

Volunteers the bright stars in Observatory firmament

by Dr James Biggs

WITH the onset of the cloudy, winter weather, CALM's Observatory volunteers can take a well-earned break from the night-tour program.

This financial year's night-tour attendance of 4,168 sets a record. Nearly 2,000 more people attended than in the previous record year 1994-95.

This was due partly to the extra effort of the full-time Observatory staff organising and conducting an increased number of tours, and partly to the help provided by the volunteers.

More than 150 expressions of interest were lodged in response to the Observatory's volunteer program advertisement in August, 1996.

From these, 22 people were chosen to train for the night-tour program. In this program, volunteers help the full-time staff in various tasks such as showing the public night sky objects through telescopes, answering queries and setting up the telescopes and equipment.

Not only has this benefited the public by increasing access to the Observatory, but it has provided the volunteers with a thoroughly enjoyable pastime. A typical volunteer response to the opportunity is "When can I do some more?"

Another intake of volunteers

is planned for September, 1997. The Observatory needs more volunteers for the night tour and astronomy field night programs, the developing historical records archiving project, and a new research assistants program.

Any reader who would like to take part should register his or her interest in writing, including a few details about themselves, to the Government Astronomer, Perth Observatory, Walnut Road, Bickley 6076, by September 26, 1997.

Buoyed by the success of its first volunteer program, the Observatory initiated another activity to help with its astronomy field nights.

This is similar to the night tours, except that telescopes are transported to the site of the group (usually schools) requesting the tour.

Recently, one of the volunteers started the Perth Observatory Volunteer Newsletter. Its purpose is to keep the volunteers informed of Observatory, full-time and volunteer staff activities, and provide relevant background information.

Initial feedback has been positive and reflects highly on all those concerned with its inception and production.



CALM's Observatory volunteers, (front, left to right) Trevor Dunn, Vic Levis, Phil McGuire (under telescope), Don Hartley, Jeanne Bell, Steve Ewing, John Richardson, Bevan Harris (checking Steve's watch), Lyn Andrews, Nikola Angus and Cathy Gazey. Above the telescope (left to right) Nick Wright, Kevin Hogan and Lyall Bell. They are assembled around the historic 12.5-inch Calver Telescope (purchased in 1910). This is one of the instruments volunteers have learned to use so they can help with the Observatory night tours. Photo by James Biggs