

January 2024

Meetings at Highland Road Park Observatory and online through YouTube and Jitsi

<https://meet.jit.si/brasmeet>

January 2024 Calendar:

- 8 January:
 - Light Pollution committee—6PM
 - General Meeting—7PM
- 12 January: Rockefeller Gaze
- 16 January Sidewalk Astronomy (2 events, see below)
- 17 January MSA West Academy Plaquemine STEM night
- 25 January: Business Meeting—7PM

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President's Message

Well, well, well ... another year's come and gone. As Yogi Berra famously said "It's like déjà vu all over again". It seems like only a decade or two ago that I last served as your club's President. Now I find myself in that role again. I have to say I have mixed feelings about this. On one hand, I am honored to have been elected and I am honored to serve. But, on the other hand, I'm disappointed that none of our newer members rose to the occasion. What's the deal? There's nothing to be afraid of. It's been a long time since we've had to guillotine a leader. And what about you ladies? I think the last time we had a woman President was before I even joined the club in 1999. Well, that's too long (my apologies to Wolf brand chili)! I realize that we have quite a few MOPOs in the club (members on paper only), but at any given meeting we usually have around 25 folks that actually show up. Is there not an aspiring President among you? Nonetheless, since I have been chosen, I will gladly serve to the best of my ability. OK, enough of my soapbox preachin'.

As I said back in November, my main interest in the club has always been and will continue to be in promoting the hobby and the science of astronomy. Star parties, both formal and informal, are what really gets me excited. Some of the other topics of advocacy that BRAS has adopted in the past few years will certainly continue so long as our members are passionate about them. I may not share that passion, but I won't stand in the way of anyone who wishes to pursue such interests. BRAS has always been inclusive in this way; no need to change now.

We have a couple of events coming up in the next few months. First is our trip to Rockefeller

Refuge on the weekend of January 12-14. This used to be an annual event for us, but Hurricane Laura back in August 2020 caused such extensive damage to the facilities at the refuge that our visits were

suspended temporarily. They are finally in a position to host us again. If you've never been to that part of the State, this is a great opportunity to see it. Being so close to the coast, the skies are incredible dark when the weather cooperates. When the skies are all cloudy and gray, there are other activities to keep you busy. Many of us are also birders, so even if you don't own a telescope, be sure to bring some binoculars. Birders, like astronomers, love to introduce the hobby to new people.

Coincidentally, the Baton Rouge Audubon Society also calls themselves BRAS. And, if you'd rather just sit and veg on the balcony, that's fine too. As of today, we have eight people signed up for the trip. We have space for eight more. I'll have the sign up at the next meeting.

And finally, the big event is April 8th, the total solar eclipse. Depending on where you go, totality could last as long as four minutes or more. That's twice as long as the 2017 eclipse. How can you call yourself an astronomer if you don't make an effort to see this one?! Naturally, our April BRAS meeting falls on that date. Since many of us will be out of Louisiana, April's meeting will be held a week later on April 15th. Hopefully that won't tax anyone's schedule.

Don

This Month

Hi Everyone,

The program for the January meeting will be a throwback to the older days of the club. It will primarily be a "show-and-tell" of astro related stuff you got for the Holidays. Apart from that, we'll talk about things coming our way in 2024 (Rockefeller, Total Eclipse and future Outreach endeavors) and we'd love to hear from you, too. Do you have any cool ideas that may be of interest to the club? What are some things you'd like to see the club do that we haven't done yet, or in a long time?

If we finish up early and have some clear skies, we can always brush the dust off of some of the scopes in the BRAS closet, too!

I hope to see you all out there. **Highland Road Park Observatory.**
Monday, January 8th at 7pm.

Clear Skies,

Ben Toman

Vice President

Outreach Report

Hi Everyone,

We ended 2023 with two great Sidewalk Astronomy events at both the Ascension Parish Library in Gonzales and at Perkins Rowe. Perfectly clear skies in Gonzales and plenty of open holes at Perkins Rowe so we had a lot of happy viewers both nights. We'll be looking forward to continuing Sidewalk Astronomy at both places throughout 2024.

Thanks, as always, to our volunteers for showing up to make these events happen. (Scott, Don, Roz, Chris R. and Ben were getting it done!)

