reference frame radio source shows a stellar appearance on the plates. Using the quoted reduction model, a m.e. of unit weight for the plate solution of < 0.1 arcsec could be obtained. The final FK5/J2000 position, based on 3 plates, is

RA(J2000) $7^h\ 50^m\ 52.051^s$;

DEC(J2000) $+12^\circ\ 31'\ 04.84''$

Using the corresponding VLBI position from (Ma et al., 1990), the system difference in the sense "optical minus radio" then is:

DAcos(DEC) = +0.073 arcsec;

DDEC = +0.01 arcsec

which is in good agreement with earlier results (Johnston et al., 1985) and the recently quoted first preliminary results of a HIPPARCOS-FK5 comparison in that sky region (Lindegren, 1992). However, a dense grid of some 100 comparison points, as will be provided by our reference frame programme is required for a more detailed conclusive analysis.

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The ESO Minor Planet Sky

L. D. SCHMADEL, Astronomisches Rechen-Institut, Heidelberg, Germany

The European Southern Observatory was established in 1962 to operate the powerful La Silla observatory for the benefit of many fields of astronomy and astrophysics. Only a few programmes were directly concerned with the survey of the solar system and the discovery of minor bodies like comets and minor planets. In many cases, observations of these objects were made only as valuable by-products of other campaigns. It was especially the wide-field telescopes, the 1-m ESO Schmidt and the 40-cm GPO Astrograph, which yielded an enormous amount of positional data. During the last decades ESO has always maintained a leading position in the world, as far as the number of minor planet observations is concerned.

In 1988, Commission 20 of the IAU established a special study group to elucidate the meanings of minor planet names. This endeavour, which comprises a lot of data for the first 5012 minor planets numbered until the end of 1991, has now reached completion (L.D. Schmadel, *Dictionary of Minor Planet Names*, X+687 p., Springer-Verlag, 1992).

Since all information in this work has been archived in a computer-readable data base, it is very easy to extract material which directly or indirectly pertains to ESO. I have here used the data base and some recently published, additional material to illustrate the "ESO minor planet sky".

The many thousands of observations at ESO have inevitably produced quite a few discoveries. However, there is a long way from the detection of a new solar system object until it can be definitively numbered and named. The new planet has to be observed in – at least – three oppositions before it can be numbered. Therefore, the majority of new detections remain in a "dormant" stage in the Minor Planet Center's computer files. In some cases it is possible to identify new positions with planets observed earlier; this shortens the process. Nowadays, it is a rare exception when a newly discovered planet can be quickly identified with a long series of prior observations.

The statistics show that until July 1992, some 186 ESO discoveries have reached the status of "established", i.e. numbered, minor planets. Table 1 records these objects in ascending order together with the name (or preliminary designation), the year of discovery and the discoverer(s). Whereas the great majority was found by Belgian astronomer Henri Debehogne during special surveys for minor planets, most others were found by chance, mainly with the Schmidt telescope, and during the various ESO atlas projects. A total of 16 astronomers earned discoverer merits; they are shown in Table 2 together with the overall numbers of discoveries and co-discoveries (in parentheses).

It is interesting to note that in the very near future ESO is likely to rank fifth (behind Heidelberg, Crimea, Palomar and the Anderson Mesa Station of Lowell Observatory) on the list of the most successful minor-planet discovering observatories. In the ranking list of the most successful discoverers of minor planets of all times, Henri Debehogne now occupies the 13th place – one place ahead of the famous visual planet hunter A. Charlois in Nice, who detected some 99 planets between 1887 and 1904.

The right to name a minor planet essentially belongs to the discoverer. As can be seen from Table 1, only a small fraction of ESO discoveries honours ESO astronomers. This has to be done by other colleagues, and there are in fact a lot of names which together constitute a kind of "ESO minor planet sky". While it is very easy to extract all ESO successes from the data base, it is nearly impossible to find among the 4,000 existing minor planet names those which have been accorded to ESO officials, staff astronomers, etc.

The list in Table 3 gives all those which are mentioned in the book about the ESO history, recently written by Adriaan Blaauw. Still, it cannot be considered to be a complete compilation. It shows, however, that it is not very exaggerated to speak about the ESO minor planet sky!