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Pre-Perihelion Monitoring of Rosetta Target Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko

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ESA's Planetary Cornerstone Mission Rosetta is on its way to rendezvous with comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko in order to accompany the comet, in orbit around the nucleus, while moving into the inner solar system. In 2008 the target comet has been approaching its perihelion (passage: 28 Feb. 2009) for the last time before the encounter in 2014, moving along that part of its pre-perihelion orbit, that will be first covered by the Rosetta mission. We therefore regularly monitored the evolution of the comet in terms of gas and dust activity as well as coma morphology to obtain these characteristics as a function of decreasing heliocentric distance. 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko was observed with the FORS1 instrument on the ESO VLT2 (Kueyen) telescope. Broad-band filter images and low-resolution spectrophotometric measurements were obtained between 29 May 2008 and 16 September 2008 at heliocentric distances of about 2.99 AU, 2.75 AU, 2.48 AU, and 2.22 AU. We present the first results of this monitoring campaign.