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Posted: 10:35 PM Jan 29, 2011

Scanning the skies: Astronomy club to discuss viewing rare celestial events

Amateur astronomers enjoy gazing at the celestial wonders — the sun, the moon, planets. But there's more to see in the sky than the typical sights, said Theo Ramakers, director of the Charlie Elliott Chapter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club.

Reporter: [By Karen J. Rohr, Features Editor](#)
Email Address: karen.rohr@rockdalecitizen.com

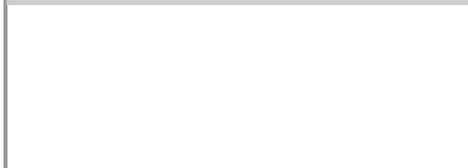
You recommend Scanning the skies: Astronomy club to discuss viewing rare celestial



Special Photo Frank Garner of Covington helps students from the Fayetteville Montessori School observe the sun as part of outreach performed by the Charlie Elliott Chapter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club. The club's Feb. 5 meeting, free and open to the public, will focus on the unusual occurrences in the solar system.

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Amateur astronomers enjoy gazing at the celestial wonders — the sun, the moon, planets. But there's more to see in the sky than the typical sights, said Theo Ramakers, director of the Charlie Elliott Chapter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club.

On Feb. 5 at 3 p.m. at the monthly meeting of the astronomy club, Ramakers will discuss how to observe and capture images of the out-of-the-ordinary occurrences that happen in our solar system, such as a solar or lunar eclipse and planets' moons and rings appearing and disappearing.

These events occur rarely and require much more preplanning to observe, said Ramakers, who has had his astronomical images featured online by NASA.

If You Go

- What: "Imaging the Unusual," presented by the Charlie Elliott Chapter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club
- When: 3 p.m. Feb. 5
- Where: Charlie Elliott Wildlife Visitor Center, 543 Elliott Trail in Mansfield, about 10 miles south of Interstate 20 at Exit 98.
- Cost: Free and open to the public
- Info: Visit <http://ceastronomy.org/blog/home>.

"I always like the unusual things," said Ramakers, who recently climbed out of his bed in the middle of the night to watch the International Space Station transit the moon at about 4:24 a.m.

With careful scheduling, amateur astronomers can be privy to what seem almost magical events unfolding in the night sky. For example, every 15 years Jupiter's moons play hide and seek. At first glance, there might be four, but a minute later only one appears. Twenty minutes later, four come back into view.

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The phenomenon occurs when the orbits of the moons line up with one another, explained Ramakers.

Ramakers said you don't need expensive equipment to view or even record the events. You just need to be on time.

"You need to know when it happens," said Ramakers, who added that the International Space Station crossings can happen in about one second.

Ramakers, a member of the Night Sky Network, is trained by NASA to talk to groups about the solar system and NASA missions. He said amateur astronomers play a key role in observing phenomena that sometimes go unnoticed by those who

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scan the skies for a living.

"What happens is the amateurs discover things the professionals don't even know about," said Ramaker. "We amateurs make images of these planets around the clock."

Ramakers encourages the community to visit the club meeting on Feb. 5 at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center, located at 543 Elliott Trail in Mansfield, about 10 miles south of Interstate 20 at Exit 98.

Ramakers will also discuss upcoming celestial events and space exploration progress, which will be followed by observing the night sky just after sunset about 6 p.m.

Meetings of the Charlie Elliott Chapter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club are free and open to the public. For more information, visit <http://ceastronomy.org/blog/home>.

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Posted by: Don Location: Conyers on Jan 30, 2011 at 01:26 AM

If you have never been to a star party, (new moon dark sky observing session with an Astronomy club/group.) you owe it to yourself and children to go. It is just an all around great time. So good in fact, you may just take up the hobby for yourself !!!

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