The Second NEON Observing Euroschool

The Network of European Observatories in the North (NEON) is pleased to announce its second observing school, sponsored by the European Community, which will take place at

Observatoire de Haute-Provence (France)
from July 9 to 21, 2001

The school is organised jointly and alternately by Asiago Observatory (Italy), Calar Alto Observatory (Germany-Spain) and Haute-Provence Observatory (France), with additional tutorial assistance from ESO.

The purpose of the school is to provide opportunity to gain practical observational experience at the telescope, in observatories with state-of-the-art instrumentation. To this end, the school proposes tutorial observations in small groups of 3 students, under the guidance of an experienced observer, centred around a small research project and going through all steps of a standard observing programme. Some complementary lectures will be given by experts in the field.

The school is open to students working on a PhD thesis in Astronomy and which are nationals of a Member State or an Associated State of the European Union. The working language is English. Up to fifteen participants will be selected by the Organising Committee and will have their travel and living expenses paid, if they satisfy the EC rules (age limit of 35 years at the time of the Euro Summer School).

Applicants are expected to fill in an application form (available on the Web site), with a CV and description of previous observational experience, and to provide a letter of recommendation from a senior scientist familiar with the work of the applicant. **The application deadline is March 31, 2001.**

Secretary of the school:
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Further instructions and practical details will be found on the school Web site, which is hosted by the European Astronomical Society at: http://www.iap.fr/eas/schools.html

You will also find on this site a description of the activities in the previous school, hosted in 2000 by the Calar Alto Observatory. Over 60 applications were received for this first edition of the NEON school, almost all of high quality, and it was a difficult (and painful) task for the Selection Committee to extract the “happy few”! The others are really encouraged to apply again for the next edition!

The school was a success, thanks to the enthusiasm of the participants, to the dedication of the tutors and lecturers, and to the efforts of the local staff (the Director, R. Gredel, even provided good weather!).

After some lectures on basics of observations (Telescope Optics and Imaging by C. Barbieri; Photometry by H. Röser; Spectroscopy by M. Dennefeld), the very diverse scientific topics selected for the observations, all at the forefront of research, brought the students into the hard reality!

A. Pizzella (Padova) guided his group into “Tracing the dark matter in spiral galaxies”, by measuring rotation curves and deriving photometric profiles in galaxies of various spiral types. S. Pedraz (Calar Alto) looked with his students into the radial variation of the stellar content in dwarf galaxies and compared it with model predictions. P. Prada (Calar Alto) searched for substructures in the halo of nearby galaxies, using on-off interference-filter imaging in prominent emission lines to detect PNe or regions of star formation. A. Pasquali (ST-ECF) and F. Comerón (ESO) joined their forces (and their groups) to investigate a star-forming region in Cygnus OB2, making a systematic IR map, discovering new clusters and following the most interesting objects in spectroscopy. And P. Leisy (ESO) helped many of the students to survive within the intricacies of MIDAS.

But the unforeseen, scientific actuality added other required observations and boosted the general interest: during the first night, the 2.2-m was requisitioned to follow spectroscopically the transit of an extrasolar planet in front of HD209459. Several tens of spectra were obtained and accumulated, in the hope to show a change in spectral shape of the parent star. During several nights also, Asteroid 140 SIWA was monitored photometrically to add points to the light curve and try to figure out what was the rotation period of this asteroid, target of the Rosetta mission. And, finally, the last night, the discovery of SN2000cw by the Lick SN search group gave an opportunity to the Neon school to observe spectroscopically this target of opportunity and to announce in an IAU Circular that it was a SNIa close to maximum.

Therefore, many important aspects of observations were covered by the school and gave hopefully a good incentive to the students to continue on that track. Indeed, several of the projects started there will continue in collaboration and lead to publications, and fellowship applications have also been written! No doubt this is partly due also to the nice atmosphere surrounding the school: cheerful tutors, helpful staff and a joyful director, Spanish food, proximity of the sea… and excitement to see beautiful objects in a clear sky. Despite the hard work, the life of an observer may after all be a good choice…

M. DENNEFELD
Co-ordinator of the NEON School