

Chapter 5

PUBLIC RELATIONS

As in previous years thousands of visitors were shown the WHT and the INT, many as part of the annual observatory open days during the summer, but also through a large number of official visits, of which as much as 40% were schools. In total, ING welcomed 8206 visitors (5656 in 2004 and 2550 in 2005) in 317 tours. Some of our visitors in the reporting period were the Spanish and Dutch ministers of Science and Education and the Spanish astronaut Pedro Duque.

Coinciding with the fiesta of La Bajada de la Virgen de Las Nieves, a new model for organising tours on Open Days in order to reduce the impact on the observatory operations was tested in 2005. Visitors were asked to book online their tours well in advance. The total number of visits per open day was reduced from previous years while increasing the number of days to five.

All these activities help strengthen the ties between the observatory and the public on La Palma. Moreover, apprenticeships for a small number of technical students from La Palma have been hosted by the ING, providing further added value of the observatory to the local community. And ING also helped the foundation of the "Sociedad de Estudios Generales de la Isla de La Palma", a local society devoted to general research of La Palma.

ING continued to provide young highschool students with first contacts with professional telescopes and hands-on experiences, through the participation in night observing. One of the initiatives we supported was "WINT", a Dutch national competition for young students organised by the NOVA school. Students had to prepare their own observing programmes and the winners were awarded with two nights on the INT. Another example was from the Marlborough school from the UK, which organised a trip for 5 students and teachers to join the observer at the INT for two nights.

Other public activities included the participation of several ING astronomers in the La Palma summer university and in the celebration of the European Science and Technology Week in 2004 and 2005. The public outreach group of OPTICON has members from the CCI institutions



Figure 60. Top: Students at the INT control room during WINT observations. Bottom: Students from Marlborough School paying attention to the explanations given by the INT observer.

and was set up to promote the organization of common public activities at the Canarian Observatories. Apart from the support to the organization of visits to the ORM and the Open Days in summer, the group has also printed a collection of brochures for each astronomical facility in Spanish and in English and it has organized a traveling exhibit that has been displayed at the airport terminals.

Finally, ING also gave support to the inauguration of SuperWASP and for making public the results from Deep Impact at the ING telescopes.

ING has been particularly active on scientific outreach activities during the reporting period. A workshop on "Adaptive-Optics Assisted Integral-Field Spectroscopy" was organised on La Palma (9–11 May 2005) which

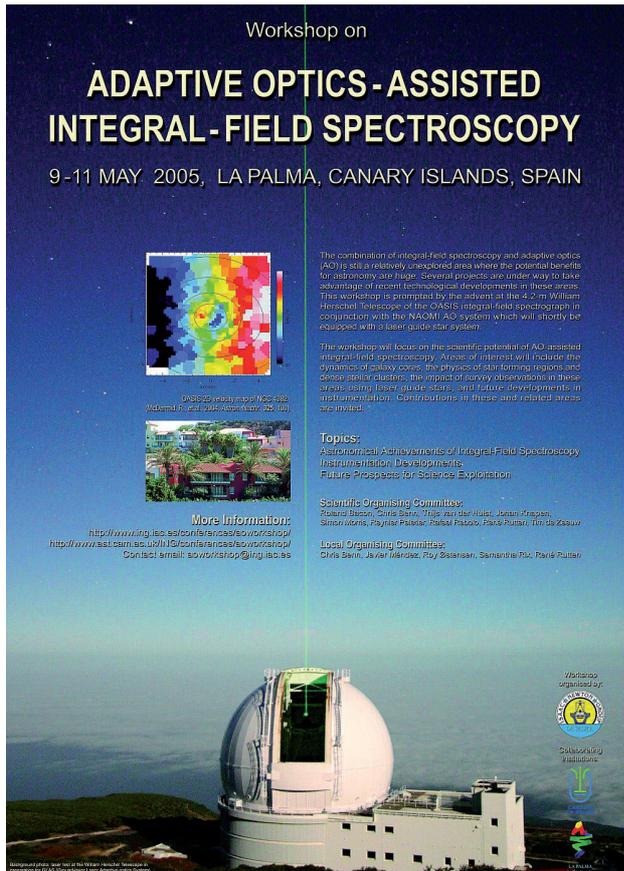


Figure 61. Announcing poster of the workshop on 'Adaptive-Optics Assisted Integral-Field Spectroscopy'.

attracted some 60 participants from around the world. This workshop was inspired by the availability of the OASIS integral field spectrograph on the WHT and of the plans to develop a laser guide star system as well. The proceedings were published in: René, R. G. M., Benn, C., Méndez, J., 2006, *New Astronomy Reviews*, **49**, 487. A joint Isaac Newton Group and Nordic Optical Telescope Conference on "Hot Subdwarf Stars and Related Objects" took place also on La Palma (6-10 June 2005), again with over 60 participants. The proceedings were published in: Østensen, R., 2005, *Baltic Astronomy*, **15**. Both conferences included a public talk and a press conference. And finally a dedicated session focussing on the scientific achievements and the future of the ING was held in London under the auspices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

Four issues of the ING Newsletter and the Biennial Report 2002–2003 were launched in the reporting period. Also remarkable is the large number of requests for using the images and photographs from our public archives in magazines, books, web sites or exhibitions in museums. The production of new public astronomical images is of vital importance to continue satisfying this high demand.

Thanks to the collaboration of the observers, we have been able to make available beautiful images, some of which have been awarded the 'NASA Astronomy Picture of the Day' recognition.

A total of 31 press releases have reflected the most relevant research highlights of our scientific production. These press releases were prepared by ING or other institutions and they were based on results from data obtained at the ING telescopes or achieved by ING astronomers. Other contacts with the press included TV teams from Spain, Germany or Ireland that filmed scenes for scientific series or documentaries at the telescopes.



Figure 62. Top: Image of M81 galaxy obtained using the Wide Field Camera on the INT. Bottom: NGC 7271 galaxy as observed with the Prime Focus camera on the WHT. Both images were incorporated to ING's public archive of images.