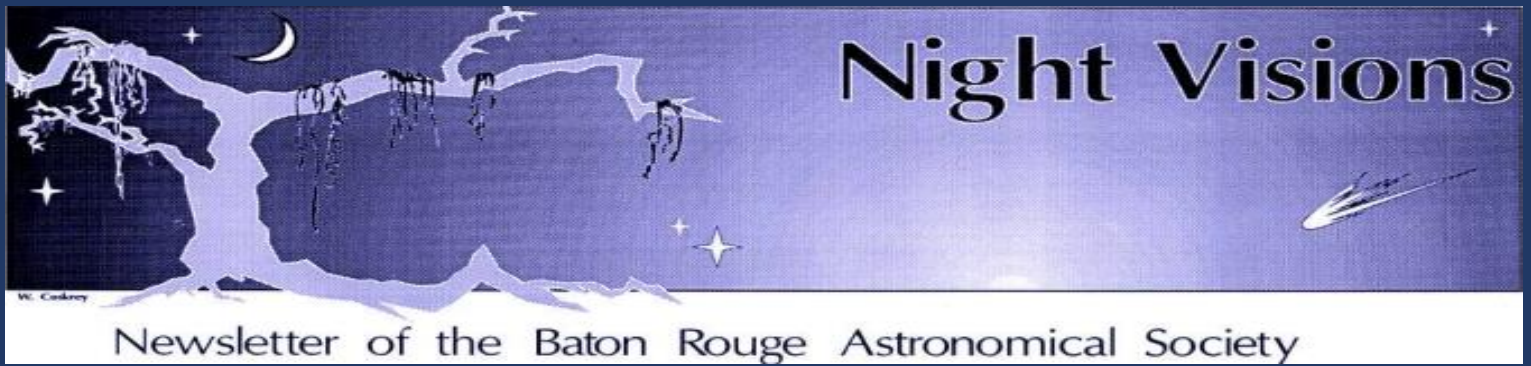




Meetings at Highland Road Park Observatory and online through YouTube

August 2026

Calendar:

- 10 August, 7PM: BRAS Meeting at HRPO
- 12 August, 10PM: Perseid Meteor shower viewing at HRPO
- 19 September: Observe the Moon Night (Fall Astronomy Day)
- 22 September, 6PM: Sidewalk Astronomy at Perkins Rowe

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President's Message

Hi Everyone,

This month's message is all about YOU! Well, specifically, what I think of as Member Engagement.

Something of which we can be proud is the fact that our club is made up of people from all walks of life and a vast span of experience from complete novice to professional astronomers. Again, this is something that makes us great, but it also poses some challenges. Most challenging of all...how do we cater to the needs and interests of such a diverse membership? Our club leadership plans monthly meeting programs and activities as well as coordinating volunteer opportunities, but it's hard to plan anything that can be of interest to EVERYONE all the time.

We've attempted to poll the membership in the past with various degrees of success (or failure!) I'm happy to say one of our members, Jim A., has volunteered to spearhead a new project that will hopefully provide a way to engage members of all levels of expertise. I won't go into full details here as we will get a good explanation from Jim during the business portion of our August meeting. Suffice it to say, we're hoping to engage with the membership to see who knows what, who WANTS to know what, and who's willing to share. There will be a Google document you can use to let us know these things. It will be available on our club website and will launch at our next meeting. (I'll also send a special email notification to everyone with a more in-depth explanation at that time.)

I'm very hopeful that this project will lead to getting some of the members more involved in the club while also providing some fantastic resources of experience and information, especially to those in the club with little or no experience in various areas of our hobby. Sure, we all know that many of our answers are a click or two away on the internet, but I think many of us join a club because we want to actually interact with people that share our interests. I know I'd rather have someone physically show me how to use a telescope than just watch a YouTube video about it. Maybe you are that type of person, too, and hopefully this project can give you even more value to being a member. Keep Looking Up!

Ben Toman

President



LASM Space Camp: Ben talks UV light while students check out the sun, Charlie monitors the line for the Seestar showing sunspots, and Scott and Charlie talk with campers about what a sunspot is before letting them take a look.

