



## FROM NIGHT VISIONS

DECEMBER 2009

**Next Meeting: Monday, December 14**  
**Observatory Christmas Party: 7 p.m.**

This will be a potluck event so please bring a side dish or a desert. The club will provide tableware, drinks, ice and a meat cold cut dish. Please plan to arrive early (about 6:30) so we can get everything set up and start at 7:00pm. Call the Observatory at 768-9948 if you have any questions. Make plans now to attend! See you there!

### Program

***Food, music and 400  
Years of the Telescope!  
Please see President's  
Message for details.***

***Keep looking up!  
Craig, Ed.***



# Pot Luck





## December 2010 President's Message

The December BRAS newsletter is now posted at

[http://www.braastro.org/newsletter/Dec\\_BRAS\\_Newsletter.pdf](http://www.braastro.org/newsletter/Dec_BRAS_Newsletter.pdf)

We plan to post each month's newsletter so we will be able to accumulate a historical record.

December is to be a fun meeting of BRAS with food and good friendship on Monday, December 14, 2009 at 7 PM.. The primary business to be taken care of is the election of officers and any other matter that comes up. Based on the November meeting nominations, the following have been nominated for officer positions but we will also take nominations from the floor:

President	Marvin E Owen
Vice Pres	Ben Toman
Secretary	Dave Thomas
Treasurer	Bob Sinitere

We have a special feature at this party. Ashley Toman, Ben's wife, is a professional harp player and she has agreed to honor us with music from her harp. I look forward to hearing it and you should also\*.

In addition to good food, music and friendship, we will show the PBS production of 400 Years of the Telescope. This is the story of the telescope from Hans Lippershey to Galileo and to the present. For those familiar with astronomical history, this is a great refresher narrated by Neil DeGrasse Tyson with comments by Owen Gingerich, Professor at Harvard and well renowned astronomer.

Some of the interesting items covered in the presentation are (1) Comments on the Keck Observatory on Mauna Kea and the other 13 major observatories, (2) The concept of Adaptive Optics and Artificial Stars created at Mauna Kea, (3) How the Hubble Telescope traveling at 17,000 MPH can maintain a focus on a target, (4) The creation of the Hubble Deep Field Photo, (5) Discovery of the fact of an Expanding Universe, (6) The giant Magellan scope with 7 mirrors of 8.4 meters each, (8) A 30 meter telescope under construction, (9) A 42 meter telescope being planned by Europeans and (10) The ALMA (solar in Spanish) radio array of 66 telescopes being built in Chili

It is a great show to watch and it is yours for the watching along with having a good Christmas visit at the observatory.

Marvin E Owen, BRAS Vice-President

### **\* Background from A. Toman's Web Site**

Ashley Lancz Toman began playing harp and studying music at the age of 15 in Traverse City, Michigan. Three years later she was accepted to the prestigious Eastman School of Music where she earned both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in harp performance and served as a harp teaching assistant.

Ashley's career as a freelance harpist has taken her all over the United States. She performed twice daily as the harpist in residence at Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Michigan for five seasons. Her group Harptallica, a Metallica tribute, has toured extensively. The group is a harp duo committed to expanding the accessibility and audience of the instrument. With Harptallica, she has made performance appearances on the WGN-TV and FOX networks as well as on various radio stations throughout the country.

Since moving to Louisiana, Ashley has appeared with the Baton Rouge Symphony, the Acadiana Symphony Orchestra, and the Louisiana Philharmonic.

She now resides in Baton Rouge, Louisiana where she maintains a busy freelance schedule and teaches privately.



## MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER MEETING

There was more discussion of Craig's idea to purchase a flat screen TV for HRPO. Marvin suggested all peripherals should be purchased at once.

Doug Inwood mentioned a podcast occurring the next day with Robert Kirshner of Harvard entitled "Einstein's Blunder Undone". He said he'd post all pertinent information on the BRAS Forum.

### 2010 OFFICER NOMINATIONS

PRESIDENT: Marvin Owen *[motion by Wally]*

VICE-PRESIDENT: Ben Toman *[motion by Wally; second by Craig]*

SECRETARY: Dave Thomas *[motion by Merrill; second by Wally]*

TREASURER: Bob Sinitiere *[motion by Craig; second by Wally]*

Wally reminded everyone that Art Barrios as Observing Chairman is also an appointment. I reminded Marvin of Stephanie Northrop's possible appointment into the new position of Public Information Officer.

