

Science Days at ESO

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The motivation for Science Days at ESO, when everyone has an opportunity to briefly present their current research, is outlined. The Science Day held in Garching in 2013 is briefly described as an example.

Science Day is the name given to the site-wide presentation of current astronomical science that is undertaken at ESO. There are quite naturally separate Science Days in Santiago and Garching, but the overall scheme of both is similar. Science Days have now become an established annual tradition and the first ones were held in November 2001, initiated by Danielle Alloin and Bruno Leibundgut.

The aim of the ESO Science Days is to display the range of science being done at ESO, to foster and encourage interactions leading to an enhancement of the research atmosphere and perhaps even initiating new collaborations. The

set-up is simple and the aim is to accommodate talks for all participants. With about 90 astronomers (Faculty, Scientists, Students and Fellows) in Vitacura¹, including the researchers working at the Joint ALMA Observatory, and more than 100 in Garching², the task is intimidating. In Chile, this requires excellent coordination since science staff are regularly on *turnos* of a week or more at the mountain sites: this means staggering the Science Day over a few sessions. These Science Days are thus all the more important to bring science staff together and represent a unique opportunity to foster an active scientific life. At the Headquarters in Garching, the challenge is to have as many talks as possible in one day without tiring the audience by an overdose of science. Naturally, there is a strong social element to such gatherings, with a catered light lunch and a congenial drink at the end of the day included in the programme.

Science Day, Garching 2013

There has been a tradition of holding the Garching Science Days in the winter, usually November or February, with the consequence that the group photograph for the Garching events often involves standing in the snow. However, this year

it was held in June (see Figure). It is needless and impossible to describe all the topics covered, but the range is always large. This year's Garching Science Day was no exception. With 74 presentations in one day, a five-minute limit per presentation had to be strictly enforced. Rather than being a constraint, this results in very dynamic and to-the-point presentations, where the enthusiasm of the speaker is very evident regarding her/his own science. There is of course only time for a few slides each, but there is always a call for questions after each presentation.

The presentations ranged from research developed out of functional work, such as the study of precipitable water vapour at Paranal, to progress reports on current projects, advertisement campaigns for a new survey or tool, to details and sidelines stemming from this research. With such a short format and receptive audience, it is sometimes tempting to delve "outside the box", such as the presentations on tachoastrometry and the rise of the savannah 30 million years ago on Earth. The range of science topics covered anything from earthshine to the highest redshift galaxies and included observations not performed with ESO telescopes, the development of software tools and a few theoretical investigations.

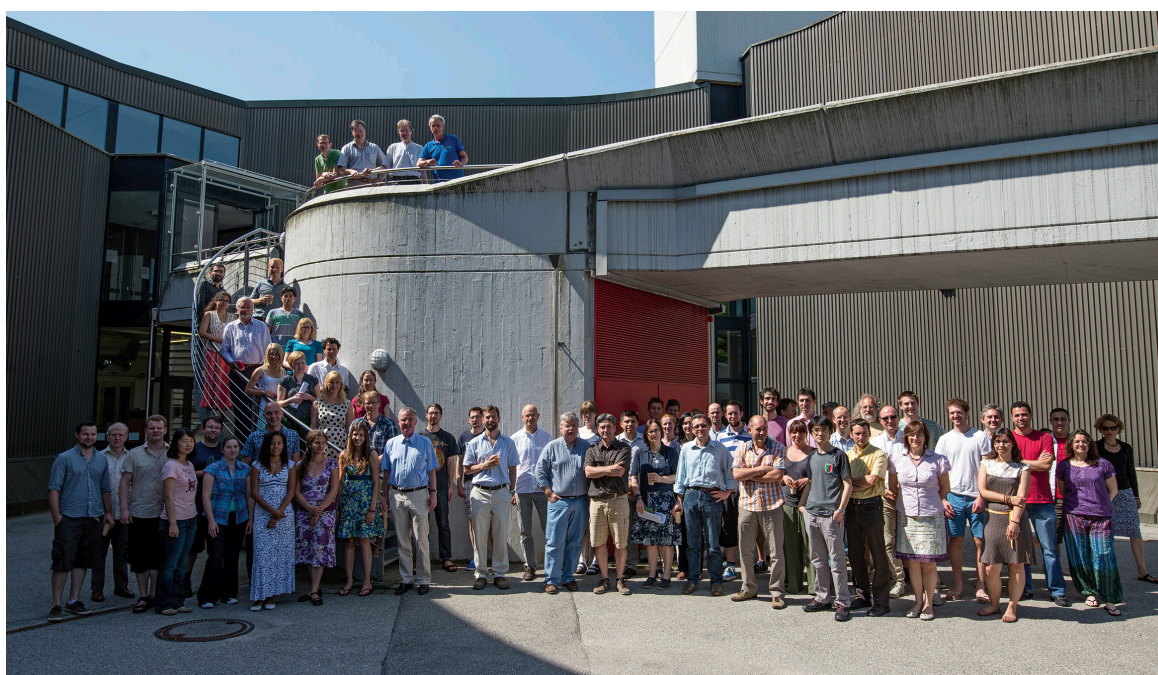


Figure 1. Group photograph from the 2013 Garching Science Day.

