

Crazy about stars

As teens and twenty somethings, these youngsters are crazy about stars. They would follow them, let out a joyful cry on seeing them and even fill their dreams with them. But Pavan Keshavamurthy and his band of youngsters would like to make one thing very clear: "Don't mistake these stars for the celluloid kinds. The stars that drive us nuts are the real ones."

Nearly three months ago, the teenager and a group of 'Star Gazers' joined hands to form the Bangalore Astronomical Society (BAS), which, they hope, would revive interest in the subject that had been close to the hearts of several Bangalorians until a few decades ago.

The group owes its existence to the Internet, where the 130 members, or at least the 30 active ones, were literally thrilled to see a blogger from Bangalore inviting those interested to join him for astronomy-related activities. "I was among the first six to register," says Rakesh Nath, an engineering student whose interest for astronomy is primarily due to the fact that he shared his first name with the first Indian to visit the space (Rakesh Sharma).

"For a couple of months, the response was lukewarm," Pavan, who opened the blog, says. "But slowly, there were more registrations and we all met on July 22, the day we consider as BAS' 'birth-day'."

Observation sessions form an important part of the group's activities. Members can hardly wait for the weekend to arrive, when they drive to 'Hosa-



The star-gazers with the telescopes.

halli', 20 kms off Doddabalapur, where it's possible to see the Milky Way with naked eyes.

"You don't find intrusions from lights in the place," says Amar Sharma, a passionate observer of the deep sky who had his own e-group before joining the BAS and forming a single city-based organisation for amateur astronomers.

The group is also working on mastering telescope making. So far, a few six-inch telescopes have been produced. Satya Kumar, a student of St Joseph College, is one of the active telescope makers: "Right from grinding the glass to polishing it, we do it by hand. Considering the fact that telescopes are expensive and we all need one to pursue our hobby, learning telescope making is the only way to do it."

Though working as a group, each member has his own pursuit in the sky. For beginners like Ravindra and Harshad, these are exciting early days.. Experienced observers like Amar, on the other hand, focus on tracking down comets.

Once settled down, the

group would like to conduct 'Sidewalk Astronomy' to encourage interest in the subject among Bangalorians. "We would like to take amateur astronomy into Bangalore's schools," Rakesh says. Though full of passion and ideas, the group falls short of resources.

"We need our own small space, where we can store the silicon carbide and other tools to make telescope. We would also use that space to have our own library and to conduct workshops. We don't expect charitable help, but if people are willing to give us the place we would pretty much build it by ourselves," Pavan says.

Right now, the group meets in Cubbon Park to share their star gazing experience and to discuss astronomy among themselves. All that they need is a place, where they can invite experts who can enlighten them with their knowledge and understanding of the space.

Catch up with BAS at: <http://basblog.wordpress.com/> Or e-mail them at: bangastro@gmail.com