### MESSAGE FROM HRPO

Well, the International Year of Astronomy is almost over. It's hard to gauge exactly how successful in was here in town. I don't know exactly how much budget the IYA people had for publicity. There was a nice spread in the Fun section this year. And I can tell you that HRPO saw a definite increase in attendance from 2008, though how much was due to IYA is difficult to say.

I'll probably start a thread in the BRAS Forum asking everyone to post their experiences related to IYA.

### CALLS FOR VOLUNTEERS

**Geminid Meteor Shower:** Sunday, 13 December from 9pm to 1am

*Probably only one volunteer is needed as this is a "low-maintenance" program.*

**NOTE TO VOLUNTEERS:** The next time each one of you shows up for volunteering at HRPO, I will snap your picture for the upcoming Volunteer Photo IDs! Dress the way you want to look on your badge!

Thanks, Christopher

## HRPO FRIDAY NIGHT LECTURE SERIES

### 11 December: "The Star of Bethlehem"

*What exactly was that famous "star" seen in the Middle East over 2000 years ago? Can modern scientific calculations shed light on the puzzle? LSU physics professor and BRAS member Brad Schaefer takes the audience step-by-step toward the solution to the mystery with current theory! Brad Schaefer received his Ph.D. from MIT in 1983. He has published several times in "Sky & Telescope" magazine and has been interviewed by the National Geographic Society.*

### 18 December: "Space Shuttle—The End of an Era"

*In less than a year, a mainstay of the American space program will be no more. The legendary white orbiters will be grounded, making way for the new Ares rocket. We'll survey the history of this incredible machine, and exactly what it meant to our culture and our understanding of how human beings live in space.*

