

Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena (UAP) Observations 2009 Reporting Scheme

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* This work is undertaken as personal work; it has not been endorsed as a research activity by ESA

Subject area

Astronomy attempts to answer some of life's fundamental questions. This scientific discipline is synonymous with adventures, discoveries, mysteries, imagination and dreams. For millennia we have been seeking to understand our place in, our role in, and the nature of the universe to which we belong. Gazing up at the night sky is breathtaking, an unalterable source of deep interrogation, a subtle mix of fear and unstoppable need for expanding our knowledge of our origin and destiny. One of the most fundamental motivations for exploring the universe surrounding us has always been, and remains today, a search for answering an age-old question of humanity: "Is anyone out there?" The idea of extraterrestrial life has captivated the imagination of people across the world since time immemorial and has energized the unmanned exploration of our solar system.

Oddly enough survey polls regularly indicate not only a widespread belief in the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life in the universe, but also and more intriguingly that some of it is already visiting us. Over the last 60 years the UAP (Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena) subject (popularly known as UFOs) has generated intense interest and invaded the modern consciousness on a worldwide basis. Despite the fact that the majority of sightings can be attributed to the misidentification of natural or man-made objects, a small residue of cases seems to remain unexplained and the debate over and fascination for the extraterrestrial hypothesis regularly resurfaces among the public. The need for legitimacy of the UAP topic has been stressed several times during the last two years when various countries (France, England, Denmark, Italy and Canada) have started officially opening their governmental files to the public, and therefore to the scientific community.

Astronomers and UAP

As stated by Astronomer F. Roach, the UAP phenomenon involves astronomers because it is mostly seen at night in the sky, a domain that astronomers have long considered as their field. It has often been claimed that astronomers never observe UAP and that for this reason such phenomenon cannot possibly exist. This was proven false in 1976, when over two thousand questionnaires were mailed by P.A. Sturrock, Professor of Space Science and Astrophysics at the Stanford University, to members of the American Astronomical Society, enquiring if they had witnessed any event which they could not have identified and which could have been related to the UAP phenomenon. A small but

significant number (around 5% of the 1350 questionnaires returned) replied affirmatively. As the bulk of the UAP information is essentially narrative, originating from witnesses who have no scientific training or knowledge of astronomy, and mostly describing sightings occurring at night, it appears of paramount importance to collect testimonies from members of the population that are trained observers. It is only through this process that progress towards a better knowledge of rare, transient atmospheric phenomenon can be envisaged. This approach has recently been stressed in France, when the French Space Agency (CNES) decided to make available on the website of its specialised unit's GEIPAN (UAP research and information group) website a specific questionnaire aimed at collecting UAP observations from astronomers. Even if no exogenous intelligence is responsible for UAP sightings, there is always an opportunity for science to discover new natural phenomena. The historical example of the red sprites should be kept in mind. The first images of these spurts of energy were made by accident in 1989. Before that, pilots had reported seeing mysterious red flashes above thunderstorms, but their claims were not always taken seriously.

The Internal Year of Astronomy (IAY2009) event represents a unique opportunity, on a worldwide scale and of a significant duration, of firstly potentially collecting rigorous UAP testimonies and instrumented data from the astronomical community; and secondly for facilitating the communication of such reports without any a priori bias.

The fact that the author has received support letters from different parties (international organisations, institute, university) gives confirmation that the nature of the proposal, although related to a controversial topic, can be fascinating and stimulating for the general public, enthusing the young (and not so young) people and prompting them to start looking upwards and outwards to make sense of their place in the universe.

Objectives:

The proposed UAP Observations 2009 Reporting Scheme is a proposed special project to be labelled in the context of the IYA2009, and which shall be initiated before the Galilean nights Cornerstone project. The objectives of the UAP Observations 2009 Reporting Scheme are the following:

1- To enable the reporting of UAP sightings through a simple questionnaire, to be downloaded from a single

dedicated web page. This report form will also be circulated within the IYA2009 network in order to reach the maximum amount of potential observers.

2- To facilitate the collection of such reports that would have otherwise little chance to surface. As a matter of fact, opening a dedicated webpage linked to the IYA 2009 will certainly encourage witnesses to come forward with eventual testimonies. Making such a project visible within the IYA 2009 will greatly reduce individuals' reluctance of reporting a UAP sighting, reluctance based either on the assumption that no one will believe them, the fear of ridicule, or that nothing will be done with such reports.

3- To tentatively obtain instrumental and photographic records of unidentified phenomenon. As many IYA 2009 observers will be equipped with technical equipments (e.g. telescopes, video-cameras, cameras with spectrographs), a much bigger chance exists of obtaining supplementary data and not only narrative.

4- To permit the subsequent analysis of the most potentially important UAP reports, the ones exhibiting some high levels of strangeness aspects and of witnesses' credibility.

5- To facilitate the creation of new networks. In the event of an unexpectedly high level of returned questionnaires or the existence of significant qualitative UAP reports, it is envisaged to develop new partnerships and cooperation with scientists, organisations and agencies that are either interested in the topic or currently involved in collecting information on UAP sightings.