For 2024, we'll be looking to get even more of our club members involved with our Outreach, especially the Sidewalk Astronomy type events. It's always fun to watch people get excited looking at the Moon or a planet for the first time. These Outreach events are fun for us and a great way to learn more about some of these objects (with the intent of passing the knowledge along) and they're a great way to provide a community service in a fun way.

We have a couple of events coming this January so be sure to take a look below for the dates. We'll have 2 Sidewalk Astronomy events on the same night, so we'll need to divide and conquer. As always, please let me know if you'd like to help out with any of them!

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, January 16th

6pm-7:30pm

Ascension Parish Library Gonzales Branch

Telescope viewing

Tuesday, January 16th

6pm-9pm

Sidewalk Astronomy at Perkins Rowe

Telescope viewing

Wednesday, January 17th

5pm-6pm

MSA West Academy Plaquemine STEM Night

Telescope viewing/demo table if cloudy

(Expecting 100 K-5th students)

Clear Skies,

Ben Toman

Outreach Chairperson



Club members Roz Reddinger, Chris Rabey, Ben Toman, and Scott Cadwallader representing the club for the final sidewalk astronomy at Perkins Rowe for 2023

Secretary's report of past meeting

Secretary's Summary of the December Meeting

- We started off with the potluck dinner consisting of a pulled pork main dish (contributed by BRAS) complimented by side dishes and desserts supplied by attending members.
- Elections took place after that. There were no new candidates nominated, so the original slate of candidates that was announced in November was voted in. This included Don Weinell as president, Ben Toman as vice-president, and Scott Cadwallader as secretary (Trey Anding keeps his current position as treasurer without a vote being needed for this).
- Annette and Chris Raby handed out the new outreach T-shirts that club members had ordered previously. These should be worn at future outreach events to give our group a more consistent look for the public.
- Ben awarded pins created by the Night Sky Network for those who helped with outreach this year. In addition to the regular outreach events, we had 33 members help out with the ALCON event here in Baton Rouge this past July. Ben thanked all involved and emphasized how important this work is. He also discussed upcoming outreach events (this is covered elsewhere in the newsletter).
- Trey announced that he still has calendars for sale (\$10) and that he is collecting dues for the upcoming year from those who haven't paid yet (\$20 for an individual membership).
- Don discussed the upcoming Rockefeller Stargaze. This will take place on MLK weekend including the nights of January 12th – 14th. Don has a list of the rules for those attending the event. New for this year is the change of age range for the LA hunting license/LA

fishing license/LA Wild Stamp; you only need one of these if you are ages 16 – 59 inclusive. Otherwise, it's pretty much the same as in years past (\$10 a night to stay in the dormitory, BYO food [kitchen utensils are furnished], linens are furnished). There are a maximum of 16 slots available; Don has the signup sheet and will answer any additional questions at the next meeting (January 8th).

- Craig announced recently that he and his wife are moving to Missouri to be closer to their children. Because of this, John and the club presented Craig with a plaque commemorating his many years of service to the organization and the science of astronomy. Craig gave a brief speech touching on how the club started in 1981 with him, Bob, and Wally meeting in a small room at the old Main Library on Goodwood and how it grew from there. He encouraged the people present to keep it going and get involved with activities to keep it vital. He is not sure yet when he'll be moving as it will be dependent on his house here selling; he will still be around until that happens.
- The meeting next month will be a show-and-tell session about astronomical gifts members received for Christmas.
- The meeting finished up with the raffle. To celebrate the holidays there were roughly twice as many items available as there usually are including a tripod, 2024 Vatican astronomy calendar, and books.

Submitted by Roz Readinger, Secretary

Secretary's report of Business meeting

BRAS Business Meeting for December 27th, 2023

1. Spam Problem with BRAS Forum – There is a problem with spam showing up on the BRAS forum. Since Mike Carambat owns and runs his business from the same servers that are supporting the BRAS forum, he wants the forum removed. There was discussion about the best way to resolve the issue. This included closing the forum down. Someone wondered if it would help to restrict access to the forum to BRAS members only. There was a suggestion to ask Mike for a backup of the current posts for archive purposes. There was talk about moving toward Reddit/Discord; Amy Northrup's name came up as someone to check with about this possibility. Although John has been talking to Mike in the past, we may need to get some more people involved in a conversation with Mike to get some answers. There was more discussion about possibly getting training and information on hosting a forum. We will possibly need to set our own servers up to get this done. Chris K. mentioned that he is going to check with BREC to see about getting information on this. IRS hourly rates for volunteer services got mentioned along with the fact that Astronomics sponsors a forum for the site Cloudy Nights. Barry Simon with PAS got mentioned as someone to check with also.
2. Changes to Duties and Meeting Schedules – There was a brief discussion about moving the newsletter duties in under the Secretary position. Also, the April BRAS meeting will probably need to be moved to another date as there will be a lot of members missing on April 8th due to the eclipse. There was discussion about the business meetings needing to stay on Thursday nights for the spring semester this next year; someone may be talking to Matthew Penny about this.