### 25 December: {CLOSED}

1 January: "2009—The Space Year in Review" *no description at this time*

## LSU PHYSICS COLLOQUIA

All in Nicholson 109

### 11 December at 1:30pm: {TBA}

*Bruce Allen, Director of Max Planck Institute*

# BRAS Observers Update

## December 2009

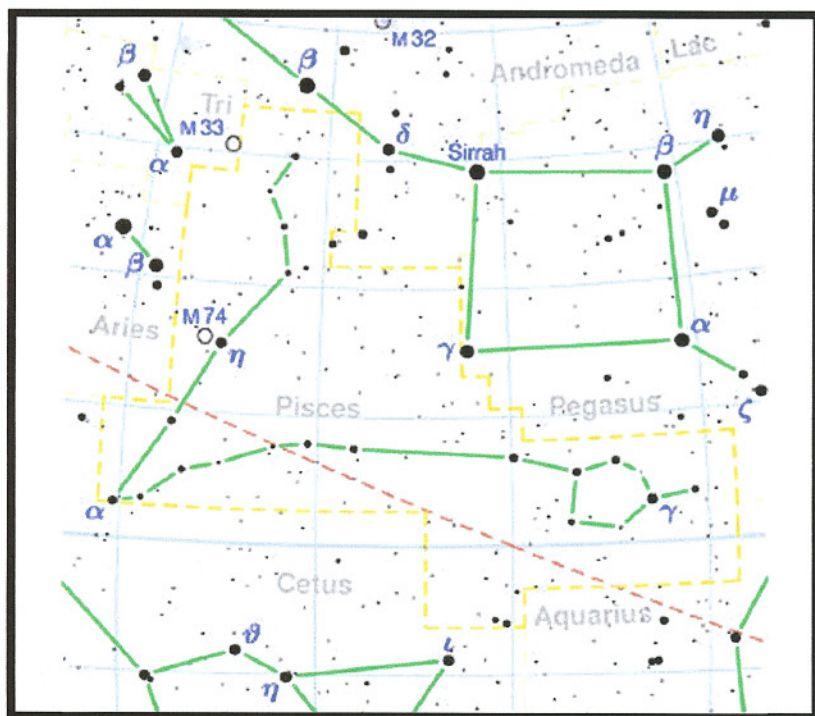
### BRAS Dark Sky Site Viewing Dates

Dec 12th Primary – Dec 19th Secondary

### Constellation of the Month

#### *Pisces: The Fishes*

The constellation Pisces is most often seen as two fish whose tails are connected by a length of cord. According to Greek mythology, Aphrodite and her son Eros were transformed into the two fish in an attempt to escape an attack by the fearsome monster Typhon. It is believed that the early Syrians would not eat fish because of this. Pisces is a faint constellation with its brightest star, Eta Piscium, at only 3.4 magnitude. Pisces is notable because it contains the point at which the Sun crosses the celestial equator into the northern hemisphere each year. This point, called the vernal equinox, previously lay in Aries but has now moved into Pisces and will eventually move to Aquarius due to the wobble of the Earth on its axis called precession.



#### **Position in the Sky**

Right Ascension: 1 hour

Declination: 15 degrees

#### **Named Stars**

Alrishah (Alpha Psc) , Fum al Samakah (Beta Psc) , Torcularis Septentrionalis (Omicron Psc)

#### **Deep Sky Objects**

M74 (spiral galaxy)

#### **The Circlet of Pisces**

The five stars which make up the lower right fish of the constellation Pisces is also known as the Circlet. It can be seen with the naked eye and is an easy way to find the constellation. It can be found just below the great square of Pegasus.

#### **A map of the BRAS Dark Site can be viewed at**

[http://maps.live.com/?v=2&sp=Point.p1wwxc7c69n1\\_BRAS%255fDark%255fSky](http://maps.live.com/?v=2&sp=Point.p1wwxc7c69n1_BRAS%255fDark%255fSky) .

