

VARIABLE STAR OBSERVING IN BELGIUM

Ludwig Cluyse
VVS Variable Star Section
Groeneweg 5
8720 Dentergem, Belgium

*Presented at the First European Meeting of the AAVSO
Brussels, July 24-28, 1990*

Abstract

The history of the Vereniging Voor Sterrenkunde (VVS), Variable Star Section, and some of its main activities, is described.

The Variable Star Section was officially founded in 1986 as one of several working groups of the VVS. Before that time, we had already some very keen observers making many observations on a regular basis, but the cooperation and exchange of ideas among amateurs was not well organized.

The VVS Variable Star Section has always been highly influenced by the main goals set by AAVSO, which means that the organization has put an emphasis on the observation of long-period variables, semiregulars, and dwarf novae. To answer the need for giving feed-back to our observers, and bearing in mind that we are not a large group, we found it necessary to stick to a main program of about 30 stars that we ask everybody to include in his or her own observing program. This way we are able to produce light curves that are valuable in the sense that, even if they are obviously better combined with observations originating from the rest of the world in an AAVSO database, they can serve as a reward mainly for the relatively new observers who may need a boost. This way we are also able to compare observations of new observers with those of experienced ones, and determine if there is a problem with the technique used to estimate the brightness of a variable. Of course we highly recommend that people extend this basic program with stars of their own choice, or draw up an observing program with other variable star observers.

Since the foundation of our variable star section, we have collected somewhat fewer than 85,000 observations. Each year we have about 20 observers making estimates for the Variable Star Section.

During the past few years we have put some effort into trying to follow up ongoing abnormal activity of some variables, which we heard of through either variable star circulars or alert notices such as those issued by AAVSO and *The Astronomer* (which we now rapidly receive via modem or in printed form), or by detecting unusual activity of a variable star ourselves, such as was the case with Nova Cyg 1975, and the most recent outburst of VY Aqr. We can also receive messages very quickly from the IAU through its *Circulars*, and we currently set a goal of trying to submit critical observations that could find their way into a news circular. There also is a growing interest in cooperation for special observing runs.

For about five years now, we have been putting our data on disk, both new and old observations. To date we have some 70% of our historical observations on file. A few of us are also highly interested in writing application software such as programs for period determination and user-specific management software for this database.

From experience we have learned that new observers often seem to have similar problems when choosing variable stars as their specialty. For this reason we have issued

a 180-page description of variable stars, including a supposedly clear picture of how variable stars fit into stellar evolution. A few of us still have other specific interests in variable star mapping or, quite recently, the automated CCD search for supernovae, just to mention two of them.

Despite the small scale of our contributions to variable star monitoring, at least compared with AAVSO as a whole, we are delighted to be the host of this first-ever European AAVSO meeting, and I can only express my sincere hope that this may be a stimulus for continuing and increasing activity within our association.