



# AU AstroNews

## The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

March 2024

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History



*Bob Berman, our speaker for the March 1st general meeting.*

### **March SBAU Meeting**

We will meet in Fleischmann Auditorium at SBMNH on Friday, March 1, with a short planetarium show at 7 PM, followed by our speaker at 7:30 PM.

Bob Berman is one of the world's most widely read astronomers. Since the mid-1990s, his celebrated "Strange Universe" feature has appeared monthly in Astronomy magazine, the largest circulation periodical on the subject. Berman is also the long-time astronomy editor of the Old Farmers Almanac. He was Discover magazine's monthly astronomy columnist from 1989-2006. He has authored more than a thousand published mass-market articles and been a guest on such TV shows as Today and Late Night with David Letterman.

Bob Berman is author of 12 popular science books, most published by Harper Collins and Little Brown. Listeners in seven states hear his Strange Universe program on the WAMC Northeast Public Radio stations during NPR's Weekend Edition each Sunday morning. For 17 years starting in 1979, Berman created and taught the summer astronomy

program at Yellowstone Park for the National Park Service and Yellowstone Institute.

Berman is director of two Ulster County observatories and the Storm King Observatory at Cornwall, New York. He was adjunct professor of astronomy and physics at New York's Marymount college from 1995-2000.

As a lecturer who leads annual expeditions to see celestial events such as auroras and total eclipses, Bob has spent five years overseas, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, and is known for his unique blend of humor, informality, and encyclopedic sky-knowledge.

### **Las Cumbres Observatory Tours**

**There have been problems with emails to and from [sbau.org](http://sbau.org) addresses, so please make sure you contact Diane, our Events Coordinator!**

Free tours for SBAU members of the Las Cumbres Observatory (LCO) have been scheduled for: Tuesday March 5th, and Thursday March 7th.

LCO Address is 6740 Cortona Dr #102, Goleta, CA 93117. Meet at 9:45 AM and check in with Event Coordinator Diane Welcenbach - the tour is 1.5 hours long. There is ample on street parking.

Space is limited to 15 people per tour date. First come, first serve. No guests.

To sign up, send an e-mail to [<d.welcenbach@verizon.net>](mailto:d.welcenbach@verizon.net)

Include your name, phone number, and preferred tour date .

## **Outreach Summary**

Since the last newsletter, certified AU and SBMNH volunteers Krissie Cook, Tim Crawford, David Feinberg, Sean Fox & John Winckowski & Quasars, Ron Herron, Sean Kelly, David Larson, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Mary Megrant, Janet & Martin Meza, Bruce Murdock, Edgar Ocampo, Javier Rivera, Charles Schueler, Tom Totton, Tom Whittemore, Lee Wilkerson & Jasmine & Melissa, and Andre Yew showed cool stuff in the sky to 552 people, helped by Dr. Kihlstrom at Westmont.

*SBAU volunteers must have undergone the SBMNH background check, and conform with the SBMNH policies for dealing with the public, to participate in outreach activities. To get vetted, contact SBMNH Volunteer Manager Rebecca Coulter <[rcoulter@sbnature2.org](mailto:rcoulter@sbnature2.org)>. It's quick and painless.*

## **Outreach Events**

### **Wednesday, March 6, setup 4 PM**

Telescopes for Science Night at Hollister Elementary School, 4950 Anita Lane. We set up on the blacktop, with access through a gate at the end of Ashton Street. Dinner for volunteers.

### **Thursday, March 7, setup 5 PM**

Telescopes for Science Night at Santa Barbara Charter School, on the campus of Goleta Valley Junior High, 6100 Stow Canyon Road, at the eastern end.

### **Friday, March 8, setup 6 PM**

Telescopes at the eastern end of Shoreline Park for students from Fusion Academy of Santa Barbara.

### **Saturday, March 9, 4:30 PM**

SBAU Monthly Planning Meeting on Zoom. Watch your email for the link.

### **Saturday, March 9, setup 6:30 PM**

Monthly Public Star Party at SBMNH, next to Palmer Observatory, from 7:30 PM to 10 PM.

### **Tuesday, March 12, setup 7 PM**

Telescope Tuesday in the plaza by the theater at Camino Real Marketplace.

### **Wednesday, March 13, setup 4:30 PM**

Telescopes for Science Night at Monroe School, 431 Flora Vista Drive. Dinner for volunteers. We set up on a lawn next to the library.

### **Friday, March 15, setup 6 PM**

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont's Keck Observatory, next to the athletic fields.

### **Saturday, March 16, setup 6 PM**

Telescopes for a birthday party at Westmont's Keck Observatory, next to the athletic fields.

### **Tuesday, March 19, setup 5:30 PM**

Telescopes for Girls, Inc. of Carpinteria, 5315 Foothill Road. We'll set up in their courtyard.

