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Stimulating Interest in Natural Sciences and Training Observation Skills: The UAP Observations Reporting Scheme

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For a number of reasons the general public and many young people are fascinated by the ideas of UFOs and extra-terrestrial life. As mysteries motivate to gain interest and knowledge, an opportunity exists, throughout these topics, to stimulate the people's interests to natural sciences and technology. A major problem however exists, concerning the fact that the general public generally associates any strange aerial sighting to something exotic, unknown, and to the possibility of extraterrestrial visitations. Rumours, irrational thinking and conspiracy theories prevail around these topics.

Launched under the framework of the 2009 International Year of Astronomy, the Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena (UAP) Observations Reporting Scheme seeks to tackle this situation through approaching the topic from a professional and rational perspective, providing an opportunity to teach the public how to think more critically, demystifying UFO events, and ultimately attempting to stimulate the interest in natural sciences and technological disciplines.

This is tentatively attempted through the following resources:

Firstly, the project's website (1) provides an extensive resource for inquiry-based learning regarding the various natural or man-made phenomena that often give rise to false UAP sightings. It serves as a general forum for educating the public about human, atmospheric and astrophysical phenomena that could be observed in the sky.

Secondly, the basic educational information provided on the web site allows potential UAP witnesses to critically evaluate the potential cause of their sightings. Visual descriptions, photos, video clips, tools, and links to relevant websites are provided for each category of phenomena, in order to assist the observer in his self-analysis. Amateur astronomers and societies who receive questions about UFOs can redirect queries to the website.

Thirdly, the website provides novice observers viewing tips (e.g. elevation, azimuth, angular size) about how to record as accurately as possible a UAP event, in order to facilitate future identification and study.

Lastly, one of the project's objectives is also to collect reports of trained observers (astronomers) of apparently inexplicable events for further analysis. Certainly, whenever there are unexplained observations there is the possibility that scientists could learn something new by studying these events.

During this presentation, we will provide an overview of the project, present the website's extensive and well illustrated list of misidentifications, describe how people can further check details, develop their knowledge (e.g. satellite paths, stars/planets charts, characteristics of meteors, pictures of sprites, clouds classification) and enhance their observation skills. In order to show the relevance of the project, a short illustrated list of UAP cases received by the project will be featured, both explained and inexplicable. Finally, we will explore potential plans for strengthening the visibility and usefulness of the project, while requesting feedback from the community of atmospheric and natural sciences' researchers.

(1) www.uapreporting.org

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