

Results of the IMO Video Meteor Network – March 2014

Sirko Molau, Abenstalstr. 13b, 84072 Seysdorf

2014/06/17

March 2014 was another record-breaking month. The lucky streak of the observers in northern Europe, which enjoyed unusually good weather in the previous months, continued. At the same time, also the observers in southern and eastern Europe finally experienced better observing conditions after a long lean period. In total, 58 out of 80 cameras, i.e. more than 70%, managed to observe in twenty or more nights. In three nights (March 12/13, 13/14 and 28/29) an amazing 72 cameras were active at the same time, which is another splendid result.

In the history of the IMO network there were just two months (October 2011 and August 2012) where we collected more than 10,000 hours of effective observing time. Thanks to the combination of perfect weather and still relatively long nights in March, we collected almost 12,000 hours this time, which set new standards. On the other hand, the typical “spring minimum” of meteor activity was particularly strong this year – 1.7 meteors per hour was the lowest average yield since 2005. Hence, when it comes to the sheer meteor number the month could obviously not compete with August or October, but never before were recorded more than 20,000 meteors in March.

After the two image-intensified cameras AKM I and II of the “Arbeitskreis Meteore” broke down recently, the German meteor observer society purchased another camera. This time we decided for a Mintron 12V6-EX without image intensifier, and a Panasonic 6 mm f/0.75 c-mount lens. This camera is operated by 18-years old Kevin Förster of Thuringia, who became the youngest video observer in Germany and maybe even of the whole IMO network. We wish him that his interest in astronomy will last for a long time.

Since March lacks interesting meteor showers, too, we will have a closer look at the video equipment this time. About a month ago, Sirko Molau met “veteran” lunar occultation observer Eberhard Bredner at a meeting of the German “Vereinigung der Sternfreunde” society, and by chance we came to a discussion about video cameras. The requirement of occultation watchers are partly comparable to ours, because occultation events are often faint and of short duration just like meteors. I was surprised to learn, that the occultists neither prefer the Mintron 12V6-EX nor the Watec 902H2 Ultimate, but rather another camera that I did not even heard of before: the Watec 910HX-RC

This camera is almost twice as expensive and offers also frame integration, which the Watec 902 does not have – but that’s something you hardly gain from in meteor observation with the fast moving targets. Still my curiosity was created.

Thanks to the mediation of Bernd Gährken, Nimax GmbH (astroshop.de) was so kind and provided me with two cameras for testing, so that I could compare the Mintron and the Watec side-by-side under real observing conditions. I used a 6 mm f/0.75 Panasonic lens which is frequently used among meteor observers. Both cameras were set to 2x sense up (integration time 1/25s) which is the default setting for MetRec. The gain was turned to maximum (Watec: AGC high; Mintron: maximum manual gain) and the gamma value was set to 0.45 to enhance dark objects.

Skies in June are not perfectly dark, but visually I obtained a limiting magnitude of almost 6 mag in zenith. Already the first look at the monitor revealed significant differences. The video image of the Watec was much more noisy – in particular the vertical structures are disturbing – but many more stars could be spotted. In comparison, the Mintron has almost a noise-free image even at the highest gain level, but only fewer stars were visible (Figure 1). The night sky was recorded with both cameras about 15 minutes for later analysis. The two meteor cameras AVIS2 and MINCAM1 which were active in parallel detected only a minor change in limiting magnitude of about 0.1 mag, so that the observing conditions must have been almost constant.