### **Thursday, March 21, setup 6:30 PM**

Telescopes and slide show for students at Santa Barbara Junior High, 721 E Cota. We set up behind the Marjorie Luke Theater, with access through a gate by the intersection of E Ortega and N Quarantina.

## **FROM THE PRESIDENT**

*Jerry Wilson*

A recent progress report was submitted to the *Astronomical Journal* by Professor Mike Brown of CalTech, lead author, on the continuing search for Planet 9. Planet 9, AKA Planet X, is a hypothetical planet that potentially orbits in the outer reaches of our solar system, far beyond the orbit of dwarf planet Pluto. Its presence is predicted based on perturbations observed in the orbits of several other Kuiper belt dwarf planets beyond Neptune.

Planet 9 is believed to be about 6.6 times the mass of earth and with an orbital semi-major axis of 500 AU. This would make Planet 9 the fifth largest planet in our solar system, between Earth and Uranus in size. This size planet is common in exoplanet systems, referred to as a Super Earth.

The latest results are based on Pan-STARRS data. This study has so far eliminated 78% of the projected locations for Planet 9 in the largest volume search to date. So far, Planet 9 remains elusive. We look forward to the next progress report.

## ARTS CORNER

“Falling a Little Bit in Love With the Dark”

*Margaret Renkl (excerpted from the December 21, 2022 NYT)*

This year the winter solstice arrives on Dec. 21 in the shank of the dark afternoon. Officially the first day of astronomical winter, the solstice is better known as the shortest day of the year. I prefer to think of it as the longest night of the year, for I am making friends with the darkness.

For most of my life, I looked forward to the solstice because it signals a shift to longer days. I was never a fan of winter, and earlier sunrises and later sunsets always felt to me as a kind of compensation for the cold. But my heart has been thawing these past years, watching as winter becomes ever more fragile, its cold imperiled by the changing climate, its darkness by our own foolishness and fear.

With the arrival of LED lighting, which costs so little to burn, every house has become an island of illumination, every city a blazing forest fire of artificial light. In my own backyard, it's hard to enjoy the full moon because so many of our neighbors now leave their lights on all night long. And that's without the holiday displays, each one bright enough to guide an airplane from the sky and land it safely in the middle of our street.

This resolve to snuff out every shadow of night – I wonder how closely it might be linked to the metaphorical darkness of our age. Discord, suffering and sorrow are everywhere, all much darker than any winter night, and tilting Earth is not to blame for them. It's not hard to understand what's really to blame: Media and political figures alike profit when we are angry or afraid.

Literal darkness is simple by comparison, but people inclined to flood their own yards with light for safety's sake seem not to know how little safety they've provided themselves or what measures of actual safety they have closed off in the attempt. They will never know what dangers might lurk beyond their own little circle of light because they've created the very circumstances that prevent their eyes from adjusting to darkness.

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**AU AstroNews**, the monthly publication of the **Astronomical Unit (AU)**, is mailed to the AU membership. For publishing consideration for the next month, submit astronomical items by the 20th of the current month!

**AU annual membership rate: \$20**

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# The Astronomical Unit

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| MARCH 2024   |        |  |                                     |  |  |   |
|--|--------|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Sunday   | Monday | Tuesday                                    | Wednesday                           | Thursday   | Friday   | Saturday  |
|  |        |  |                                     |  | 1<br>AU MONTHLY<br>MEETING<br>7PM                  | 2   |
| 3<br>LQ Moon   | 4      | 5<br>LCO TOUR 09:45                        | 6<br>HOLLISTER<br>ELEMENTARY<br>4PM | 7<br>LCO TOUR 09:45<br>SB CHARTER<br>SCHOOL<br>5PM | 8<br>FUSION<br>ACADEMY AT<br>SHORELINE PARK<br>6PM | 9<br>ZOOM PLANNING<br>MEETING<br>4:30PM<br>STAR PARTY<br>6:30PM |
| 10<br>NEW MOON<br><br>DAYLIGHT<br>SAVINGS TIME<br>BEGINS | 11     | 12<br>TELESCOPE<br>TUESDAY<br>7PM          | 13<br>MONROE<br>SCHOOL<br>4:30PM    | 14   | 15<br>WESTMONT<br>PUBLIC STAR<br>PARTY<br>6PM      | 16<br>WESTMONT<br>COLLEGE<br>6PM                                |
| 17<br>FQ Moon  | 18     | 19<br>GIRLS, INC.<br>CARPINTERIA<br>5:30PM | 20                                  | 21<br>SB JUNIOR HIGH<br>6:30PM                     | 22   | 23  |
| 24<br>Full Moon  | 25     | 26   | 27                                  | 28   | 29   | 30  |
| 31   |        |  |                                     |  |  |   |