



# Snake River Skies

February 2005  
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## Message from our New MVAS President Cheryl Lowman

### Club Officers

- Cheri Lowman, President, 736-7293
- Ken Thomason, Vice President 324-4532 ktst@pmt.org
- Rick Widmer, Secretary Webmaster 539-5162 rwidmer@developersdesk.com
- Tom Gilbertson, Newsletter Editor 734-04383 palo@pmt.org

Write to MVAS at P.O. Box 5101, Twin Falls, ID 83303

Website MVAstro.org

Yearly membership is \$20 per person or family and \$10 per student. Sponsor memberships are \$100.

This month's regular membership meeting will on Saturday, February 12 at 7:00 in the Herrett Center. Our guest speaker this month is Bob Neimeyer. He is one of our regular speakers who always gives interesting, thought provoking presentations. You won't

want to miss it!  
  
March is fast approaching, bringing with it the annual Messier Marathon! Come to the meeting to provide us with input on where and when you would like to see it happen!

It has been a while since we have been able to follow a meeting up with a star party. I think we're due! Hope to see all of you there!  
  
Your 2005 MVAS President,  
Cheri

## News from the Herrett Center

***"From its vantage point 350 miles above the Earth, the Hubble Space Telescope has beamed back eye-popping vistas of our universe."***  
  
HUBBLE Vision the new show at the Planetarium. This is a very good show for both beginners

and the advanced. This plays Tuesday, Friday & Saturday at 7:00 pm.  
  
A fun Family show "Mystery of the Missing Seasons" plays Saturdays at 4:00 p.m.

Don't forget the Centennial Observatory nights. The first and 3rd Tuesdays through March one hour after sunset to 9:00 pm weather permitting and Astronomy talks 1st Friday after the new Moon at sunset or 7:15 pm whichever is latest.

Where do I find the latest news on space exploration or Astronomy Events? Check out our own MVAS Website at [Mvastro.org](http://Mvastro.org)

## Titan's Surface is Revealed

Congratulations to the European Space Agency (ESA) for its successful mission to capture an image of the surface of Saturn's largest moon Titan. For those of you who are asking "great, but what is Titan?" here is a brief primer on Titan. Titan was first discovered by early telescope pioneer, Christian Huygens, in 1655. This is who the ESA's probe was named after. Titan is the second largest moon in our solar system after Jupiter's largest moon, Ganymede .

Titan is named for the Titans who in Greek Mythology were the children of earth and heaven which sprang from Chaos which was a confused and shapeless mass in which slumbered the seeds of things. Saturn was one of these Titans along with his wife Rhea, Oceanus, Hyperion, Iapetus, Ophion, and others.

Titan is the only moon known to have an atmosphere. Interestingly Titan's atmosphere is estimated to be very similar to that of ancient earth made up of almost entirely of Nitrogen with traces of methane. The atmospheric pressure at the surface of Titan is some 60% greater than that of earth. Titan does not have the mass or density of Mercury, but it does have a larger diameter hence volume than Mercury.

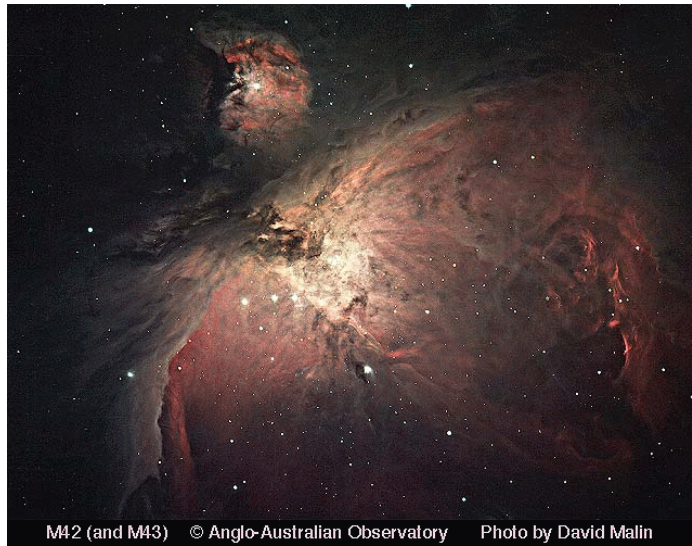


The orbital period of Titan around Saturn is about 21.27 days. In comparison to our moon Titan's diameter is about one and one half times larger with not quite twice the mass. Think of the size of tides on earth if it were our moon.

Titan is easy to see with a small telescope or even good quality binoculars. Despite its great size it appears as a tiny dot from our vantage point slowly dancing around the ringed planet from night to night.



M41



M42 & M43

## What's Up in the Sky February 2005

Orion and his hunting dogs Canis Major and Canis Minor dominate the early evening night sky.

The three belt stars of Orion point to bright Sirius the star marking the heart of Canis Major. Sirius is the brightest star seen from the northern hemisphere partly because it is the nearest star seen by the naked eye from most of the northern hemisphere at a mere 8.6 light-years. Just below Sirius look for M41 a large beautiful Star Cluster.

The sword of Orion contains the very impressive

star birth region of the Great Orion Nebula M42 & M43.

Canis Minor also boasts a bright relatively nearby star, Procyon. This star is the 8th brightest star in our night sky some 11.4 light years from earth.

In 2005 January and February are our best chances to view Saturn and its always impressive ring system, but do not forget about the tiny moons visible with a medium to large telescope.

Jupiter is making it's entry rising late in the evening, but outshining all the other stars until the minutes of dawn and sunrise.

Mercury watchers will have a chance to view this elusive planet in the evening sky about 30 minutes after sunset late if February. Of course in the Western sky.

Mars rises early in the morning and will be visible just before dawn in the southeast.

Venus is disappearing into the glow of sunrise getting ready for her next debut as the evening star later this spring.

February is typically less cloudy than January and a great month to dust off our telescopes after a long cloudy winter.

## This is your Newsletter

We all owe a special thank you to Jay Sneddon who tirelessly worked in getting our newsletter out the last few years. I have forgotten how much work it was until I attempted to do these last few. Jay needed to spend more time with his family and so has decided to turn his newsletter duties over to me. Not that I'm so accomplished. I am still struggling with an old computer and the complicated technicalities of Publisher.

Nevertheless I will do what I can to continue in Jay's great tradition and send you a newsletter worthy of your time and one that you

will not be ashamed to share with friends.

You can help. If you have some news you want to have in the newsletter write it down and mail it to MVAS, P.O. Box 5101, TF, ID 83303, or email to [palo@pmt.org](mailto:palo@pmt.org).

Also if you have not already done so please send in your dues for the coming year. Thank you for being a member of MVAS.

Tom Gilbertson