Vice President's Word

These endless summer days have to end sometime. Thankfully with the equinox fast approaching we can start getting back into the observing spirit of things. In some traditions, the seasons start off not with the equinoxes and solstices but with the so called cross-quarter days, which would make August 1, Lughnasa, the official start of Fall—a tradition which, to this day, is upheld by the people who start decorating for Halloween in August (citation needed).

In truth, August always has felt like the start of the new year to me. It is, after all, the start of the academic year and that alone has a profound effect on how we live, especially in Baton Rouge. As we welcome the new students and their relentless pursuit of making traffic worse in some areas of town it's a good time to get ourselves back into the observing frame of mind. To help out we were lucky to get one of our friends from Pontchartrain Astronomical Society to come speak with us for our August meeting. Barry Simon is serving as PAS president this year and will speak with the club on Advances in Amateur Astronomy, taking us on a brief history of how the hobby has changed in the last little bit. Barry is a fixture of the amateur astronomical community in Louisiana and we're very happy to have him. This would also be a great time to grill him about this fall's Deep South Stargaze should you be so inclined as he's also in charge of that event.

Three other events I would like to remind people of for August, for those not travelling abroad to chase after the solar eclipse (those lucky so and sos), are the annual Perseid Meteor shower, the greatest elongation of Venus, and the Partial lunar eclipse on the 27th, all of which are worth taking in. For the past few years, we've had a good showing of club members at the Highland Road Park viewing of the Perseids and I'd like to steer you in that direction, if you aren't dark-sky minded for that event. As for the lunar eclipse, although it's only partial, it should be a deep partial, which can sometimes surprise you with a good showing so don't write it off completely. Also, it's at a reasonable hour for a change, which is doubly enticing.

In terms of skygazing, it seems like July was a washout, at least from my experience, but hopefully we'll find a way to get a group out into the wild for August. If you haven't signed up for our GroupMe group, find one of us at the meeting so you can get in the loop: hopefully, we can get more and more people out there as the group gains traction. And though we haven't set it up yet, I'll try to find a time for a local star party at HRPO just for the club members sometime in September.

Outreach Report

Hi Everyone,

It was nice to have a little bit of a rest from Outreach this past month, especially with the heat and rain we've been having. We know things will be picking up again, so best to rest our heels while we can!

Even in a slow month, we had a few opportunities to get out into the community. On July 3rd, Scott, Charlie and Ben provided some Solar viewing to the Astronaut campers at the Louisiana Art & Science Museum. On July 10th, Scott, Chad, Jim and Ben contributed some astro-knowledge for the Youth Job Challenge session at the Gillis National Guard base. Finally, as I write this, we have an upcoming outreach on the 28th at the Country Day school for some preschool children. I was skeptical at first about trying to provide astronomy education to kids as young as 2-5 years old, but we have found ways to engage the little ones with some of our hands-on demonstrations and even introduce some concepts about our Solar System that they can begin to understand.

August is our slowest month and we currently have NO events planned. For one, it's just too hot to do an event of Solar observing and for another, it's not getting dark early enough to do any of our Sidewalk Astronomy type events. Couple that with schools finishing up their Summer breaks and just starting up their new semesters and it's no wonder the month is so slow.

I AM happy to announce our return to Perkins Rowe for Sidewalk Astronomy will be Tuesday, September 22nd. (I wouldn't mind doing it the week before, but the Moon would quickly be lost behind the buildings.) I'm looking forward to another great season out there and continuing to spread the joy of telescope observing throughout our community. The Sidewalk Astronomy events at the Ascension Parish Library will likely start back up in October.

Rest easy while you can and start getting yourself ready to get out there with us when the calls start to come!