3. New Dark Sky Site – We are still looking for a better dark sky site. Port Hudson was mentioned as a possibility as we have done outreaches there. Ben will be asked to get an SQM reading there within the next six weeks.
4. LSU Star Parties – Star parties for LSU were discussed briefly with one being proposed in the fall for graduate students and one in the spring proposed for undergraduates.
5. HRPO Site Improvements – The rotation issue in the small dome was fixed with four new rotational motors. Now we need to fix issues with its computer and shutter. BREC is also working on clearing the dead trees out of the parks that have succumbed due to the drought; we have heard they are starting with Highland Road Park.
6. Cylinders – We still have only one quote on the cylinders for the large dome. There have been several refusals to bid by other companies; we are waiting to see what happens at the end of this process. Scott C. read a draft of the letter he wrote about the recent history of the cylinders; this is proposed correspondence from BRAS to BREC. He got feedback from Trey and is going to make some minor adjustments; he will send a new copy to Trey before January 15th. This may also pass by someone at LSU for review before it is sent.
7. Odds and Ends - The meeting ended with a general discussion of the January meeting (show-and-tell with astronomy related items received for Christmas) and the possibility of time allocation being used again for the 20-inch telescope for BRAS members as well as for LSU graduate students.

Members attending this evening were Trey A., Scott C., Chris K., and Roz R.

Submitted by Roz Readinger, Secretary

Observatory Notes

FRIDAY NIGHT LECTURE SERIES

7:30pm / for ages fourteen and older / no admission fee

5 January = “2023—The Space Year in Review” Tradition continues, with HRPO’s cornerstone program returning for another calendar year with a look back at the discoveries, advances and celestial events of 2023.

19 January = “Lunar Status Report” BREC Center Supervisor James DeOliveira presents the current missions preceding Artemis II and Artemis III—cargo drops, national rivalries and future plans for the landscape of the Moon!

26 January = “Solar Cycle 25” An average of once every eleven years, our parent star increases in visually brilliance (spots, flares, plage) and increases as a threat to satellite, radio, entertainment and military technology.

EVENING SKY VIEWING

for ages six and older / no admission fee

Fridays (5, 12, 19 and 26 January from 8:30pm to 10pm)

Saturdays (6, 20 and 27 January) from 7:30pm to 10pm

HRPO houses a 50-cm reflector, a 40-cm reflector and several smaller telescopes to bring the majesty of the night sky to the public. Trained operators, sharing duties via a rotating roster, work throughout the year in shifts. Each operator has a pre-planned list of objects to highlight. However, requests will be taken if there is time and if all present have viewed the previous target.

SCIENCE ACADEMYSaturdays from 10am to 12pm.for Cadets aged eight to twelve / \$5 per Cadet per week (\$6 if out-of-parish)walk-ins welcome, but advanced registration via WebTrac strongly recommended[activity #531990] / parents may stay with or leave CadetFour Cadet minimum and sixteen Cadets maximum per session.

6 January = “Your Personal Skygazing Kit”

13 January = “Plate Tectonics”

20 January = “ISS Expedition 5”

AMATEUR ASTRONOMY COURSESSaturdays from 3pm to 7pmRegistrants must be aged eighteen or older / \$15 per in-parish registrant; \$18 per out-of-parish registrant*These exciting one-day classes are tailor-made to instruct the patron in the use of a personal telescope or binocular for skygazing, or the basics of the unaided-eye Baton Rouge sky. Sign up for one or more!*Learn Your Binocular [6 January]

This class is a hands-on introduction to the operations of your personal binocular. We'll even take it outside for some practice, weather permitting. Also included will be an overview of all major sky events for the next twelve months. Up to four household members over the age of eight are encouraged to attend, though the registrant for this course must be over eighteen. Please bring all parts and accessories belonging to the binocular, including the instruction manual. This one-day course focuses specifically on binocular views of the Baton Rouge sky. Limit twenty registrants. Limit one binocular per registrant. *Deadline for registration is 3 January; two households needed.*

