

THE BRITISH ASTRONOMICAL ASSOCIATION VARIABLE STAR SECTION

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Abstract

The activities of the Variable Star Section of the British Astronomical Association (BAA) are described, with emphasis on 1989 as a typical year.

The British Astronomical Association (BAA) was founded in 1890, and the Variable Star Section began operation at the same time. Since the turn of the century, this section has always encouraged specific observing programs rather than estimates of any variables. All work of this section is carried out by voluntary officers and helpers. No financial support of any sort is received, other than basic expenses, which are covered by the BAA.

The year 1989 may be taken as an example of the current programs. The Binocular and Main (Telescopic) Programs cover a wide range of objects, but the distinction between them is largely only of a historical nature. The Recurrent Objects Program covers old novae, long-period (and suspected) dwarf novae, and similar objects. These three programs produced approximately 35,000 visual results from approximately 60 active observers in 1989. It may be noted that although the results of the Recurrent Objects Program are often of great interest to professionals, it remains a problem to know where results should be published so they may be easily and rapidly available.

The United Kingdom Nova/Supernova Patrol is run by the exceptionally active Guy Hurst. In 1989, nova patrols amounted to approximately 100 hours with approximately 650 visual and 1,500 photographic observations. The supernova patrol reversed these figures, with approximately 3,000 visual and 230 photographic observations. During the year, 104 alerts were issued, and Mike Collins, checking patrol photography, discovered 32 objects not in the *General Catalogue of Variable Stars* (Kholopov *et al.* 1985), of which a few proved to be listed, with unknown types of variability, in the *New Catalogue of Suspected Variable Stars* (Kholopov *et al.* 1982).

The Eclipsing Binary Program resulted in approximately 8,600 observations, with some 3,600 visual estimates and 5,000 from the Automatic Photoelectric Telescope (APT), resulting in 70 timings of minima. Despite the sad loss of Jack Ells, it is hoped that the APT will continue to be used for photoelectric work.

The Variable Star Section has in its archives some two million unpublished estimates, and currently data requests are met by hand. Observations are submitted every six months, and estimates of southern stars are exchanged with the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand Variable Star Section. Computerization of the database is proceeding slowly, and a subset of the data (in AAVSO format) will eventually be made available via the AAVSO.

An important recent advance has been our increasing reliance on electronic mail, with many active observers receiving alerts via a commercial service. Urgent requests for data

and details for IAU Telegrams are met by the use of academic and scientific networks (STARLINK, JANET, SPAN, BITNET/EARN, etc.).

Partly arising from the IAU's call for more amateur/professional collaboration, there is now a United Kingdom Professional/Amateur Liaison Committee, approximately evenly divided, which is functioning well. This helps amateurs gain access to facilities and advice, such as assistance on photoelectric projects. Professional astronomers gain from being able to set up special observing projects and, most importantly, being able to find out what work amateurs are carrying out, and what they could contribute.