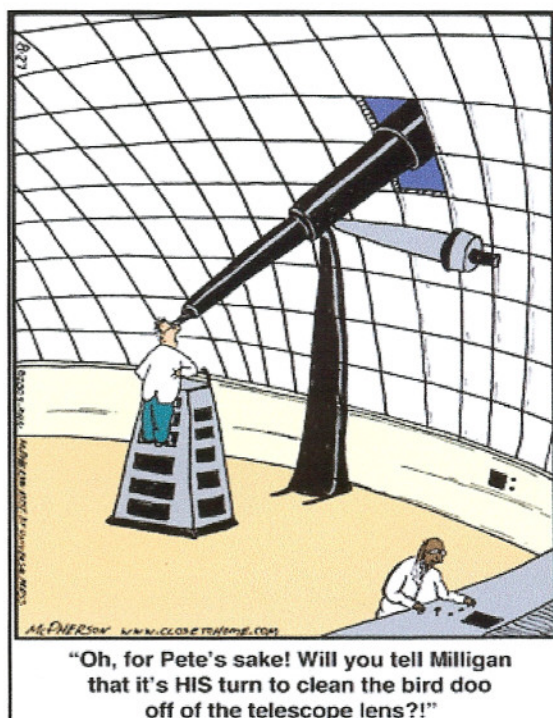
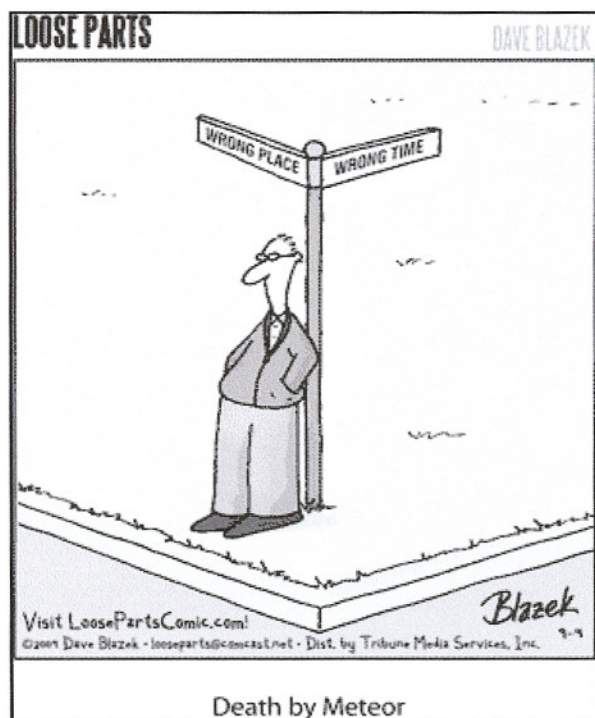
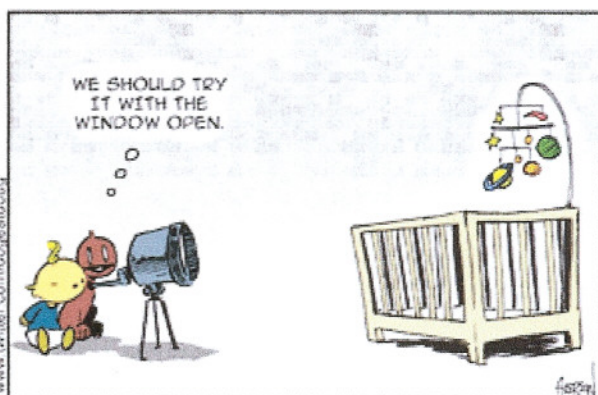
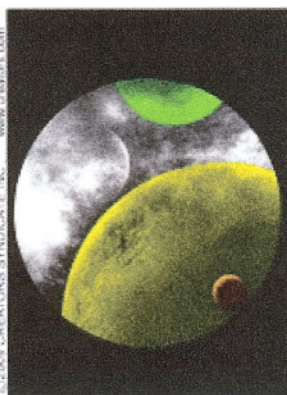
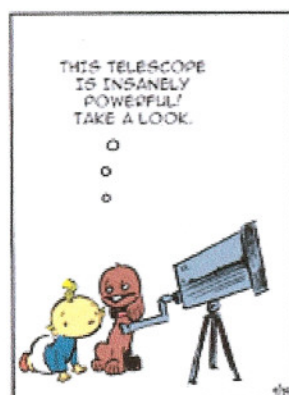
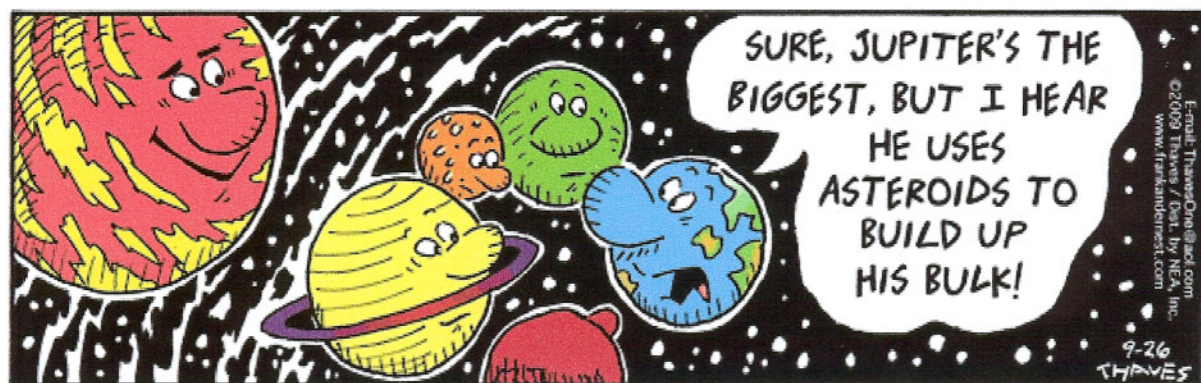
#### **Directions to BRAS Dark Sky Site:**

From Baton Rouge take I-10 west about 19 miles from the Mississippi River Bridge. Take exit 135, LA Hwy 3000, to Ramah-Maringouin exit. Go north about 100 feet. You will see a bait shop on left, turn left here. Go about 200 feet, you will see a gas station on right, turn right. Go about 400 feet until you come to the levee, turn left (south). Go 1.6 miles down the gravel road along the levee. You will see a road on right going up onto the levee, turn on this road and either stop on top of the levee or directly on the other side.

Art Barrios  
BRAS Observing Chairman  
[art.barrios@cox.net](mailto:art.barrios@cox.net)



# COSMIC COMICS



**Thank you Fred for sending them!**



# Thoughts on Astronomy and a Long Life

You need not look far to see books, blogs, and all kinds of health gurus talking about the latest ways you might live to 100 years of age. Meditation. Exercise. The "Okinawa Diet". De-stress. Keep your mind active, and so on. All good ideas, no doubt.