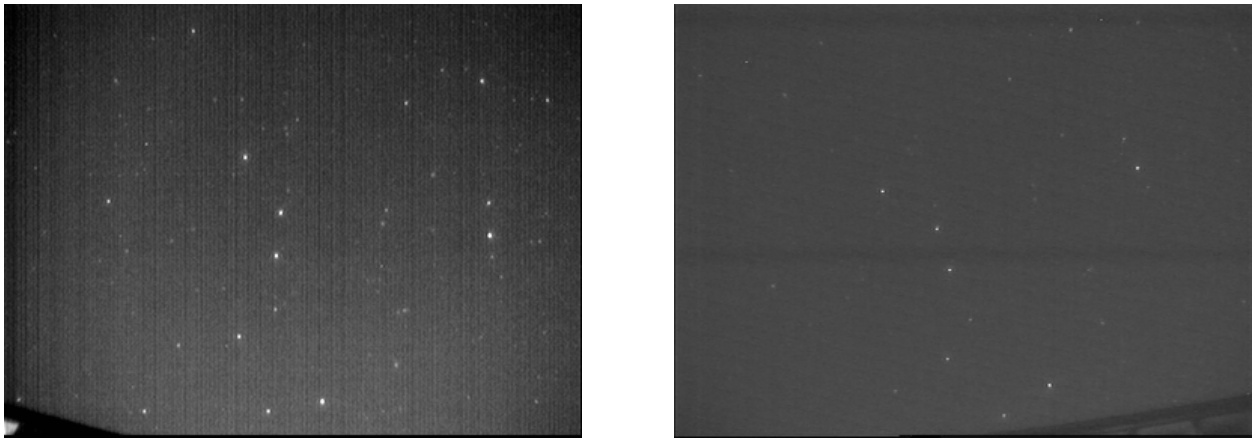


Figure 1: Reference image of the Watec 910HX-RC (left) and the Mintron 12V6-EX cameras (right), averaged over 64 video frames.

During the measurement of the reference image, 76 stars of the Watec image could be used, but only 46 stars of the Mintron. Now the question was: Would the noise of the Watec camera increase in the same manner as the object brightness and thereby kill the gain in limiting magnitude?

The faintest visible star in the field of view is no good indicator for the limiting magnitude, since it heavily depends on individual factors like the spectral class of a star. For this reason, MetRec uses similar to visual meteor observers a more robust procedure to determine the limiting magnitude. At first, all stars in the (slightly averaged) video image are segmented and identified. Based on a star catalog it is then determined, how many stars up to a given magnitude are located inside the field of view. A comparison with the measured star count yields the limiting magnitude. This way, individual stars with exotic spectral classes, double or variable stars have almost no impact anymore.

The operation area of both cameras differs significantly (the noise level of the Watec camera was about 24 brightness levels compared to only 6 for the Mintron), but the software will automatically adapt to that. For the Watec camera about 100 stars could be identified, which yielded a limiting magnitude of 5.5 mag. At the same time, only about 70 stars were found in the Mintron recording, which yielded 5.1 mag. So if you push the Watec 910HX-RC to the limits, it is indeed almost half a magnitude more sensitive than the Mintron 12V6-EX.

By chance, the Watec recorded also a faint meteor in the short interval, and that made me a little thoughtful since it was not well-defined but appeared a little fuzzy and unfocussed. So is the Watec camera in fact cheating by integrating over more than two frames in a sliding fashion? To be sure I conducted a few experiments with an “artificial meteor“ (laser pointer) which did not harden my suspicion. It seems that only by chance I recorded one of those rare meteors which slowly desintegrate in full view of the observer.

What other differences are there between the Mintron and Watec camera?

- The housing of the Mintron is compact, but the Watec is really tiny. You can hardly build the camera any smaller.
- Both cameras offer frame integration, which is only of limited help for meteor observers but interesting for other astronomical purposes.
- Both cameras are configured via OSD (on-screen display) with five push-buttons. The buttons of the Mintron are directly integrated in the back of the housing, whereas the rc edition of the Watec comes with a small remote control connected via cable. That’s very comfortable for the initial configuration of the camera, but a meteor observer will do the settings only once and never touch them again, which relativizes this advantage.
- Whereas the Mintron has only two setting for gamma correction (0.45 and 1.0), you can set the gamma of the Watec in steps of 0.05 and select also smaller values than 0.45. Additionally you can adjust the contrast linearly by setting the minimum and maximum

brightness value. Whether that can be used to further push the sensitivity could not be tested on short notice.

- Both cameras showed a few hot pixels, which you are not happy about when buying a new camera. These pixels were more obvious in case of the Mintron because of the lower noise level.
- If you switch off the AGC (automatic gain control), you can adjust the gain of the Mintron manually. The Watec, on the other hand, offers three AGC levels (low, medium and high) but you cannot set the gain level manually if you switch off AGC.

There are further differences between both cameras, but they are not really relevant to amateur astronomers.

Overall we can conclude that the Mintron costs significantly less than the Watec and yields more “aesthetic” pictures, but that comes at the cost of almost half a magnitude. It should also be noted that I was told that the latest edition of the Watec with serial numbers beyond 1000 is even more sensitive. Both cameras are well suited for meteor observation and in the end the observer has to decide which camera he prefers.

