



**T**o celebrate various astronomical anniversaries such as the first observations made through a telescope 400 years ago, and the fortieth anniversary of the first manned mission to the Moon, as well as promoting and teaching astronomy to a worldwide audience, 2009 has been heralded as the official International Year of Astronomy (IYA).

The theme for the IYA is 'The Universe, yours to discover'. Events will be taking place on a global, national and indeed local scale, and we are asking you to get your societies involved in the excitement and participate with your own activities. Getting the grassroots involved is really important: local activities can

# What will you be d

The International Astronomical Union is launching the International Year of Astronomy in 2009. With events taking place all over the country and indeed all over the world, **Keith Cooper** asks what will your society be doing in 2009?

present astronomy to the public on an almost one-to-one, personal level that national or global events can't really do. Furthermore, a successful 2009 could help swell the ranks of amateur astronomy societies and get your society more well-known and respected amongst the local community. If you are a society applying for funding, perhaps from the Lottery, in order to build a new observatory or buy a new telescope then one of the conditions is that you have to show how you will use it to the benefit of the general public. So why not take advantage of the IYA to apply for that grant to get that special piece of equipment and increase your activities with schools, scout groups, community centres or the general public at large?

## Global events

So, what is happening during 2009? Well, there are a number of global 'cornerstone' projects that each country will be participating in, to some extent. Among these global activities, those that may be of interest to an astronomical society include:

- 24 hours of astronomy – a round the clock, round the globe extravaganza, with webcasts, observing events and live video feeds to activities all around the world. One of the key aims is to get as many people as possible to look through a telescope and see what Galileo saw four centuries

ago – Jupiter and its four Galilean moons. Why not have your society take part in this global event and show people who have never looked through a telescope before the amazing moons of Jupiter?

- Telescope amnesty – this will invite people to bring their little-used telescopes to IYA events where astronomers, amateur or professional, can teach them how to get the most out of their equipment. How many people in your town or city have a telescope in the attic or in the garage gathering dust? Invite them to one of your society's open days and unleash the power of their telescope!

- Portal to the Universe – this will be a multimedia resource collecting news, pictures, webcasts, videos, and outreach information that will be added to on a daily basis by astronomers all over the world. If you are researching a talk that you are going to give to your society, or at a school or the scouts or wherever, this will be the place to go to find your information. It will also include a comprehensive directory of observatories, institutions and astronomy societies that can be accessed from anywhere via the Internet.

- Dark skies awareness – a programme to highlight the problem of light pollution, with star counts conducted by the public, star parties, the promotion of



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# doing in 2009?

new lighting technologies and education about the night sky. We all know how much light pollution affects astronomy in the UK, so why not have your society hold a star count and forward the results to the Campaign for Dark Skies?

- Plus there are many, many more 'cornerstone' events. Check out the IYA website, [www.astronomy2009.com](http://www.astronomy2009.com), for more information.

## 2009 in the UK

Each country taking part in the IYA (ninety have signed up so far, and 140 are expected to be taking part by 2009) has its own steering group, or 'node', made up from representatives of interested parties dedicated to the promotion of astronomy. In the UK these include the BAA, the SPA, the National Maritime Museum, the Institute of Physics, the Association for Science Education, the Science and Technology Facilities Council, the Society for the History of Astronomy, the Federation of Astronomical Societies, the Faulkes Telescopes, and *Astronomy Now*, amongst others. The IYA activities are managed by the Royal Astronomical Society, who will soon be appointing a co-ordinator to work with UK groups involved with the IYA on a daily basis. Spearheading the steering group is the UK's Single Point of Contact (SPOC), Professor Ian Robson of the UK Astronomy Technology Centre and the University of Edinburgh. The SPOC is the link between the UK group and the worldwide organising committee at the

International Astronomical Union. If you have an idea for an activity that you or your society would like to do, the SPOC is the person you need to get in touch with. You can find his details on the UK's IYA website at [www.astronomy2009.co.uk](http://www.astronomy2009.co.uk)

So, what activities are happening in the UK? National Astronomy Week will be taking advantage of the four-hundredth anniversary since Thomas Harriot first looked through a telescope (reputedly before Galileo did) by hosting a week-long, nationwide lunar observing event called MoonWeek. The Society for Popular Astronomy hope to supply as many secondary schools as possible with a small (four-inch) telescope with additional educational support for teachers, pupils and parents on how to get the best out of the telescope, and both the SPA and the British Astronomical Association aim to take telescopes to as many schools, colleges and public events as possible. Newsletters and posters will be produced that will be made available to all schools and societies. There will be exhibitions, opportunities to use robotic telescopes, the Campaign for Dark Skies will be boosted, the national media will be engaged on a large scale and there will be many more events that are still in the planning stages. Certainly as we enter 2008 those plans will speed up and if your local society, or school, or college, or social group want to get involved, now is the time to do it.

You may already have ideas for what your society could do, but if not, don't

## Get involved

If you have an idea for an activity in 2009 and want to make it official (and perhaps get funding too), just follow these steps:

- Check the UK IYA website, [www.astronomy2009.co.uk](http://www.astronomy2009.co.uk), to see what other groups are doing.
- Contact the SPOC (Prof. Ian Robson) via the contact details on the website.
- When proposing an event, you'll need to include the following: the name of the activity, a short description, is it national or regional, the date of the planned activity, contact details, and a link to a website if you have one.
- And finally, welcome aboard!

worry. You can join in with events already being planned, or take a look at what societies and organisations are doing in other countries and adapt them for the UK. If you have an astronomy department at your local university, get in touch with them to team up on activities, and contact schools, scouts, community centres and local newspapers, radio and TV to inform them of what you are planning and how they can join the party. Because 2009 is going to be one heck of an astronomy party, and you don't want to miss out!

**Keith Cooper is the Editor of Astronomy Now and a member of the UK IYA steering group.**

**From left to right: Another growing phenomenon in the promotion of astronomy is that of 'sidewalk astronomy'. Expect to see a lot of telescopes on the streets in 2009! Image: Liverpool AS.**

**The IYA is the perfect opportunity to take astronomy to the public, even in the day with solar observing. Image: Ron Westmaas, the Astronomy Experience.**

**Take an astronomy exhibition to local events or festivals and help bring the International Year of Astronomy to the public, and promote your society. Image: Barry Bellinger.**

