



Towards a better understanding of unusual atmospheric events: the Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena (UAP) Observations Reporting Scheme.

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For many years very little attention and credence was given by the scientific community to airline pilots' sightings of strange luminous glows above thunderstorms. It was only in 1989 that some university researchers accidentally took a video of luminous events that provided the first documented evidence. These phenomena, now called "Sprites" and "Blue Jets", were revealed to be large-scale electrical discharges that occur high above thunderstorm clouds.

Today, the mysteries of the sky continue to awe many novice observers viewing something entirely unfamiliar for the first time. Throughout the last 60 years the subject of UAP (popularly known as UFOs) has generated intense interest and invaded the modern consciousness on a worldwide scale. Despite the lack of incontrovertible scientific evidence and the tendency to classify the topic as "pseudo-science", there is a need to keep an attitude of humility and scientific open-mindedness since some UAP reports might still represent events worthy of research. Rare atmospheric events, near-earth space phenomena, unexpected consequences of human activity (space debris, electromagnetic signals, and pollution) or interactions among these may be revealed by further study. The continuous analysis of unexplained atmospheric events or unusual aerial perceptions could lead to a deeper understanding of our planet and possibly other benefits, for example safer air travel.

Launched under the framework of the International Year of Astronomy 2009, the Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena (UAP) Observations Reporting Scheme aims to approach the UAP from a professional, rational and scientific perspective. Its objectives are to: 1) provide amateur and professional astronomers with a formal mechanism (a questionnaire) for reporting any unexplained phenomena they observe when studying the sky, and 2) contribute towards a better understanding of transient atmospheric phenomena by explaining the most common causes of UAP misidentifications for the general public. All of this is available on one easily accessed Website (1).

This presentation will focus on providing an overview of the project and its current status, highlighting preliminary results in terms of questionnaires received, infrastructure, outreach activities, website traffic reports, while exploring ideas for the future and requesting feedback from the geosciences experts.

More importantly and besides further advertising the project, the 2011 European Geosciences Union's General Assembly represents an excellent opportunity for initiating an open communication channel between the geoscientist community, interested amateur observers, instrumentalists and UAP researchers. Ultimately, whenever there are unexplained observations, there is the possibility that scientists could learn something new with further study.

(*): Disclaimer: Work undertaken as personal work; not endorsed as research activity by ESA.

(1) <http://www.uapreporting.org/>