19)

Typically, ASLC hosts public in-town observing sessions at the Pan Am Plaza on University Ave. and at Tombaugh Observatory on the NMSU campus. All sessions begin at dusk.

At our Leasburg Dam State Park Observatory, we normally hold monthly star parties. Located just 20 miles north of Las Cruces, our 16-inch Meade LX200 telescope at this site is used to observe under rather dark skies. Please note that the ASLC will not be holding other meetings, gatherings or public outreach events until it is deemed safe to do so. Please social-distance and wear your mask!

From the Desk of Ed Montes ASLC President

The cyclic nature of our skies provides us with the opportunity to constantly visit and re-visit old friends and to make new ones. Yes, I mean all the wonderful sights that we find up there. Sometimes we have observing routines that are carefully planned, plotted and followed. Sometimes we open up the latest issue of



Sky and Telescope or Astronomy and check out the observing articles and try to match what they've described. Sometimes we just realize that, "oh, it's April, the Pleiades are close to setting for the year, I better observe them one more time before they disappear" or "Hercules is rising, let's find M13." These friends are always there, and seeing them again, visiting with them again, is just up to us. They are the touchstones of our relationship with the heavens, always available to be found and contemplated (and maybe even talked to, during lonesome observing sessions when it's just you and the stars). If we make the effort, they will respond.

The cyclic nature of our skies provides us with the opportunity to constantly visit and re-visit old friends and to make new ones. Yes, I mean all the wonderful people with whom we are willing to share a view through an eyepiece, or stare up at the sky and count meteors, or just contemplate the enormity of the universe. There are always people you've known "forever", who let you look through the telescope they bought with money from their first job, and the ones you went on a road trip with to see the total eclipse. There are the people who've never seen the Andromeda Galaxy and you are the one who introduces them to M31 after they say they've always wanted to see it but never knew how to find it. There are those who took you under their wing and taught you things you'd never imagined and the taught

you how to imagine things for yourself. And there are those that you will inspire and whose imaginations you will spark. These friends will not always be there, appreciate them while you have them, they are the touchstones of our relationship with the heavens. Contemplate with them, and maybe you'll find your observing sessions ever more enriching and just a bit less lonesome".

My sincere hope for this club is for it to be an organization that can engender both types of "old friends". That we can constantly inspire people to go out and look at the sky with inquiring eyes so that they want to join us. And that we constantly add new sights to behold so that the tapestry of our sky just gets richer.

In that vein, our speaker this month is Brandon Hamil. I met him by way of introduction from one of our former members, Sid Webb. Sid met Brandon at the Enchanted Skies Star Party several years ago which Brandon had come to from Minnesota. Subsequently, Brandon was in the area again and the three of us got together for dinner and astronomy talk. Brandon does a lot of traveling for his job and always looks for astronomical connections. I'm looking forward to his talk, The Traveling Astronomer.

Finally, after our last Zoom meeting, one of our members contacted me to inform me that there were some comments made as the meeting was ending that he perceived to be "political" in nature and that this disturbed him. Here is a direct quote from his message, "I think the group needs a reminder that the ASLC is an apolitical group. I get annoyed when I hear comments for or against any side in politics. I know there are many different views held by the members and (this) public forum is no place to air them. There was a comment last night ... and a counter comment, it does no one any good."

I am looking forward to warmer nights, great observing sessions, and eventually real star parties with old friends.

Until next month, clear skies!

The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC) is dedicated to expanding public awareness and understanding of the wonders of the universe. ASLC holds frequent observing sessions and star parties, providing opportunities to work on Society and public educational projects. Members receive electronic delivery of The High Desert Observer, our monthly newsletter, plus membership in the Astronomical League including their quarterly publication, Reflector, available in either paper or digital format. ASLC members are also entitled to a discount on a subscription to Sky and Telescope magazine. Annual Individual Dues are \$30; Family \$36; Student (Full Time) \$24. Dues are payable in January and partial year prorated for new members. Please contact our Treasurer, Patricia Conley, treasurer@aslc-nm.org for further information.