Learn Your Telescope [20 January]

This class is a hands-on introduction to the operations of your personal telescope. We'll even take it outside for some practice with the waxing gibbous Moon, weather permitting. Also included will be an overview of all major sky events for the next twelve months. Up to four household

members over the age of eight are encouraged to attend, though the registrant for this course must be over eighteen. Please bring all parts and accessories belonging to the telescope, including the instruction manual. This one-day course focuses specifically on telescopic views of the Baton Rouge sky. Limit ten registrants. Limit one telescope per registrant. *Deadline for registration is 17 January.*

Learn Your Sky [3 February]

This class is an introduction to the unaided-eye Baton Rouge sky. We'll even go outside for some practice, weather permitting. Also included will be an overview of all major sky events for the next twelve months. This one-day course focuses specifically on the unaided-eye Baton Rouge sky. Limit thirty registrants. All registrants must be over eighteen; children are not allowed. *Three adults needed for registration by 31 January.*

INTRODUCTION TO SKYGAZING

Friday 12 January from 5:30pm to 8:30pm

for ages ten to eighteen / no admission fee / binocular recommended

Our special module for teachers, parents and students has been renamed and moved from March—but the goal remains the same: get youth outside and looking at celestial marvels.

PLUS NIGHT: “Beginnings and Endings”

Saturday 13 January from 7pm to 10pm

for ages six and older / no admission fee / binocular recommended

During Plus Nights and extra features are available to the public...

*The well-known marshmallow roast takes place at the campfire ring (weather-dependending).

*Six to eight of HRPO's collection of over fifty physical science demonstrations will be on hand to perplex and amaze. Which demos will it be?

*An unaided eye sky tour takes place, showing the public major features of the sky for that month.

*Filters are inserted into the viewing mechanisms, to show patrons “hidden” details of the Moon, Mars and Jupiter (when they are available).

*Reveal your age, and be shown any “birth stars” in the sky at that time.

SOLAR VIEWING

Saturday 27 January from 12pm to 2pm
for ages six and older / no admission fee

Weather permitting, viewing of the Sun’s image in three different manners—transferred onto a white surface, directly with safely-filtered optical light, and directly in safely-filtered hydrogen-alpha wavelength—will take place for two hours. Protective clothing and sunscreen are recommended.

STEM EXPANSION: “STELLAR ASTRONOMY”

Saturday 27 January from 3:30pm to 7:30pm
for ages twelve to sixteen. / \$15 each per in-parish registrant; \$18 each
per out-of-parish registrant. Advanced registration via WebTrac
required [activity #531993].

