



The UAP Observations Reporting Scheme, an Invaluable Tool for Collecting Data on Unusual Observations in the Atmosphere and Demystifying UFOs Events

P. Ailleris (*), Professional address: ESA/ESTEC, AG Noordwijk, Netherlands (Philippe.Ailleris@esa.int)

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

Abstract

Astronomy stirs the public imagination and the human spirit. This scientific discipline is synonymous with adventure, discovery, mystery and is driven by human curiosity. What do people think of when they gaze up to a star-lit night sky? Certainly amongst their thoughts will be a question as to whether or not anybody or anything is out there. The search for extraterrestrial life represents one of the most important scientific questions of our times, and nowadays constitutes a strategic cornerstone in the space agencies engaged in the exploration of our solar system and the universe.

Although the probability of discovering micro-organisms on other planets is increasing, the prospect of making contact with intelligent extraterrestrial beings remains distant. However, such an event can not be excluded; it may happen unexpectedly and under as yet unforeseen circumstances, but it remains within the realm of possibility. Oddly enough, opinion polls regularly reflect that a large part of the public considers such an event as very probable, or that it has taken place already. Over the last 60 years the Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena (UAP, popularly known as UFOs) subject has generated intense interest and invaded the modern consciousness on a worldwide basis.

Despite the lack of incontrovertible scientific evidence and the fact that the majority of sightings can be attributed to the misidentification of natural phenomena, it can be argued that the topic provides unacknowledged support for space exploration missions and exobiology, as well as psychologically preparing the public for encountering extraterrestrial life. Furthermore the UAP topic emphasizes societal issues related to the needs of scientific engagement, communication and transparency. There is indeed a need to keep an attitude of humility and scientific open-mindedness since some UAP reports might still represent events worthy of research and also as this would constitute a welcome signal to the public that

science doesn't systematically dismiss topics the public finds intriguing.

Launched under the framework of the International Year of Astronomy 2009, the Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena 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 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.

The UAP Observations Reporting Scheme provides an extensive resource for inquiry-based learning and for UAP witnesses to critically evaluate the potential cause of their sightings. Descriptions, photos and videos, tools and links to websites are provided to assist the observer. By relying on the innate fascination that the UAP topic invokes, an opportunity therefore exists to expose the general public and its young people to science and technology, and stimulate their curiosity. Ultimately it also fulfils a need in relation to demystifying UFO events, dispelling the public's superstitions and misconceptions and teaching the public how to think more critically.

This presentation will focus on providing an overview of the project and its current status, highlighting the latest results, infrastructure, outreach activities (e.g. partnerships with "Astronomers Without Borders", "The World At Night"), while exploring ideas for the future and requesting feedback from the community of planetary scientists.