Clear Skies,

Ben Toman

Outreach Chairperson



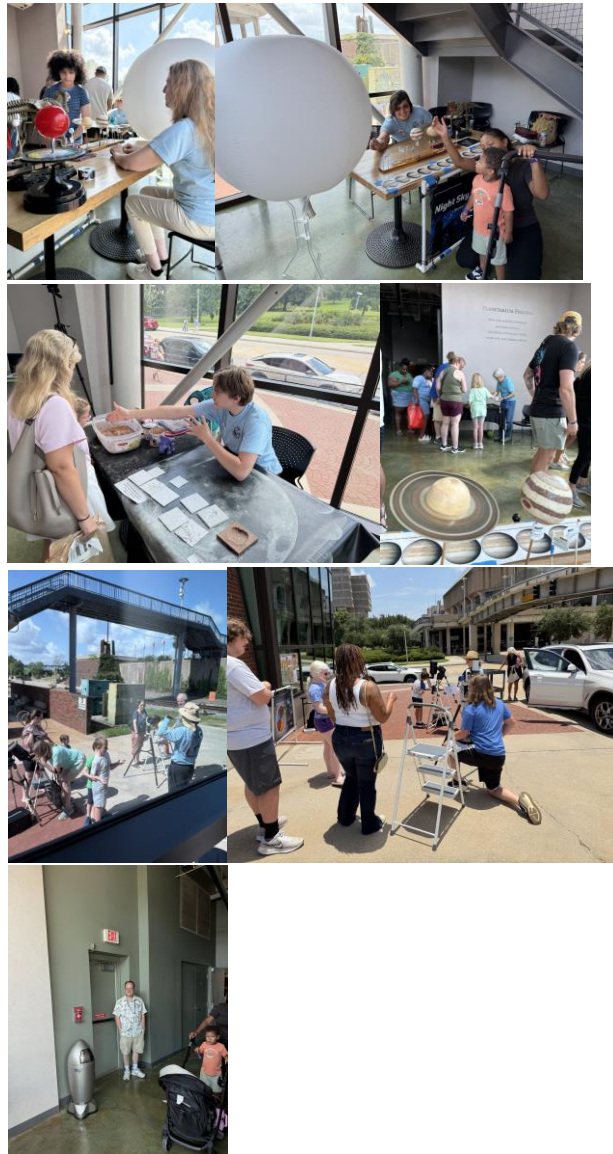
National Guard Youth Challenge Program: Jim and Chad watch helplessly as Ben introduces us to the group.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, September 22nd

6pm-9pm

Sidewalk Astronomy at Perkins Rowe



From Dino Days at LASM: Top, Susan and Tania talk about the relative sizes of the solar system objects. Row 2: Charlie explains lunar topography and Annette explores gravity. Row 3: Scott and Roz check out the Sun. Bottom, Ben...well Ben just stood there.

Secretary's Summary

There were 25 people in attendance at the July meeting.

BRAS President Ben Toman discussed recent outreach programs and remarked how nice it was to see some new faces participating at these events. He passed around a volunteer sign-up sheet for an upcoming outreach event at Country Day School on July 28th.

BRAS Vice President Scott Cadwallader talked about assembling our upcoming schedule of guest speakers and recommended our members attend Astronomy on Tap and the star parties at Landolt Observatory. Astronomy on Tap has moved from the Varsity Theatre outside the LSU campus to the Pastime Lounge, a popular family-owned restaurant with its own parking lot underneath the Mississippi River Bridge. The star parties at Landolt observatory are located on the roof of Nicholson Hall on the LSU campus and are very family-friendly, offering incredible close-up views of the Moon, planets and stars.

As a summer break from our usual format no guest speaker was scheduled for the July meeting, but the club gathered to have fun, eat pizza and discuss sci-fi movies. BRAS President Ben Toman kicked off the meeting with a few of his picks, followed by several other members who also shared their recommendations.

Three items were raffled off at the end of the meeting. Charlie Carson won the book, *The Fabric of the Cosmos* by Brian Greene. Charlie must be starting a collection, because he won another Brian Greene book last month! Brandon Gravois won a *The Asteroid News* coffee mug donated by Steven Tilley. Tanya Ayala won a BRAS string pack/grab bag.



Gateway Preschool, Livingston: Left, Jim and Chad watch as Ben introduces the club to the audience. Right: Chad, Jim, Ben, and Roz pose for the newsletter.