But it got me thinking... doesn't stargazing help you live a healthy lifestyle worthy someone who might live to 100 years old... and beyond?

Hmmm... that got me thinking. Can stargazing help you live a longer life? Let's see... here are five things astronomy can do for you that match up with the advice of the health gurus...

## 1. Maintain Muscle Mass

Scientific studies of longevity say maintaining muscle mass and bone density may help you live longer and enjoy the years you have left. Makes sense. While amateur astronomy isn't exactly the decathlon, it does take a little muscle to drag your telescope and mount around the backyard, or set it up at your favorite dark-sky observing site.

So don't think of setting up your scope each night as a chore... think of it as a healthful workout. If you have a too-small telescope, tell your spouse you need to upgrade to a bigger scope because it's good for your health. Hey... it's worth a try...!

## 2. Don't Be A Loner

This one seems to be one of the most important: good relationships are critical to a long and healthy life.

As a hobby or profession, astronomy can be as solitary or as sociable as you want it to be. While it's nice to sit alone at a telescope and ponder the stars from time to time, it's a lot more fun to share your enjoyment with others. If you've ever been to a star party or local gathering of amateur astronomers, you know what I mean. The positive energy of dozens or hundreds of people doing and sharing what they love is infectious. At the end of the night, you're tired but happy.

There are many pleasant opportunities for socializing and establishing friendships around your interest in the night sky. Take advantage of them when you can.

## 3. Manage Your Stress

Apparently, pleasure is good for you. Really good. Not only does it counteract stress, it also causes your cells to release a natural antibiotic called enkelytin. Pleasure from chocolate, coffee, or a dram of fine whiskey can serve as self-medication.

Life is fair sometimes, is it not?

There's not much more pleasurable than looking up into the night sky and finding your way to one of the thousands of stunning objects that await your inspection night after night. If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad.

## 4. Eat Healthy

If nothing else, stargazing will keep you away from the couch, the T.V., and a bowl full of junk food. And you don't want to have your fingers in a bag of Cheetos before handling a \$400 eyepiece. Fine optics and greasy snacks do not mix.

## 5. Exercise Your Brain

Cognitive research shows that boosting your mental horsepower might have as potent an effect on your brain as drugs used for dementia. For an amateur astronomer, there are endless possibilities for deep thought... from learning how to read a star map to understanding how stars evolve, to figuring out how to take a really good picture of the night sky.

Just try to wrap your mind around how big the Milky Way really is: if the galaxy was scaled down so the Earth was just 1 inch from the Sun, Pluto would be 1 meter away, the nearest star would be 4 miles away, and the Milky Way would span 100,000 miles... almost halfway to the moon. And the Milky Way is just one galaxy among hundreds of billions! If that doesn't get your brain moving, nothing will.

Now we can't promise stargazing will help you live to the age of 100. But it will certainly make your remaining years more rewarding. If you're new to astronomy and want to get started right, our own Stargazing for Beginners is worth a careful look. Or if you already know your way around the sky, learn how to see further into the cosmos with *Secrets of the Deep Sky*. And it certainly can't hurt to eat your broccoli. At least once in a while.

Well, that's it for today...

Clear skies,  
Brian Ventruo Publisher,  
*One-Minute Astronomer*

Submitted by Merrill Hess



## **AWARD FOR "EXCELLENCE IN ASTRONOMY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES"**

Astronomy Magazine is again offering an award of \$2,500 to a club for "excellence in astronomy outreach activities". The submission is due in early January as was set out on page 25 of the January 2010 issue of the magazine. We made a submission for the award in 2008 in which there were 40 submissions made and we were mentioned as being in the top 5 submitters. The prior winner was the Cincinnati Observatory Center that "distingusihed itself" by giving away forty 8-inch Dobsonian telescopes to local science teachers and high-school students in its "40 Telescopes" program.

I plan to submit a proposal on behalf of BRAS but want to see if any of you want to provide any input.

