

## IYA2009 and Planetary science education at *Observatoire de Paris*

**B. Bourdon** (1), S. Thiéry (1) (1) Communication service, Observatoire de Paris, France  
(Brigitte.bourdon@obspm.fr)

### Abstract

Besides being an institution of higher education and research aimed at advancing our knowledge of the Universe, the *Observatoire de Paris* also promotes public outreach as part of its mission. So, it is natural for our institution, at the instigation of its president, to join in the celebration of the International Year of Astronomy (IYA 09) with all its available resources, expertise, and know-how.

Researchers, teachers, technical and administrative staff will participate in the numerous projects on the rich and varied program put together by the *Observatoire de Paris*.

Over the last five years, the *Observatoire de Paris* diffusion of scientific and technical knowledge actions put our institution ready to face, with relative serenity, outreach actions wanted by International Year of Astronomy on the motto: "The Universe, Yours to Discover" translated in French "*L'astronomie pour tous*".

A reorganization of the Communications team has been done with the will to "rejuvenate" our visitors. For this purpose, a "scientific mediation" service has been created in 2007, and the interaction between communication and education-training divisions has been strengthened. In 2004, 88% of the visitors were over 60 years. Today, 85% of them are less than 20 years old, in our Paris and Meudon campus...

In the specific context of diffusion of knowledge, especially on planetology, various actions were born from 2004 supported by scientific events, and a clear fascination of

audiences - especially the youngest among them, for the Solar System and its beautiful planets.

We will discuss here some aspects of IYA activities developed in this field by our institution. Note that the Communication Department is the "spearhead" of these projects through its expertise in terms of organizing, press relations, writing, graphic arts, scientific mediation... All aspects of the distribution chain are present in terms of expertise within the team. This autonomy has allowed a strong interaction with our researchers for whom we can express the desires drive or accompany the projects...

- Travelling exhibitions and educational posters
- Public's night observations
- Animations at regional or national area
- Support publications

### Travelling exhibitions and educational posters

In November 2004, under the leadership of Pierre Drossart, Marcello Fulchignoni and Alain Sémary, the *Observatoire de Paris* opened a public exhibition over an area of 300 m<sup>2</sup>: "Beyond the Earth, Europe explores the Solar System." The exhibition broke with the type of exposure proposed to the public for several years, which indeed focused on major institution's historical figures: Foucault, Arago... Initiated by the Communications team, a light exposure from this large exhibition has been created. This first

travelling exhibition received a lot of success in school institutions.

The success of this initiative, supported by ESA and CNES, led the Department of Communication to build a series of exhibitions on various astronomy themes. The most requested relate the exoplanets discovery ("Corot, One mission, Many Scientific Disciplines") and the Solar System ("The Solar System", exposure declined for two age groups). There are all available on tarpaulin and can be downloaded on the *Observatoire de Paris* website: [www.obspm.fr](http://www.obspm.fr). Animations tools have been added to these exhibitions through the collaboration of our Education and Training division (movies, games, kits, models, etc.). Six exhibitions are now available in this device, plus educational posters created for 2009 and available online...

These exhibits are very requested in connection with the IYA in France, but not only. The Embassy of France and the CNRS delegation have translated the Solar System exhibition into Chinese. It will travel in China this summer for the solar eclipse announced...

#### **Public's night observations**

In April 2005, the *Observatoire de Paris* has launched nocturnal visits on its Paris and Meudon sites for the public eager to "see" the celestial objects from our "historical" instruments. Each spring, the institution offers five nights on prior registration, and receives more than 2 000 people around the night observations. This experience has enabled the *Observatoire de Paris* to offer many entertainment nightly observations under the IYA: "100 hours of astronomy" at Meudon, the "Rally of the 100 hours" in Paris, The "Nuits de l'Observatoire de Paris" (with RV given every Friday evening from April 3 to 23 October), the "Rencontres Astronomiques de Meudon" (a one "star party" night in May), "Feast of the Sun" in June, "Galilean Nights" scheduled for October... These observations are accompanied by lectures and presentations

on topics dealing with scientific actualities to scientific instrumentation, all given by researchers from our institution.

#### **Animations at regional or national area**

Having developed animation tools consistent and appreciated by the public, the *Observatoire de Paris* accompanied by his presence various regional or national operations organized around the IYA: Forum "Faites de la Science" in Orsay, "Salon des Jeux mathématiques", "Heritage Days", "Researchers Night"...

#### **Support publications**

Since 2004, the *Observatoire de Paris* has made a great effort in publishing: creation of quarterly French/English "*Observatoire de Paris: The Magazine*", booklets overview of the institution, booklets about a particular field as Doctoral School or diffusion of teaching astronomy resources, etc.

This editorial policy is accompanied by a strong promotion of publications in the form of monographs written by our researchers. A particular effort is led in 2009 by the Communications team for publications aimed at young audiences or specific audiences, such as an encyclopaedic astronomy dictionary in French sign language (LSF).