Research using the Paranal, La Silla, and now ALMA, sites was of course well represented.

Science Days have to be well organised, so all speakers have to deliver their presentations in advance and all run from the same computer. Of course the role of the chairs is particularly important to the smooth running of the day and this forms excellent training for Fellows and Students. For the end of the Science Day, the Bavarian tradition of *Bier und Brezen* has been adopted (borrowed

from the closing session of workshops at the neighbouring Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics). This year it was particularly encouraging that so many participants attended for the whole day, avoiding the increasingly common and taciturn practice of turning up one talk before one's own, and leaving one talk later. The gain for the participants is tremendous and the exposé of current high-level astronomical research can be a stimulating encouragement to one's own work.

Acknowledgements

Christina Stoffer has, since their inception, run the logistics of the Science Days in Garching, assembling the programme and ensuring that all the presentations are installed, and, not least, arranging the catering. We thank her very much for her dedication, without which such busy programmes would not be possible.

Links

¹ List of scientific staff in Chile: <http://www.eso.org/sci/activities/santiago/personnel.html>

² List of scientific staff in Garching: <http://www.eso.org/sci/activities/garching/personnel.html>

Fellows at ESO

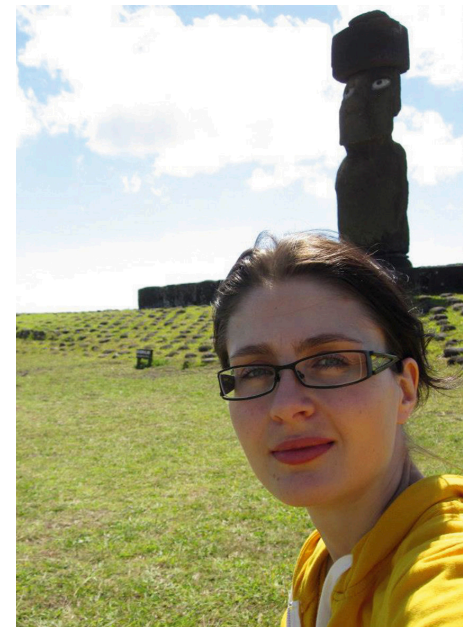
Andrea Mehner

During my childhood, growing up in Berlin, I only remember seeing the Moon and very few stars. It wasn't until much later in life, at university, that I witnessed the beauty of a clear and dark night sky. I was born in East Berlin, and growing up there it was unimaginable that I would one day live in Chile and work for an astronomical organisation. However, even then, I had the desire to travel and see the world. In elementary school I was fascinated by maths and I decided to study mathematics in Moscow. This plan obviously never came to fruition. The Wall came down, and instead I had the opportunity to live in England, Spain, the United States and now Chile. Also, I did not study maths, but first physics, and then astrophysics.

During my university years, I wavered between nuclear physics and geophysics, before settling on astrophysics. The first astronomical event I took part in was the transit of Venus in 2004. At the end of the same year I saw Saturn's rings for the first time, through an amateur telescope in the Sierra Nevada, Spain. Back in Germany, Dr Eike Guenther inspired me to pursue a career in astro-

physics. I attended some of his lectures and he displayed such an enthusiasm for the subject that I asked him to supervise my Diploma thesis at the Karl Schwarzschild Observatory in Tautenburg, Germany. Thanks to his enthusiasm, but also his entertaining stories about observatory trips, I developed a growing interest in astrophysics and astronomical observatories. During my thesis I had my first observing experiences at the observatories in Tautenburg, La Silla, and Calar Alto and enjoyed them so much that I became convinced that I would follow a career in an observatory.

In 2007, I moved to the Twin Cities in Minnesota, USA, to obtain my PhD. People may know Minnesota for its cold weather, its 10 000 lakes and its zillions of mosquitoes. Yet, there is also an astronomy department with small groups covering a rather large variety of topics. There I was confronted with Eta Carinae for the first time, one of the most massive and luminous stars in the Galaxy. I find this object so fascinating that I spend most of my time trying to understand the enigma it presents. In a nutshell, η Car is an evolved star with a mass of likely more than $100 M_{\odot}$, which may end its life any moment, or, let's say, within the next



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10 000 years. The star shows intriguing variabilities on several time and magnitude scales. This object is also one of the most beautiful in the sky and has remained a mystery to researchers for many centuries. Hubble Space Telescope