As of now, I would plan to discuss and include photos of the outreach activities that we participate in including (1) the MARS van, (2) Friday now talks and (3) the articulating eyepiece and dome created for handicapped persons. As to proposed uses of the funds if we were to receive them would be for the purchase of a large flat screen monitor and the MallinCam camera system from Jack Huerkamp as he presented it at the September BRAS meeting. The purpose of this system would be to observe objects through the telescope which will be captured via the camera and displayed on the monitor either at the observatory or in conjunction with the MARS van. This could also be a good extension of the use of the H-Alpha solar telescope since it is so difficult to see the sun's flares in the small eye piece but it may could be enlarged with the camera and monitor.

The discussion of the outreach activities is limited to 500 words and the discussion of the use of the funds is limited to 250 words. The use of the funds is described as being: "The outreach programs should be of a size and scope so that the \$2,500 award allows demonstrable progress toward completion or improvements. For example, a new telescope for public events, laptop computer, marketing materials, signage for events, structural improvements to facilities, or other technology upgrades."

You can see further details at Astronomy Mag's award page at [www.astronomy.com/award](http://www.astronomy.com/award)

Any additional comments or suggestions? My thanks to Craig for his input on these items already.

Marvin E Owen, Attorney-CPA

[marvin@meocpa.com](mailto:marvin@meocpa.com) ph 225-292-0099 FAX 225-296-5780 web page at: [www.meocpa.com](http://www.meocpa.com)

## **NOTIFICATION OF OFFICER ELECTIONS OF 2010**

Elections of officers is coming up at the December 14 meeting. A short listing of duties of each office for the *Baton Rouge Astronomical Society* is as follows:

President - Presides over all meetings of the Society. Sets the agenda for each meeting. Sees that communications to the general membership is carried out. Oversees general operations and activities of the Society. Each president, upon retiring from office, assumes chairmanship of the executive board, with power to call meeting of this board.

Vice-President - The vice-president shall preside at all meetings in the absence of the president. The primary duty of this office shall be to arrange the program for each regular monthly meetings.

Secretary - The secretary's primary duties is to keep brief minutes of all society meetings, maintain correspondence external to the Society, and oversee Society publications as concern Society members.

Treasurer - The duties of the treasurer is to receive and disburse all Society funds and maintain permanent records of all such transactions. Keep a record of members in good standing and give notice to pending Society annual dues owed.

Any member wishing to have their name placed into nomination for next year may enter his or her name onto the ballot by at the December meeting. Elected members serve form January to December of 2010.



# The Evening Sky Map

FREE\* EACH MONTH FOR YOU TO EXPLORE, LEARN & ENJOY THE NIGHT SKY

## Sky Calendar – December 2009

- 1 Moon near the Pleiades (midnight sky) at 15h UT.
- 2 Full Moon at 7:31 UT.
- 4 Moon at perigee (closest to Earth) at 14h UT (363,479 km; 32.9').
- 5 Moon near Pollux (morning sky) at 5h UT.
- 6 Moon near Beehive cluster (M44) (morning sky) at 5h UT.
- 6 Moon near Mars (morning sky) at 23h UT. Mag. -0.2.
- 7 Moon near Regulus (morning sky) at 19h UT.
- 9 Last Quarter Moon at 00:13 UT.
- 10 Moon near Saturn (morning sky) at 5h UT. Mag. +1.0.
- 11 Moon near Spica (morning sky) at 18h UT.
- 14 Geminid Meteor Shower peaks at 5h UT. Produces bright, medium-speed meteors at its peak (up to 80 meteors/hour). The parent body of the Geminids is a mysterious asteroid known as 3200 Phaethon believed to be an "extinct comet." Very favorable viewing conditions this year.
- 16 New Moon at 12:02 UT. Start of lunation 1076.
- 18 Moon near Mercury (20° from Sun, evening sky) at 7h UT. Mag. -0.5.
- 18 Mercury at greatest elongation, 20° east from Sun (evening sky) at 17h UT. Mag. -0.5.
- 20 Moon at apogee (farthest from Earth) at 15h UT (distance 405,731 km; angular size 29.5').
- 21 Jupiter 0.53° SSE from Neptune at 10h UT (evening sky). Mags. -2.2 and +7.9.
- 21 Moon near Jupiter (evening sky) at 12h UT. Mag. -2.2.
- 21 December solstice at 17:47 UT. The time when the Sun reaches the point farthest south of the celestial equator marking the start of winter in the Northern Hemisphere and summer in the Southern Hemisphere.
- 24 First Quarter Moon at 17:36 UT.
- 29 Moon near the Pleiades (evening sky) at 1h UT.
- 31 Full Moon at 19:13 UT.
- 31 Partial Eclipse of the Moon from 18:52 to 19:54 UT, mid-eclipse at 19:23 UT. Very slight eclipse visible from Europe, Africa and Asia.