ASLC Board of Directors

| | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------|
| board@aslc-nm.org | |
| President: | Ed Montes president@aslc-nm.org |
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Featured Article:

Watch the Lion: Celestial Wonders in Leo

This article is distributed by NASA Night Sky Network. The Night Sky Network program supports astronomy clubs across the USA dedicated to astronomy outreach. Visit <https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/> to find local clubs, events, and more.

By David Prosper

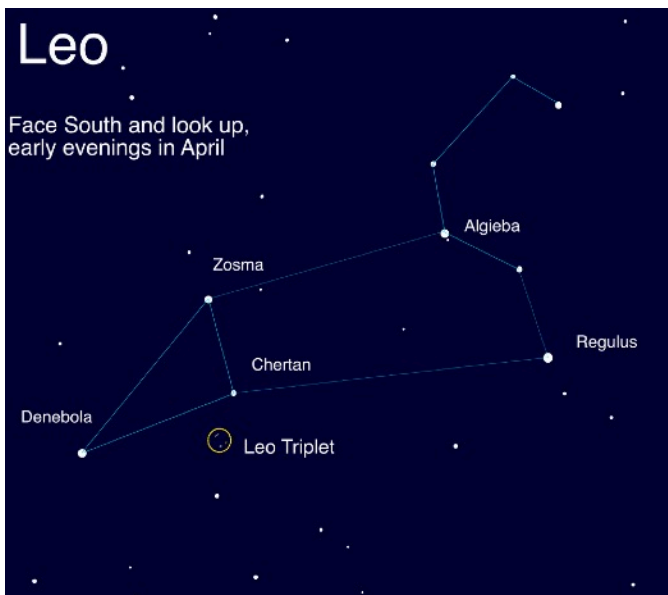
Leo is a prominent sight for stargazers in April. Its famous sickle, punctuated by the bright star Regulus, draws many a beginning stargazer's eyes, inviting deeper looks into some of Leo's celestial delights, including a great double star and a famous galactic trio.

Leo's distinctive forward sickle, or "reverse question mark," is easy to spot as it climbs the skies in the southeast after sunset. If you are having a difficult time spotting the sickle, look for bright Sirius and Procyon - featured in last month's article - and complete a triangle by drawing two lines to the east, joining at the bright star Regulus, the "period" in the reverse question mark. Trailing them is a trio of bright stars forming an isosceles triangle, the brightest star in that formation named Denebola. Connecting these two patterns together forms the constellation of Leo the Lion, with the forward-facing sickle being the lion's head and mane, and the rear triangle its hindquarters. Can you see this mighty feline? It might help to imagine Leo proudly sitting up and staring straight ahead, like a celestial Sphinx.

If you peer deeper into Leo with a small telescope or binoculars, you'll find a notable double star! Look in the sickle of Leo for its second-brightest star, Algieba - also called Gamma Leonis. This star splits into two bright yellow stars with even a

small magnification - you can make this “split” with binoculars, but it's more apparent with a telescope. Compare the color and intensity of these two stars - do you notice any differences? There are other multiple star systems in Leo – spend a few minutes scanning with your instrument of choice, and see what you discover.

One of the most famous sights in Leo is the “Leo Triplet”: three galaxies that appear to be close together. They are indeed gravitationally bound to one another, around 30 million light years away! You’ll need a telescope to spot them, and use an eyepiece with a wide field of view to see all three galaxies at once! Look below the star Chertan to find these galaxies. Compare and contrast the appearance of each galaxy – while they are all spiral galaxies, each one is tilted at different angles to our point of view! Do they all look like spiral galaxies to you?



The stars of Leo: note that you may see more or less stars, depending on your sky quality. The brightness of the Leo Triplet has been exaggerated for the purposes of the illustration - you can't see them with your unaided eye.

April is Citizen Science Month, and there are some fun Leo-related activities you can participate in! If you enjoy comparing the Triplets, the “Galaxy Zoo” project (galaxyzoo.org) could use your eyes to help classify different galaxies from sky survey data!

Looking at Leo itself can even help measure light pollution: the Globe at Night project (globeatnight.org) uses Leo as their target constellation for sky quality observations from the Northern Hemisphere for their April campaign, running from April 3-12. Find and participate in many more NASA community science programs at science.nasa.gov/citizenscience. Happy observing!



