



## VBAS Highlights for February

### Public Programs for February

Our next member's meeting will be held on Friday, February 20th at 7 PM. The program this month will be by our own Dr. Wes Colley, titled *Introduction to Galaxy Evolution*. VBAS Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7 PM; they're open to the public and are free.

Regular planetarium programs are held on Saturdays at 7:30 PM. This month, we focus on Galileo, the first man to use a telescope to look at the heavens 400 years ago, with shows on February 7th, 14th, and 28th. On the 21st, we will give a seasonal sky tour. Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, \$5.00 for Adults, \$3.00 for Students, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes normally follows each planetarium program, weather permitting.

### Occultations of the Pleiades and Venus

On page 3, Resident Astronomer Doug Horacek lists this year's upcoming occultations.

### Planetary Conjunctions For 2009

See page 3 for Doug's list of this year's upcoming planetary conjunctions.

### Historic Video Archives

UAH's Salmon Library website contains interviews with several VBAS founders and early members. John Young gives details on page 5.

### 2009 Messier Marathon Set for March 27

Jeff Delmas gives details about the "faint fuzzies" observing event on page 5.

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**Deadline for March 2009 Via Stellaris submissions is Monday, February 23.**



## VBAS Calendar of Events

*Saturday, February 7th, 14th, & 28th, 2009, 7:30 PM*  
 Planetarium Show: ***Galileo: The Man Who Moved the World***

*Location: VBAS*

2009 is the International Year of Astronomy, celebrating the 400th anniversary of when Galileo became the first man to turn a telescope to the heavens. Learn more about the man and his impact on science, religion, and politics.



*Portrait of Galileo Galilei by Justus Sustermans (1597-1681)*

*Friday, February 20th, 2008, 6 PM*  
 Adult Regular Observing Evening  
*Location: VBAS*

*Presented by Doug Horacek*

Come and take out your scopes and observe if possible before and after the members meeting. There should be many deep sky objects and a crescent waning moon, so there will be no moon during the early evening hours. Contact Doug Horacek at 772-6788 for more information.

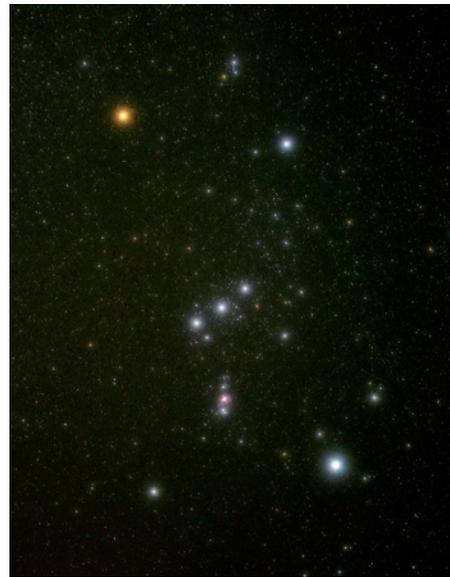
*Friday, February 20th, 2009, 7 PM*  
 Regular Monthly Meeting  
*Location: VBAS*

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet we'll discuss pertinent society business before moving on to our program. Our own Dr. Wes Colley

will present this month's program, titled *Introduction to Galaxy Evolution*. Dr. Colley will introduce the basic concepts of galaxy evolution, including formation, development of spiral structure, mergers, and environmental effects. Come out and learn about this interesting topic and, as always, visitors are welcome to our members' meetings.

*Saturday, February 21st, 2009, 7:30 PM*  
 Planetarium Show: ***Seasonal Star Tour***  
*Location: VBAS*

Join us for a relaxing evening at VBAS. We'll show you which constellations are visible this time of year, and teach you how to find them. We'll also learn about the fascinating and beautiful deep sky objects that can be found, along with a mix of mythology. Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky afterwards through one of VBAS's powerful telescopes, too.



*Camera Orion (Credit & Copyright: John Gauvreau)*

*Friday, February 27th, 2009*  
 Adult and Youth Observing Session  
*Location: VBAS*

*Presented by David Lofts*

The adults will have telescopes and the kids can come observe. There will be a global star count taking place for the constellation Orion, everyone's favorite. Kids can work on both observing the constellations and the star count, and they can look through the adult scopes. Contact David Lofts at 726-0275 or Doug Horacek at 772-6788.

*Saturday, March 7th, 14th, & 28th, 2009, 7:30 PM*  
 Planetarium Show: **Observing at Night...  
 and in the Day**

*Location: VBAS*

*Friday, March 20th, 2009, 7 PM*  
 Regular Monthly Meeting

*Location: VBAS*

Our Director of Facilities and VBAS Librarian, Terry Owens, is heading a "Spring Cleaning" sale at VBAS. We've got some cool stuff, such as extra books, AV equipment, telescopes, parts, etc. needing new homes. VBAS members can use this opportunity to sell some of their own astronomical-related items, as well. So, make plans to attend our "Spring Cleaning Sale" on March 20th.