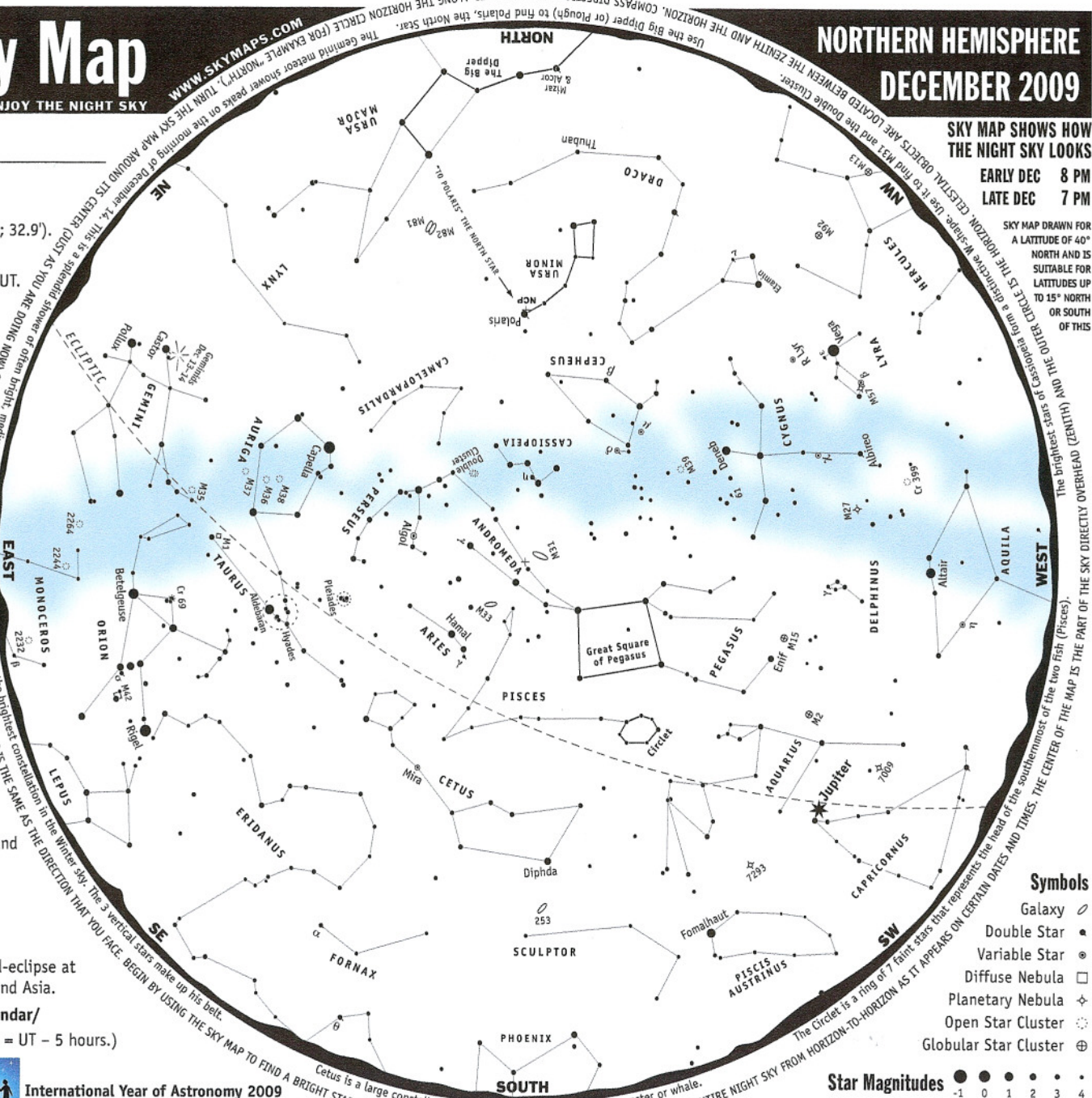
More sky events and links at <http://Skymaps.com/skycalendar/>

All times in Universal Time (UT). (USA Eastern Standard Time = UT - 5 hours.)