1. Observers

Code	Name	Place	Camera	FOV [$^{\circ}$]	St.LM [mag]	Eff.CA [km ²]	Nights	Time [h]	Meteors	
ARLRA	Arlt	Ludwigsfelde/DE	LUDWIG2 (0.8/8)	1534	5.8	2467	26	185.7	318	
BERER	Berkó	Ludanyhalaszi/HU	HULUD1 (0.8/3.8)	5542	4.8	3847	12	100.5	285	
			HULUD3 (0.95/4)	4357	3.8	876	4	31.4	23	
BOMMA	Bombardini	Faenza/IT	MARIO (1.2/4.0)	5794	3.3	739	23	119.0	303	
BREMA	Breukers	Hengelo/NL	MBB3 (0.75/6)	2399	4.2	699	24	200.1	173	
			MBB4 (0.8/8)	1470	5.1	1208	22	158.5	131	
BRIBE	Klemt	Herne/DE	HERMINE (0.8/6)	2374	4.2	678	28	181.7	254	
		Berg. Gladbach/DE	KLEMOI (0.8/6)	2286	4.6	1080	25	196.2	242	
CASFL	Castellani	Monte Baldo/IT	BMH1 (0.8/6)	2350	5.0	1611	24	217.7	419	
			BMH2 (1.5/4.5)*	4243	3.0	371	25	210.3	294	
CRIST	Crivello	Valbrevenna/IT	BILBO (0.8/3.8)	5458	4.2	1772	27	147.9	316	
			C3P8 (0.8/3.8)	5455	4.2	1586	24	164.7	171	
			STG38 (0.8/3.8)	5614	4.4	2007	24	182.5	372	
DONJE	Donati	Faenza/IT	JENNI (1.2/4)	5886	3.9	1222	25	180.3	418	
ELTMA	Eltri	Venezia/IT	MET38 (0.8/3.8)	5631	4.3	2151	22	118.4	187	
FORKE	Förster	Carlsfeld/DE	AKM3 (0.75/6)	2375	5.1	2154	3	22.4	35	
GANKA	Gansel	Dingden/DE	DAROO1 (1.4/3.6)	7141	3.1	652	20	129.4	174	
GONRU	Goncalves	Tomar/PT	TEMPLAR1 (0.8/6)	2179	5.3	1842	23	192.8	346	
			TEMPLAR2 (0.8/6)	2080	5.0	1508	23	198.1	321	
			TEMPLAR3 (0.8/8)	1438	4.3	571	26	196.4	168	
			TEMPLAR4 (0.8/3.8)	4475	3.0	442	21	177.4	237	
			TEMPLAR5 (0.75/6)	2312	5.0	2259	26	185.9	243	
GOVMI	Govedic	Sredisce ob Dr./SI	ORION2 (0.8/8)	1447	5.5	1841	25	182.1	267	
			ORION3 (0.95/5)	2665	4.9	2069	12	74.0	90	
			ORION4 (0.95/5)	2662	4.3	1043	23	53.8	143	
			SALSA3 (1.2/4)*	2198	4.6	894	29	287.1	346	
HERCA	Hergenrother	Tucson/US	HUBAJ (0.8/3.8)	5552	2.8	403	13	90.0	88	
			Debrecen/HU	HUDEB (0.8/3.8)	5522	3.2	620	26	207.9	206
			Hodmezovasar./HU	HUHOD (0.8/3.8)	5502	3.4	764	26	168.1	163
IGAAN	Igaz	Budapest/HU	HUPOL (1.2/4)	3790	3.3	475	21	58.7	55	
			Budapest/HU	HUSOR (0.95/4)	2286	3.9	445	25	149.1	164
JONKA	Jonas	Kamnik/SI	CVETKA (0.8/3.8)	4914	4.3	1842	21	147.6	420	
KACJA	Kac	Kostanjevec/SI	METKA (0.8/12)*	715	6.4	640	8	70.8	157	
			Ljubljana/SI	ORION1 (0.8/8)	1402	3.8	331	15	69.0	47
			Kamnik/SI	REZIKA (0.8/6)	2270	4.4	840	18	131.3	419
			Steffka (0.8/3.8)	5471	2.8	379	20	156.0	279	
KISSZ	Kiss	Sulyasap/HU	HUSUL (0.95/5)*	4295	3.0	355	22	134.1	62	
KOSDE	Koschny	Izana Obs./ES	ICC7 (0.85/25)*	714	5.9	1464	20	143.7	820	
			La Palma / ES	ICC9 (0.85/25)*	683	6.7	2951	25	165.5	954