*Friday, March 27th, 2008*

*(Rain date Saturday, March 28th)*

Messier Marathon

*Location: VBAS*

"Messier Marathon" is a term to describe an effort to observe all 110 deep sky Messier objects in one night. This year's Messier marathon has been set for Friday, March 27. Make your plans now to attend this event to rack up as many Messier objects in your log book as you can in one evening. This is a great opportunity for newer observers to learn more about the night sky and to learn observing techniques from more experienced members.

...And as always, for the most up-to-date information about VBAS events, be sure to check the web site at [vbas.org](http://vbas.org).

## Occultations of the Pleiades and Venus

*by Doug Horacek, Resident Astronomer*

The only occultations to be seen in Alabama are of the Pleiades. The Venus occultation occurs in the west with the crescent Moon on the morning of 22 April 2009.

The occultation of the Pleiades on 4 February 2009 will only be observed north of Alabama. It will happen around 10:00 P.M. local time for those areas of the Northern US that can observe the occultation.

On the morning of 14 August 2009 the Pleiades is again occulted early in the morning by a waning crescent moon. Some of the stars may reappear in the dawn twilight or after dawn.

The tail end of the Pleiades will be occulted for us in Alabama on 29 December 2009, beginning just after sundown.

Some may disappear at dusk, but all will reappear after twilight. I will have more details in the December *Via Stellaris*. The moon will be 94% waxing gibbous. I just checked on my cybersky and the Pleiades will be well above the trees if we want to observe at VBAS.

The rest of the Pleiades occultations are in different parts of the world and we will not be able to observe them here in Alabama.

If you are interested in the 29 December 2009 evening occultation let me know. Contact Doug Horacek at 772-6788 or email me at [horacekd@bellsouth.net](mailto:horacekd@bellsouth.net) or [observers@vbas.org](mailto:observers@vbas.org).

## Planetary Conjunctions For 2009

*by Doug Horacek, Resident Astronomer*

The only evening conjunction just passed on 22 January 2009, when Uranus passed 1.2° to the lower left of Venus. The rest of the planetary conjunctions are in the dawn skies around sunrise.

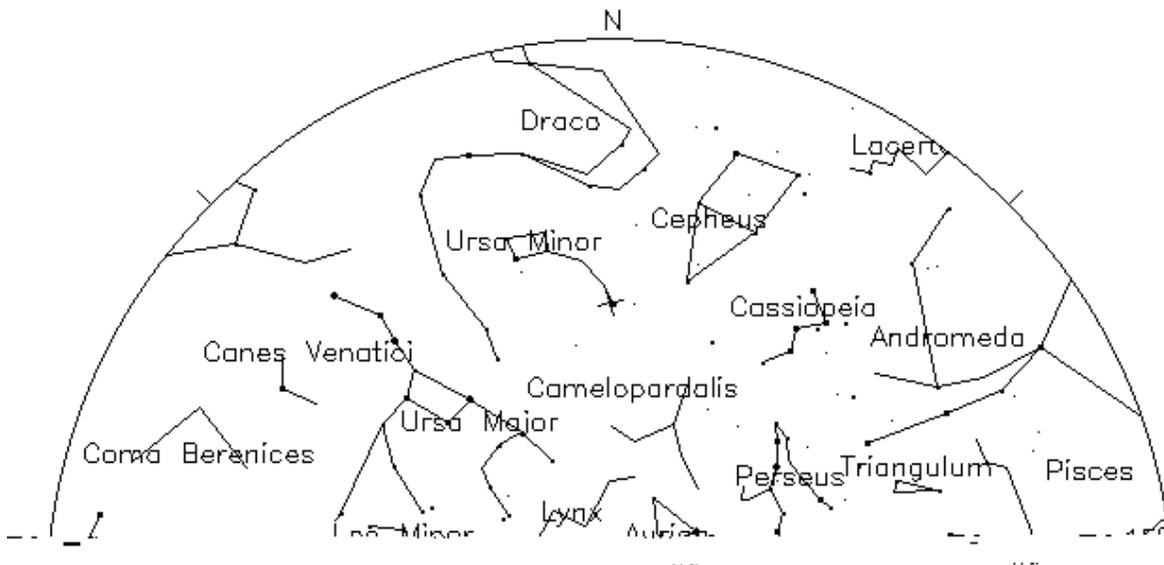
- On 24 February 2009 Mercury is 0.7° below Jupiter.
- On 15 April 2009, in the dawn twilight, Uranus is 0.4° to the upper left of Mars.
- On 21 June 2009 Mars is 2° to the upper left of Venus
- On 20 September 2009 the Star Regulus, the heart of the lion, is 0.5° to the lower right of Venus
- On 8 October 2009 Saturn is 0.4° to the upper left of Mercury.
- On 13 October 2009 Saturn is 0.5° to the left of Venus.