**Skymaps** Follow us on Twitter  
<http://twitter.com/skymaps>



International Year of Astronomy 2009  
<http://www.astronomy2009.org>



## NORTHERN HEMISPHERE DECEMBER 2009

SKY MAP SHOWS HOW  
THE NIGHT SKY LOOKS

EARLY DEC 8 PM  
LATE DEC 7 PM

SKY MAP DRAWN FOR  
A LATITUDE OF 40°  
NORTH AND IS  
SUITABLE FOR  
LATITUDES UP  
TO 15° NORTH  
OR SOUTH  
OF THIS

### Symbols

- Galaxy ☾
- Double Star ●
- Variable Star ○
- Diffuse Nebula □
- Planetary Nebula ◇
- Open Star Cluster ○
- Globular Star Cluster ⊕

Star Magnitudes ● ● ● ● ● ●  
-1 0 1 2 3 4

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# **Baton Rouge Astronomical Society**

## **Treasurer's summary (Jan 1-Nov 30, 2009)**

Beginning balance: (rounded to dollar amt)

Checking account \$2650.00  
Cash on hand \$ 201.00  
Savings Acct \$1709.00

Total: \$4560.00

Ending balance: (Nov 30, 2009)

Checking account \$2506.00  
Cash on hand \$ 172.00  
Savings Acct \$1710.00

Total: \$4388.00

Income (credits)

Dues and donations: \$2398.00 (includes book raffles and Hodges Garden Star party, Astronomy subscriptions (paid by subscriber).

Expenses: Liability Insurance: \$330.00  
Astronomical League: \$410.00  
Hodges Garden Star Gaze \$197.00  
Int. Dark Sky Mem \$100.00  
Magazine subs: \$214.00 (paid by subscribers)  
Dinner for May meeting: \$175.00  
Coffee, cups etc 75.00  
Corporate reg. Fee (La) \$5.00  
Publishing, mailing,  
Copier toner, ink cart  
Paper, stamps for n/l \$822.00  
Calendars, books, etc: \$172.00  
Hardware/supplies: \$70.00

Total exp: \$2570.00

Of our total expenses, publishing/mailing/laser print toners, = 32%, Insurance = 13%  
Astronomical league dues = 16%, Dark sky member = 4%,  
Other supplies = 10% (all other expenses = 25 %)



# BATON ROUGE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

You can pay your Membership Dues at our next Meeting or  
Send your Dues to:

*Baton Rouge Astronomical Society, inc.  
c/o Bob Sinitiere, Treasure,  
14558 Cottinham Ct.,  
Baton Rouge, LA 70817-3543*

If you have questions about dues or receiving your News Letter call Bob  
at 755-2079

◆ Regular Membership \$20.00 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Each Additional Family Membership \$ 5.00 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Student Membership \$10.00 \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
( through age 17)

◆ Donation\* toward club building fund or  
( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
*Specify*

**TOTAL ENCLOSED** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone

(H) \_\_\_\_\_

(C) \_\_\_\_\_

(W) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How do you wish to receive the Society's Newsletter *Night Visions*-

\_\_\_\_\_ By Mail or by \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail

*(Please Check one)*

**PLEASE CHECK THAT YOUR ADDRESS AND E-MAIL ARE CURRENT AND CURRENT.**

*Meetings are usually held the second Monday of each month at 7pm, except for June and July.  
Most meetings are held at the Highland Road Observatory.*

\*All donations to the *Baton Rouge Astronomical Society, Inc.* are tax-deductible under IRS Section 501(c)(3) & (a)(1) and also 170(b)(1)(A)(vi).

The *Baton Rouge Astronomical Society, Inc.* is a nonprofit corporation chartered under the laws of the State of Louisiana.