

SUCCESS: The asteroid, discovered in 2017, is named in honor of the Latvian astronomer



Asteroid "(658787) Alksnis = 2017 UM95" - the asteroid discovered on the night of October 19, 2017 at the Baldone Astrophysics Observatory was confirmed with that name in June of this year. The name was given in honor of Andrejs Alksnis, a researcher at the Baldone Astrophysics Observatory. The observations of the newly discovered asteroid were made by the leading researcher of the Institute of Astronomy of the University of Latvia (LU), Dr.Phys. Ilgmārs Eglītis, and coordinate measurements - Vilnius University's leading researcher of Theoretical Physics and Astronomy, Dr.Phys. Kazimieras Černis.

The volume and precision of the accumulated measurements of the positions of the asteroid discovered in 2017 is sufficient to number this one-kilometer small object of the main asteroid belt of the Solar System and give it a name based on the proposal of the discoverer. In June of this year, the name of the asteroid was approved by the Committee of the International Astronomical Union (SAS Executive Committee WG Small Bodies Nomenclature). A description of the name is published in the SAS edition of the WG Small Bodies Nomenclature Bulletin, Volume 4, Number 8.

The average distance of the newly discovered asteroid from the Sun is 3.09 AU, which is about 464 million kilometers, and it completes one revolution around the Sun in 5.44

years. At the time of discovery, the asteroid was located in the Perseus constellation and was a magnitude 21 object. Its rotation period around the axis, according to a rough estimate (the series of brightness measurements is still too small for more accurate calculations) is close to two hours, and from this point of view, the asteroid belongs to the fast-rotating ones.

The newly discovered asteroid is named in honor of Latvian astronomer Andrejs Alksnis (1928.07.15 - 2017.03.11), the long-time head of the Baldone Astrophysics Observatory department and his achievements.

Andrejs Alksnis was born in Valmiera, where he also graduated from Valmiera Gymnasium in 1947 as an external student. He was an all-round gifted young man who also practiced basketball and played clarinet in the school orchestra. A. Alksnis studied at LVU FMF astronomy specialty (1947-1951), 1951/1952. in the academic year, he continued his studies at the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of the Moscow State University, which he graduated in 1952, majoring in astronomy. His first and only place of work was the Astronomy sector and its later variations - the Astrophysics Laboratory, the Radio Astrophysics Observatory and the Institute of Astronomy of the University of Warsaw (1952-2009), where he rose through the career ladder from a junior research associate to a leading researcher. During his postgraduate studies, Alksnis was seconded to the Crimean Astrophysical Observatory (1954-1957). In 1961, A. Alksnis defended the candidate's thesis of physical-mathematical sciences "Determination of stellar magnitudes, color indices and spectral classes for faint stars and study of interstellar absorption in the Cepheus region". During his scientific work career, in addition to the research of carbon stars, he conducted the study of flaming stars (novae) in the Andromeda galaxy. He has personally discovered 54 new novae. A. Alksnis is the co-author of three monographs (Properties of carbon stars of the galaxy, 1983; Carbon stars in a field in Cygnus, 1988, General Catalog of Galactic Carbon Stars by C. B. Stephenson. Third Edition, 2001), more than 240 scientific publications and author of the book "Stars and Nebulae" (1961), author of articles in the magazine "Starry Sky" and member of the editorial board since the founding of the publication (1958 - 2017). Since 2002 - member of the editorial board of the scientific journal "Baltic Astronomy".

He led the comet observation work of the International Halley Watch (1984-1986) at the ZA Radioastrophysics Observatory, participated in the implementation of the international programs of the astrometric satellite HIPPARCOS (1982-1993) and the space apparatus ULYSSES (1993). Member of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) (1964), member of the European Astronomical Society (EAS) (1991), member of the Eurasian Astronomical Society (EAAS) (1990), and founding member of the Latvian Astronomical Society (1947). A. Alksnis was awarded the prizes of the Presidium of the ZA of the LPSR (1978 and 1986), the Medal of the Scientific Council of the ZA of the USSR (1987), the M. Keldišs Prize of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (LZA), the LZA honorary doctorate in astronomy (1999), the J. Ikaunieks medal of the Latvian Astronomical Society (2002), LZA Arturs Balklavs award for science promotion (2008).

On March 11, 2017, the family of Latvian researchers lost Andresj Alksnis, who knew astronomy so well and was able to explain it in a really good Latvian language.

Photo: LU publicity photo

Source: Ilgmārs Eglītis, University of Latvia