Observatory Notes

SCIENCE ACADEMY

Saturdays from 10am to 12pm.

for Cadets aged eight to twelve / \$5 per Cadet per week (\$6 if out-of-parish)

advanced registration via [WebTrac](#) strongly recommended

[activity #231320] / parents may stay with or leave Cadet

Four Cadet minimum and sixteen Cadets maximum per session.

1 August = “Venus”

8 August = “ISS Expedition 15”

15 August = “Baton Rouge, 1752-1807”

22 August = “Saturn”

THE GREAT FLOOD: A TEN-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

Friday 7 August from 6:30pm to 8:30pm

for ages twelve and older / no admission fee

This will be a scientific (and social) look at the catastrophic series of events that changed lives in the Baton Rouge region.

EVENING SKY VIEWING

for ages six and older / no admission fee

Fridays 7, 14, 21 and 28 August from 8:30pm to 10pm

Saturday 8, 22 and 29 August 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.

BATON ROUGE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY MEETING

Monday 10 August from 7pm to 9pm

for ages fourteen and older / no admission fee

PERSEID METEOR SHOWER

Wednesday 12 August from 10pm to 2am

for ages six and older / no admission fee

Visitors must adhere to all rules.

The Perseids are one of the major meteor showers of the year, caused by debris left from the passings of Comet Swift-Tuttle. Come learn about meteors and let's see if we can spot some "earthgrazers". Although telescopes aren't needed for the Perseids, we'll have a telescope available from until midnight for leisurely gazing at other celestial objects. But look fast for the meteors; Perseid meteoroids hit our atmosphere traveling about sixty kilometers a second! If you're lucky, you may see a fireball...

VENUSIAN ELONGATION

Thursday 13 August from 8pm to 9:30pm

for ages six and older / no admission fee

Periodically Venusian reaches its greatest angular separation in the sky (elongation) from the Sun. This is the safest way to view Venus by amateurs. Come join us at the Burbank Soccer Complex! The planet will appear as a "half-Venus".

PLUS NIGHT: "Here in the Milky Way"

Saturday 15 August 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-dependng).

*Seven to ten 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.

FRIDAY NIGHT LECTURE SERIES

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

21 August = “The Martian Apparition” It’s happening! The Red Planet is rising earlier—getting bigger and brighter until it’s wonderful opposition in February.

NATURAL SKY TASK FORCE PUBLIC INPUT MEETING

Tuesday 25 August from 5:15pm to 6:45pm

for ages twelve and older / no admission fee

The purpose of these gatherings is to network and share results of separate efforts to reduce light pollution in the HRPO service area, and to share advice on improving efforts to reduce light pollution in the HRPO service area.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Friday 28 August from 7pm to 8:30pm

Many game-changing moments have occurred since HRPO’s last focus on AI—some astonishing, some alarming. This brief update is for any who want the latest information.

SOLAR VIEWING

Saturday 29 August from 12pm to 2pm

for ages six and older / no admission fee

Weather permitting, viewing of the Sun’s image in four different manners—transferred onto a white surface, directly with optical light, directly in hydrogen-alpha wavelength and directly via Calcium K wavelength—will take place. Protective clothing and sunscreen are recommended.

STEM EXPANSION: “Icy Reaches of the Solar System”

Saturday 29 August from 2:30pm to 6:30pm

for ages twelve to sixteen. / \$15 each per in-parish registrant; \$18 each per out-of-parish registrant. Advanced registration via [WebTrac](#) required [activity #231321]. Part I is not a prerequisite.

