

Observing Variable Stars

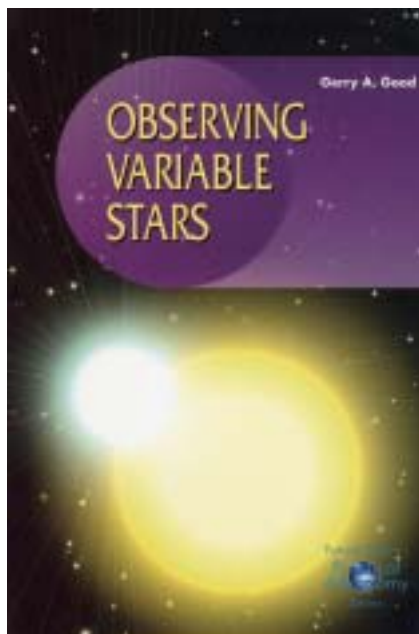
by Gerry A. Good

Springer-Verlag, 2003. ISBN 1-85233-498-3. Pp viii + 274, £24.50 (pbk).

Until the publication of Gerry Good's new book, the only popular book still in print to cover the observational aspects of variable stars was David Levy's *Observing Variable Stars - a guide for the beginner*. As the title suggests Levy's book is aimed at and intended for beginners, whereas Gerry Good's offering is intended to be the '...definitive book about observing variable stars, and ... suitable for amateur astronomers of all levels'.

Observing Variable Stars comprises 15 chapters with three short appendices, and is divided broadly into three sections: an introduction to the subject, a detailed description of the various types and classes of variables, and a series of chapters which covers the practical aspects of observing.

The introduction is competently done with Gerry's obvious love and enthusiasm for the subject coming through right from the very beginning. The description of various classes and types is excellent. Gerry has not con-



fined himself to only describing the classes given in the *General Catalogue of Variable Stars*, but also gives very intelligible explanations of each of the semi-official classifications that an interested reader might encounter in journals and online discussions. To accompany each description is an at-a-glance summary of the major features of the class – the brightness of its members, their typical magnitude range, the typical periods, and the best methods to use to observe them. The final third of the book addresses how to plan an observing programme, charts and charting, the techniques to use when observing, recording observations (including a discussion of the organisation and storing of data on computer), and ends with some brief comments in the appendices on building databases and analysis of the data.

Regrettably *Observing Variable Stars* is not without its flaws. The author acknowl-

edges that the decision to grade a class as best for visual, CCD or PEP observation is subjective; regrettably it is also inconsistent. There are two quite different descriptions of the Purkinje effect on pages 170 and 223 which whilst technically correct are both confused and confusing. There is no reference in the section on observation planning and recording to the need to include the actual estimate in the record, although this is mentioned in a subsequent chapter. Some of the black and white artists' impressions have rendered into print rather poorly (figure 3.5 showing an R CrB star in particular). Finally, the general organisation of the third section could be improved upon, to avoid for example the duplication of information that occurs in several chapters.

To try to write a 'definitive' book about anything is ambitious. Whilst Gerry's attempt is a worthy one, and the second section in particular is excellent, the various flaws mean that *Observing Variable Stars* never quite fulfils the ambition.

C. P. Jones

Chris Jones has been observing variable stars from light polluted Essex for longer than he is willing to admit. In recent years he has devoted his efforts to investigating the understudied variables discovered by the British nova hunter Mike Collins.

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