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K09 - More Than Stargazing: Astronomy Outreach as a Pathway to Dark Sky Advocacy

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For many people, the night sky begins with a simple act: looking up. Yet as communities develop and artificial light increases, opportunities to experience a truly dark sky are becoming increasingly rare.

This keynote shares the experience of the Philippine Astronomical Society, Inc. (PAS) in using astronomy outreach to build public appreciation for the night sky and encourage its protection. Through overnight stargazing camps in Tanay, Rizal, participants experience the night through telescopes, meteor watching, astrophotography, lectures, meteorite specimens, and exhibits. The sky itself becomes the classroom, allowing people to discover firsthand the value of dark skies.

Through its Celestial Nights activities with Masungi Georeserve, PAS also connects geotourism and astrotourism with a broader conversation about light pollution and its implications for wildlife, fragile ecosystems, and communities, particularly as development expands in Rizal. The experience of PAS demonstrates that dark-sky advocacy can begin with wonder. When people are given the opportunity to experience a star-filled sky, understand what makes it possible, and recognize what threatens it, astronomy can become more than a way of understanding the universe—it can become a pathway to environmental stewardship.

Preserving the night sky is therefore not only about protecting our view of the stars. It is about recognizing dark skies as part of our natural environment and encouraging communities, organizations, and decision-makers to consider the impacts of artificial light

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