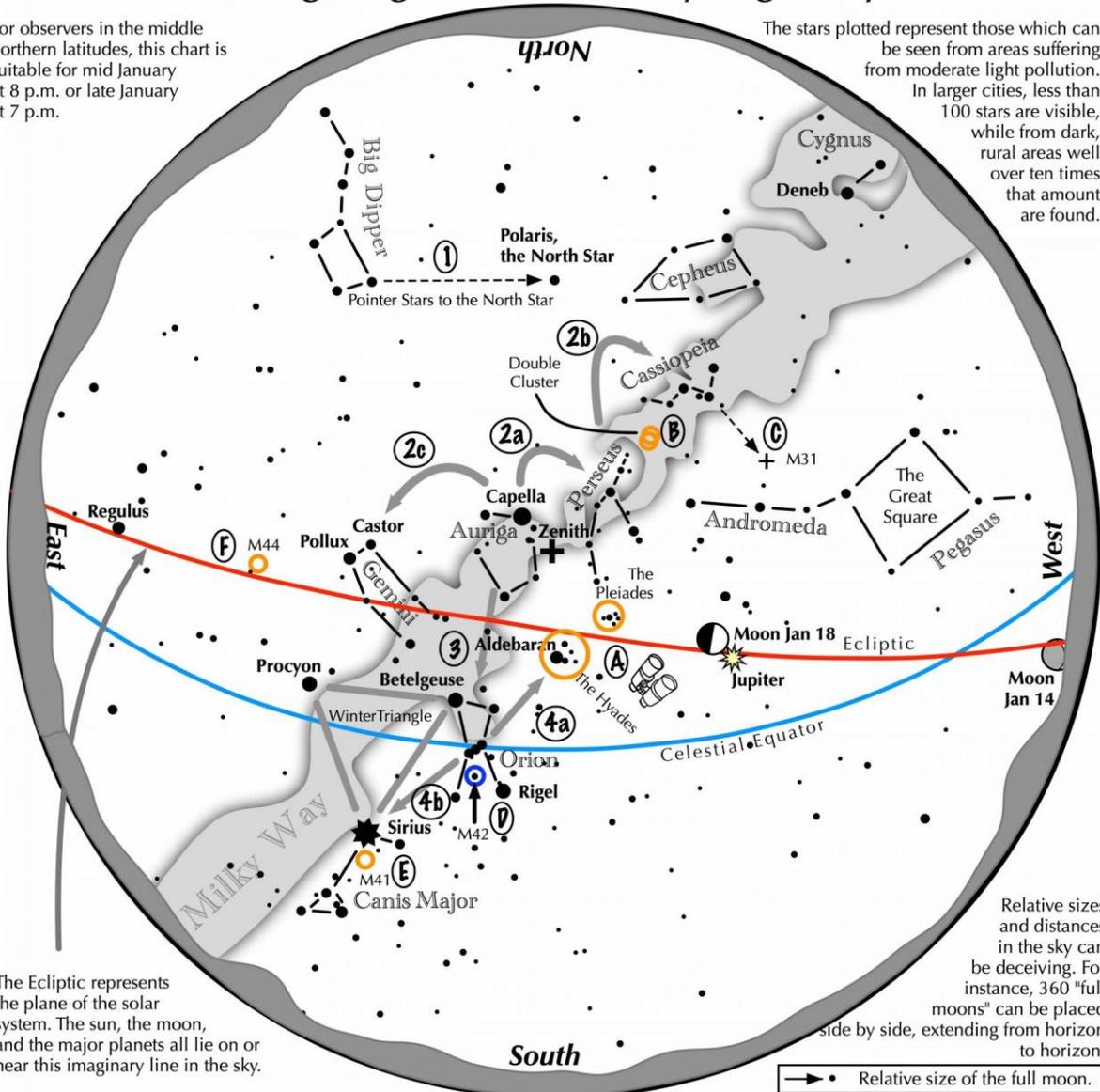
This program offers advanced topics, topic extensions and all-new games and activities to an older crowd. Certificates will be earned, and a section of archived experiments, some not seen in over fifteen years (and some *never* performed on site) take place. There are also giveaways and door prizes.

Sky Map

Navigating the mid January Night Sky

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid January at 8 p.m. or late January at 7 p.m.

The stars plotted represent those which can be seen from areas suffering from moderate light pollution. In larger cities, less than 100 stars are visible, while from dark, rural areas well over ten times that amount are found.



The Ecliptic represents the plane of the solar system. The sun, the moon, and the major planets all lie on or near this imaginary line in the sky.

Relative sizes and distances in the sky can be deceiving. For instance, 360 "full moons" can be placed side by side, extending from horizon to horizon.

→ • Relative size of the full moon.

Navigating the winter night sky: Simply start with what you know or with what you can easily find.

- 1 Above the northeast horizon rises the Big Dipper. Draw a line from its two end bowl stars upwards to the North Star.
- 2 Face south. Overhead twinkles the bright star Capella in Auriga. Jump northwestward along the Milky Way first to Perseus, then to the "W" of Cassiopeia. Next Jump southeastward from Capella to the twin stars Castor and Pollux of Gemini.
- 3 Directly south of Capella stands the constellation of Orion with its three Belt Stars, its bright red star Betelgeuse, and its bright blue-white star, Rigel.
- 4 Use Orion's three Belt stars to point to the red star Aldebaran, then to the Hyades, and the Pleiades star clusters. Travel southeast from the Belt stars to the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius.

Binocular Highlights

A: Examine the stars of the Pleiades and Hyades, two naked eye star clusters. **B:** Between the "W" of Cassiopeia and Perseus lies the Double Cluster. **C:** The three westernmost stars of Cassiopeia's "W" point south to M31, the Andromeda Galaxy, a "fuzzy" oval. **D:** M42 in Orion is a star forming nebula. **E:** Look south of Sirius for the star cluster M41. **F:** M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies to the southeast of Pollux.



Astronomical League www.astroleague.org/outreach; duplication is allowed and encouraged for all free distribution.

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