



AYLESBURY ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OBSERVING REPORT

May 2009 – By Peter Biswell

On Friday 29 May nine observers gathered at the Observatory (Peter and Tom Gillespy, Margaret Kendrick, Ray Wood, Alan North, Stuart Folkes, Peter Biswell and two visitors, Andy Batten and Louise). We first turned the 30 cm Meade to the crescent Moon in the west. Amongst the craters we spotted was Theophilus, which has a massive clump of mountains at its centre. Besides craters, we also noticed some nicely illuminated wrinkle ridges on the otherwise smooth looking 'seas'. Saturn was the next object we observed. The rings were tilted only slightly and were not well displayed. We saw four satellites – Rhea and Tethys on one side and Enceladus and Titan on the other. Unusually, they appeared in the plane of Saturn's equator, rather like the Galilean satellites of Jupiter! We did not see Mimas or Dione since they were too near to the bright rings, although the poor seeing was another factor. When we were looking at the Moon, the image was unsteady and we had to wait for the few good moments in order to catch the finer features. Looking at the double star gamma Leonis proved a waste of time! Our unsteady atmosphere mushed the image so much the two stars were not clearly separated, despite a gap between them of over 4 arc seconds.

We turned next to Messier 13, the great globular cluster in Hercules. It was a magnificent sight, even though the background sky was still quite bright. In the same constellation is another globular catalogued by Messier – M92. It is not so well known but it was surprisingly good, appearing about half the diameter of M13 and with a more condensed centre. Stuart Folkes then suggested looking at NGC 6229, a third globular in Hercules. Despite appearing fainter and much smaller (magnitude 9.4 and 3.8 arc minutes diameter), it was clearly a globular cluster. It is less impressive than the other two because it is much further away – 90,000 light-years (M13 is 23,000 light-years distant and M92 26,000). Stuart then mentioned NGC 6210, also in Hercules. It is a planetary nebula and its bluey-green disc was clearly seen in the 30 cm Meade at x 115. It was, however, completely outclassed by the next object we looked at - M57, the Ring Nebula in Lyra, which was a marvellous sight.

By this time, the sky was darker and we thought it worth having a look at a galaxy. We turned to M64, the Black Eye galaxy in Coma Berenices. It appeared bright, large and the dust lane that gives it its name was visible. During the evening, we had also observed some satellites, a flare produced by an Iridium satellite catching the sunlight, several meteors and some silvery, noctilucent clouds in the north-west. To finish the night's observing, Stuart tracked down Kruger 60 in Cepheus. It is a famous low mass, red dwarf, binary system, 11 light-years distant.