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



<https://in-the-sky.org>

Map centered on HRPO at 10PM on 15 August

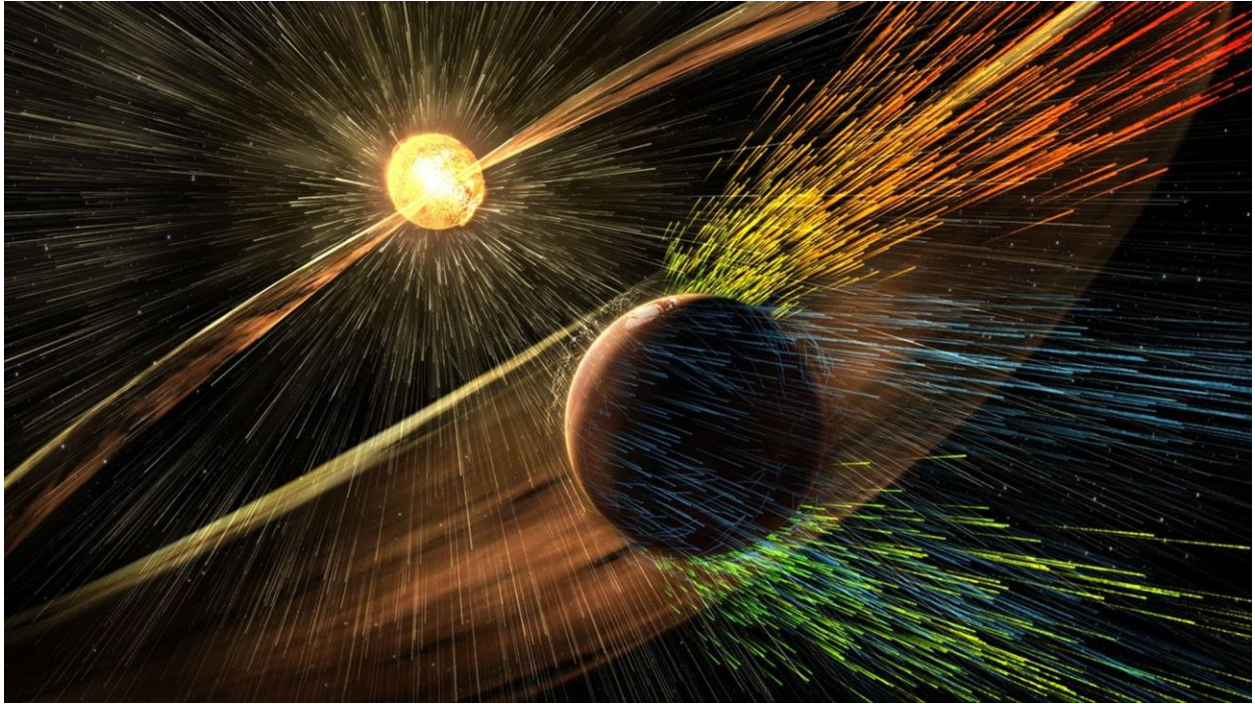
Quick Picks—Events for August

- Sun 2 [Mercury](#) at Greatest Western Elongation - 19.50°
- Wed 5 [Last Quarter Moon](#)
- Fri 7 Pleiades 1.2° S of [Moon](#)
- Sun 9 [Mars](#) 4.4° S of [Moon](#)
- Mon 10 [Moon](#) Perigee at 363,288 km.
- Mon 10 Pollux 3.6° N of [Moon](#)
- Tue 11 [Mercury](#) 2.1° S of [Moon](#)
- Wed 12 [New Moon](#)
- Wed 12 Total Solar Eclipse - Mag: 1.039
- Wed 12 Perseid Meteor Shower
- Fri 14 [Mercury](#) at Perihelion
- Sat 15 [Venus](#) at Greatest Eastern Elongation - 45.90°
- Sat 15 [Mercury](#) 0.6° of [Jupiter](#)
- Sun 16 [Venus](#) 2.1° N of [Moon](#)
- Mon 17 Spica 2.4° N of [Moon](#)
- Wed 19 [First Quarter Moon](#)
- Thu 20 Antares 0.6° N of [Moon](#)
- Sat 22 [Moon](#) Apogee at 404,644 km.
- Thu 27 [Mercury](#) in Superior Conjunction
- Thu 27 Partial Lunar Eclipse - Mag: 0.930
- Thu 27 [Full Moon](#)

Events from Telescopius.com and are non-local. Check stellarium.com for local times.