			Noordwijkerhout/NL	LIC4 (1.4/50)*	2027	6.0	4509	16	118.1	195
LOJTO	Łojek	Grabniak/PL	PAV57 (1.0/5)	1631	3.5	269	18	132.2	100	
MACMA	Maciejewski	Chelm/PL	PAV35 (0.8/3.8)	5495	4.0	1584	19	135.6	268	
			PAV36 (0.8/3.8)*	5668	4.0	1573	20	158.1	300	
			PAV43 (0.75/4.5)*	3132	3.1	319	19	115.3	74	
			PAV60 (0.75/4.5)	2250	3.1	281	20	125.0	202	
			NOWATEC (0.8/3.8)	5574	3.6	773	16	90.4	221	
MASMI	Maslov	Novosibirsk/RU	AVIS2 (1.4/50)*	1230	6.9	6152	20	163.3	777	
MOLSI	Molau	Seysdorf/DE	MINCAM1 (0.8/8)	1477	4.9	1084	27	222.3	344	
			REMO1 (0.8/8)	1467	6.5	5491	27	186.8	586	
			REMO2 (0.8/8)	1478	6.4	4778	25	198.6	471	
			REMO3 (0.8/8)	1420	5.6	1967	12	85.2	46	
			REMO4 (0.8/8)	1478	6.5	5358	27	200.0	515	
			HUFUL (1.4/5)	2522	3.5	532	26	221.4	157	
MORJO	Morvai	Fülöpszallas/HU	ROVER (1.4/4.5)	3896	4.2	1292	26	164.7	257	
MOSFA	Moschini	Rovereto/IT	ALBIANO (1.2/4.5)	2944	3.5	358	19	93.8	141	
OCHPA	Ochner	Albiano/IT	ORIE1 (1.4/5.7)	3837	3.8	460	19	113.3	187	
OTIMI	Otte	Pearl City/US	HUBEC (0.8/3.8)*	5498	2.9	460	26	183.8	278	
PERZS	Perkó	Becsehely/HU	MOBCAM1 (0.75/6)	2398	5.3	2976	21	152.0	201	
PUCRC	Pucer	Nova vas nad Dra./SI	ARMEFA (0.8/6)	2366	4.5	911	17	139.6	140	
ROTEC	Rothenberg	Berlin/DE	RO1 (0.75/6)	2362	3.7	381	24	181.3	192	
SARAN	Saraiva	Carnaxide/PT	RO2 (0.75/6)	2381	3.8	459	24	184.3	198	
			RO3 (0.8/12)	710	5.2	619	23	184.4	249	
			SOFIA (0.8/12)	738	5.3	907	24	194.4	154	
			LEO (1.2/4.5)*	4152	4.5	2052	4	25.3	24	
SCALE	Scarpa	Alberoni/IT	DORAEMON (0.8/3.8)	4900	3.0	409	27	186.5	328	
SCHHA	Schremmer	Niederkrüchten/DE	KAYAK1 (1.8/28)	563	6.2	1294	13	75.0	44	
SLAST	Slavec	Ljubljana/SI	MIN38 (0.8/3.8)	5566	4.8	3270	25	132.1	394	
STOEN	Stomeo	Scorze/IT	NOA38 (0.8/3.8)	5609	4.2	1911	27	159.7	353	
			SCO38 (0.8/3.8)	5598	4.8	3306	28	176.4	486	
			MINCAM2 (0.8/6)	2354	5.4	2751	25	196.6	344	
			MINCAM3 (0.8/6)	2338	5.5	3590	23	192.2	270	
			MINCAM4 (1.0/2.6)	9791	2.7	552	20	137.5	168	
STRJO	Strunk	Herford/DE	MINCAM5 (0.8/6)	2349	5.0	1896	24	185.7	266	
			MINCAM6 (0.8/6)	2395	5.1	2178	27	190.6	256	
			HUAGO (0.75/4.5)	2427	4.4	1036	26	205.2	194	
			HUMOB (0.8/6)	2388	4.8	1607	24	169.6	290	
TEPIS	Tepliczky	Agostyan/HU	SRAKA (0.8/6)*	2222	4.0	546	17	52.8	148	
TRIMI	Triglav	Velenje/SI	FINEXCAM (0.8/6)	2337	5.5	3574	23	140.8	196	
YRJIL	Yrjölä	Kuusankoski/FI	HUVCSE03 (1.0/4.5)	2224	4.4	933	13	31.6	65	
ZELZO	Zelko	Budapest/HU	HUVCSE04 (1.0/4.5)	1484	4.4	573	10	29.0	58	
Sum							31	11816.6	20247	

* active field of view smaller than video frame