If you are an early riser you may want to get out your scopes or binoculars for these views, given the weather cooperates.

## The Night Sky for February, 2009

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid February, 2009, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Jupiter (the lowercase "j" symbol) will be rising in the east, near Leo.

Map courtesy of John Walker and YourSky (<http://www.fourmilab.to/yoursky/>).



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## Historic video archives on UAH Library website

by *John Young*

I thought I would share an interesting link for you history buffs out there. UAH's Louis Salmon Library has a fascinating and extensive collection of oral history interviews with a number of space pioneers. The collection includes several VBAS founders and early members such as Dr. Ernst Stuhlinger, Ted Paludan, Skeet Vaughan, and Bill Varnadoe.

<http://lib.uah.edu/researchassistance/oralhistories.html#space>

In addition, their Mediaserver website has additional footage, including a number of historic lectures by Dr. Wernher von Braun, Dr. Ernst Stuhlinger, and others. They can be found "behind" the old and new NASA recordings hyperlinks on the right.

<http://media.eb.uah.edu/>

Lastly, UAH is currently working on incorporating footage from the Stuhlinger Symposium held this past fall. A myriad of speakers and friends of Dr. Stuhlinger provided technical updates on efforts related to his career and paid honorable tribute to this extraordinary man. It is hoped that this footage will come online in the next couple of months so keep an eye out.

Enjoy!  
John Young  
VBAS President

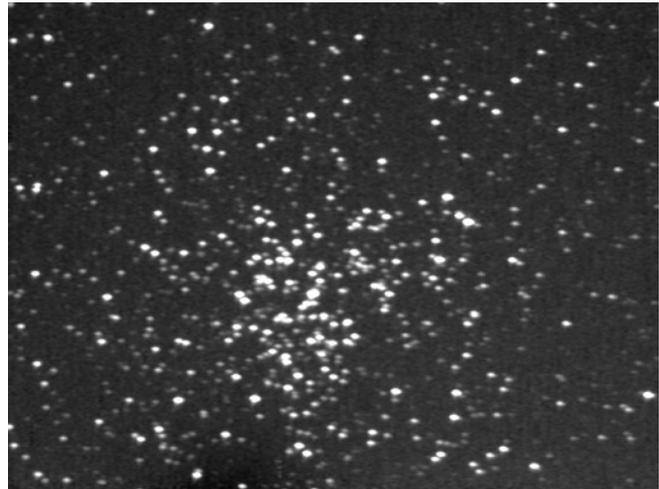
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## 2009 Messier Marathon Set for March 27

by *Jeff Delmas*

"Messier Marathon" is a term to describe an effort to observe all 110 deep sky Messier objects in one night. This is possible during several times of the year, but all 110 objects are most accessible to viewers in the Spring months of March and April during or near new Moons.

This year's Messier marathon has been set for Friday, March 27. This year, timing is almost ideal, with the new Moon occurring just one day prior to our marathon on March 26 at 16:06 UT. Saturday, March 28 is the rain date for the marathon. Make your plans now to attend this event to rack up as many Messier objects in your log book as you can in one evening. This is a great opportunity for newer observers to learn more about the night sky and to learn observing techniques from more experienced members.



*Photo of M37 by Jeff Delmas.*

### Contributions to Via Stellaris

We welcome contributions to our newsletter that may be of interest to the astronomical community. Contributions are best sent by email to Steve Sloan at [editor1@vbas.org](mailto:editor1@vbas.org). If you don't have access to email, you can send articles in either Word or ASCII format to Steve at 2110 Vilaret Dr, Huntsville, AL 35803.

### Membership and Renewal

The VBAS currently has four categories of membership. All four include free admission to the planetarium shows; subscription to this newsletter; membership in the Astronomical League; and use of VBAS library and equipment. The four categories of membership, and the dues for each, are: REGULAR at \$24.00 per year, FAMILY at \$36.00 per year, STUDENT (must be full-time student) at \$12.00 per year, and LIFE at \$500.00. Newsletter Only is also available for \$12.00 per year. Membership renewal occurs for all members annually on March 1st.

All VBAS memberships will come up for renewal on March 1, 2009. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact Gerry Conrad.

Please send your renewal to the Membership Secretary at VBAS, P.O. Box 1142, Huntsville, AL 35807. Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society. If your mailing or email address changes, please report the new address promptly to the Membership Secretary, Gerry Conrad, at [conrad1908@knology.net](mailto:conrad1908@knology.net) or 722-8212, to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

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*Steve Sloan, Via Stellaris editor*