Your view of the three galaxies in the Leo Triplet won't look as amazing as this image taken by the VLT Survey Telescope, unless you have a telescope with a mirror 8 feet or more in diameter! Still, even a small telescope will help your eyes pick up these three galaxies as “faint fuzzies”: objects that seem blurry against a background of pinpoint stars. Let your eyes relax and experiment with observing these galaxies by looking slightly away from them, instead of looking directly at them; this is called averted vision, a handy technique that can help you see details in fainter, more nebulous objects.

Did you have fun? Contribute to science with monthly observing programs from Globe at Night's website, <https://www.globeatnight.org/>, and check out the latest NASA's science on the stars you can - and can't - see <https://www.nasa.gov/>

Minutes of March 2021 Meeting

John McCullough - Secretary

Edward Montes, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC, the Society), called the March 2021 meeting to order at 7:03 pm on 26 March 2021. He welcomed attendees to tonight's meeting via ZOOM. Twentysix (26) attendees were signed in for the start of the meeting, eventually twentyseven (27) individuals participated.

Ed welcomed the group and noted that minutes from the February 2021 meeting (thanks to John McCullough, Secretary) were published in the Society newsletter, the High Desert Observer (HDO), (thanks to Tim Kostelecky, HDO editor). Ed asked if there were any required additions, deletions, or corrections to the minutes as submitted. None being offered, Tracy Stuart, Immediate Past President, moved that the February 2021 minutes be accepted as published; John Kutney seconded. There being no objections, the motion was passed.

Ed announced the meeting format will change to allow the presentation to occur earlier and not be delayed by extensive Society business discussions. With that said, Ed introduced his friend and new Society member, Jens Thielmann, of Anaheim Hills, CA.

Presentation:

Jens' presentation was on "Conceiving. Designing and Building an 18" Dob: An Iterative Approach or How I Spent My COVID Year". Jens is a retired Civil Engineer. Having his own company for many years, his early interest in astronomy took a back seat to his career endeavors. However, after retiring and accomplishing his multiple home improvement projects, he rediscovered his passion for the night sky. Jens had always wanted to build a larger telescope, including grinding the mirror himself. He shared his trials and tribulations related to building an 18" telescope over the past fifteen months with the group. He proudly announced his new telescope is almost ready for first light!

Officer/Committee Reports:

Treasurer:

The Treasurer, Trish Conley, was not in attendance at tonight's meeting. Steve Barks provided a financial status report in her stead. The Society had a negative cash flow at the end of March of \$331, primarily because of an outlay of \$598 in insurance premiums. The Society had a positive balance for the current fiscal year of \$1151.

Loaner Telescope:

Tim Kostelecky, program coordinator, has inventoried the equipment in the Society's storage unit, primarily consisting of several smaller telescopes and a Coronado solar scope. So far, he has not been able to locate all the items on Sidd Webb's (previous program coordinator) final inventory. Tim will continue to update the equipment status and will be contacting members that have equipment. He is formalizing a plan to go forward with the program. Steve Barks reported he has a 12" Light Bridge that belongs to the Society that he needs to return.

Outreach:

Chuck Sterling, program coordinator, stated there were no requests for nor dates reserved for school or public star parties at this time. Someone had contacted him for information about the Cosmic Campground which is currently open to the public.

The Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP):

Dave Doctor had nothing new to report for the Observatory, but access to the Park is easing. Robert Gonzales, Chief Ranger, told him access to the Observatory is available for members. There was no update on computer upgrades from Dave, Steve Barks, or Jerry Gaber.

Newcomers' Packet:

Rani Bush is updating the information contained in the packet but plans to tailor it to the current COVID situation. Ultimately, there will be two (2) sets of information sheets: one very basic taking

the current restrictions into account and one for a fully open environment.

Old Business:

Presentations – Ed Montes has meeting presentations scheduled through the May 2021 meeting. Speakers/presentations are needed for the remainder of this year. If members would like to make a presentation or know of someone who could make a presentation of interest to the membership, please contact Ed.

No additional old business was considered.

