



# WASP

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### Astro Chatter

by [Larry Kalinowski](#)

The Astronomical League is starting a new award called the Master Observer's Award. As you might guess, it will be awarded to those that do an exceptional amount of observing. In order to qualify, you have to have been awarded certificates in ten different categories. Five of the categories are a must and the other five are electives. The idea was first proposed by John Waggoner, the previous league webmaster. The "must" categories are Messier, Lunar, Double Star, Herschel and Binocular Messier. The other five can be any of the other categories in which the League offers certificates. Other certificates are offered in subjects such as Arp Peculiar Galaxies, asteroids, The Caldwell catalog and Earth satellites. There are a total of nineteen different categories. You have to be a member of the League to qualify for the awards, either by being in an astronomical group registered as a League member or as an individual member-at-large. For more information, jump to the Astronomical League site from Doug Bock's Boonhill.net website.

According to The League, the Caldwell catalog was put together by Sir Patrick Moore. His full name is Patrick Caldwell-Moore. Since the M catalog was already used by Messier, he decided to call his list the Caldwell catalog. It's interesting to note that the Caldwell catalog contains some rather bright objects, like the double cluster in Perseus, mainly because Messier was only interested in listing the objects that resembled comets. Messier wanted a list of objects that could be mistaken for comets and rejected the objects that obviously weren't. If you think the Caldwell catalog is easy....not so. There are some challenges and some of them are way below the celestial equator. About half the objects have a positive declination. Three quarters of the list should be visible from the Michigan area. Fortunately, almost all of the minus declination objects are theoretically visible from the southern part of Florida. The Caldwell catalog also contains one hundred and nine objects.

Joe VanPoucker demonstrated Meade's latest toy for amateur astronomers called an "electronic eyepiece", at the November, Macomb meeting. The eyepiece can be purchased from Meade for \$125. Basically, it's an eyepiece without optics, rigged with a CMOS chip, a 9 volt battery and an on-off switch coupled to a contrast control. An RCA socket, into which a standard phono plug can be inserted, connects the eyepiece to your TV set or tape recorder. A six foot cable comes with the eyepiece, for easy connection. Joe showed us what the miniature TV camera could do. He recorded a lunar image, the planets Saturn and Jupiter, and one of Jupiter's moons for the demo. The Moon was outstanding, as it usually is, when Joe panned the Moon's terminator with his LX-200. Then he moved to Saturn and wowed the audience with Cassini's division and the ring's shadow on the planets surface. Next came Jupiter, showing both equatorial belts and one of its moons. The planet's polar flattening could easily be seen. Joe admitted using his eight inch and a Barlow for this recording and said magnification could be increased even further, if required. The images of Jupiter and Saturn were easily six or seven inches in diameter on the monitor screen. Then he admitted that he got the electronic eyepiece for free when he purchased a 2.4 inch, alt-azimuth Meade telescope at Walmar's recently. The price....\$79.95. I can see more than one member recording the Saturn-Moon occultation in November, because there were a lot of ooooohs and aaaaahs while he was giving the demo. Here's a tip: if you want a longer cable, like twelve or twenty-five feet, be sure you get a video cable, not an audio cable like the one supplied.

One of the questions asked during the demo was "how much magnification does the image on the screen represent"? An interesting question because, as Marty,

our president, pointed out, it depends on how close you are to the screen when you view the image. The people in the back of the room see a smaller image than those up front. There is a quick way to estimate the magnification. If you compare the angular view on the screen to the naked eye view of the object in the sky, it'll give a good approximation. Hold up your fingers and see how many will cover the image on the screen. Four fingers are about four degrees, five fingers about five degrees, etc. Then divide the number of degrees by the object's naked eye diameter. Saturn is about forty-seven arc seconds wide (with rings). If the screen image was four degrees, then the answer would be  $(4 \times 60 \times 60) / 47$  or 306x.

If you own a Newtonian telescope and would like to find out if the diagonal in your 'scope is the right size, pick up a copy of the latest software to land in the WAS software library. It's called OPTIMAX, Version 3.2. It was downloaded from Mel Bartel's mirror making website. It's a text-based program that lists standard diagonal sizes and shows you which size is best for different eyepieces and best for photographic purposes.

Doug Bock e-mailed me recently and asked me where I get my comet information that I pass out at the club meetings. The charts and ephemerides that I make are generated with the program DEEP SPACE. However, when I want orbit parameters and information about the latest observations of different comets, I usually go to the comet website at JPL. Doug now has a link to the JPL site on his Boonhill.net website. The address is <http://encke.jpl.nasa.gov/>. The site also provides ephemerides for comets.

Congratulations to Marty Kunz for being the first one in our group to spot the new visitor Linear WM1. He says the magnitude is overpredicted in the ephemeride that I've passed out (they usually are). His estimate is two magnitudes dimmer.

Wiped out again. I was looking forward to seeing the November 30th Saturn occultation. Now I'm beginning to think Michigan is on a downward slope when it comes to good weather observing possibilities. Maybe there's something to this weather-changing thing. Less snow on the ground is a good thing for me and a longer growing season is desirable but if I have to pay for these things with crummy skies, maybe a little more snow isn't that bad.

The December computer meeting, on the 27th, will be at Gary Gathen's home in Pleasant Ridge, MI. He's located at 21 Elm Park, three blocks south of I-696 and about half a block west of Woodward Ave. The January meeting will be on the 24th. New visitors will receive a free planetarium program at the computer meeting. All meetings occur on the fourth Thursday of the month. Exceptions will be announced at the regular WAS meetings or passed along via the Boonhill.net WAS e-mail link.

Happy holidays to all! See you at the Awards Banquet on December 20th.