Looking up

NASA's MAVEN Illuminates New Understanding of Auroras at Mars



This illustration depicts charged particles from a solar storm stripping away charged particles of Mars' atmosphere, one of the processes of Martian atmosphere loss studied by NASA's MAVEN mission.

NASA/GSFC

NASA MAVEN (Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution) mission scientists have uncovered a key puzzle piece in understanding certain types of auroras on Mars, finding that they form in a similar way to Earth-based auroras.

Results published Thursday in [Nature Communications](#) show the same mechanism that circulates and catapults charged particles into Earth's atmosphere is happening at Mars on much smaller scales because of differences in the two planets' magnetic fields.

The MAVEN spacecraft, in orbit around Mars, experienced a loss of signal with ground stations on Earth on Dec. 6, 2025. On June 3, NASA [declared](#) the mission had concluded after finding the spacecraft to be unrecoverable. However, data from the mission is still being used to inform NASA science and future missions to Mars.

When the Sun's magnetic field lines get close to Earth's magnetosphere, the large magnetic bubble protecting the planet, they can reconnect and inject energy and mass throughout Earth's magnetosphere and [magnetotail](#), ultimately firing electrons back into the atmosphere to generate Earth's auroras. This process, called the Dungey cycle, drives electrical currents, accelerates charged particles that create auroras, and controls the circulation of plasma in Earth's magnetosphere and ionosphere.

This new study shows that a miniature version of the Dungey cycle is happening over Mars' strong crustal magnetic fields, which gives scientists a better look into the physics of Martian auroras.

"We knew that magnetic reconnection was happening at Mars but did not expect it to be like the Dungey cycle," said Shaosui Xu, lead author of the study and associate research physicist at the Space Sciences Laboratory at the University of California, Berkeley.

Mars does not have a global magnetic field like Earth. Earth's magnetic field is created by our planet's churning core, while Mars has numerous miniature magnetospheres that arise from intensely magnetized crust scattered around the planet. These regions were formed around 4 billion years ago when lava cooled in the presence of Mars' ancient global magnetic field, which has since disappeared due to [intense solar wind stripping the planet's atmosphere](#).

The MAVEN mission has observed highly localized auroras over these crustal fields, similar to Earth's auroras at the poles, but it wasn't until now that scientists could fully understand the physics of how they form. The study used several instruments aboard the MAVEN spacecraft to build up a picture of the Dungey-like behavior: the Magnetometer and Solar Wind Electron Analyzer instruments, which were used to determine the magnetic configuration and derive electrical currents, and the STATIC (Suprathermal and Thermal Ion Composition) instrument, which was used to measure plasma flows in the ionosphere.

"We really pushed the limit of STATIC to get the data we needed," said Xu. "It was the final piece to the puzzle in understanding these localized auroras."

The realization that a Dungey-like cycle was happening within these crustal magnetic fields answered the question of how the electrons were being energized to create the auroras. It also shows that a Dungey-like mechanism can happen on both large and small scales, giving more insight into where in the solar system this process could be taking place.

"This is a remarkable result that changes how we think of Martian auroras and is another important step toward understanding why Mars and Earth have evolved so differently despite being governed by the same underlying physics," said Shannon Curry, MAVEN's principal investigator and a research scientist at the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics at the University of Colorado Boulder. "I am incredibly proud of our team's work on this discovery and excited to uncover new insights into the Red Planet and its evolution."

By finding out more about this process, scientists also are gaining a better understanding of how the solar environment interacts with the Red

Planet as a whole, which is essential for future robotic and crewed missions.

“I remember in graduate school discussing with my advisor how the cycling of crustal magnetic fields could work at Mars,” said Xu. “It’s incredible to be part of the team that found the answer to that question.”

The MAVEN mission is part of NASA’s Mars Exploration Program portfolio. The mission’s principal investigator is based at the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics at the University of Colorado Boulder, which also is responsible for managing science operations and public outreach and communications. NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, manages the MAVEN mission. Lockheed Martin Space built the spacecraft and is responsible for mission operations. NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California provides navigation and Deep Space Network support.

For more information on NASA’s MAVEN mission, visit:

<https://science.nasa.gov/mission/maven/>

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