New Business:

Thanks! - To John Kutney for the HDO article on regional dark sky sites. Stephen Wood also provided information on the Yost Escarpment location. Thanks to Jeff Johnson and Bob Kimball

for their images that were included in the March HDO

Congratulations! – Dave Doctor had astro images published in Sky & Telescope magazine. Howard Brewington was announced as the latest recipient of the Astronomical League's (AL) Leslie Peltier Award.

Welcome! – Michael Rigsby is a new member.

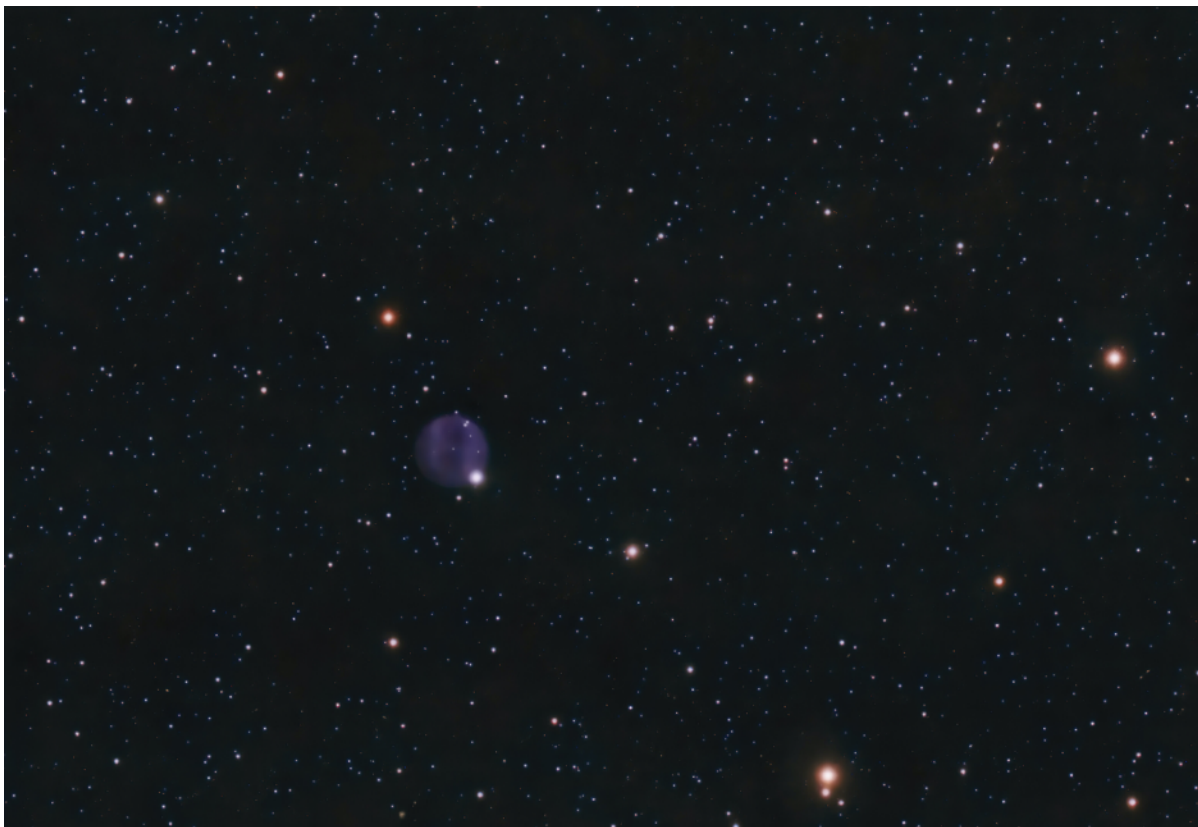
Missing! – Jerry Gaber is not receiving the HDO. Tim Kostelecky will contact Trish Conley to ensure Jerry is on the current roster. John Kutney is not receiving the AL's Reflector or other publications. Trish (ALCOR) will check this as well.

No additional new business was offered for consideration.

The March 2021 meeting was adjourned at 8:31 pm.

Member Images

Abell 33 in Hydra - John Kutney



CG 4 Crab Man Nebula in Puppis - Alex Woronow



NGC 337,1090,1253,2024 in Orion - Chuck Sterling



Messier 83 in Hydra from Southern Hemisphere - Alex Woronow



M66 in Leo - LRGB with new camera - Mike Sherick

