



# THE ISAAC NEWTON GROUP OF TELESCOPES

# NEWSLETTER



*The spiral galaxy NGC 7217 in Pegasus. Image obtained using the Prime Focus Imaging Camera at the William Herschel Telescope in B, V and R bands. Courtesy of Mischa Schirmer (ING) and Gilles Bergond (IAA, Granada).*

## Message from the Director

*Dear Reader,*

This is the 10th issue of the ING Newsletter. Now 'ten' does not read like a big number, but knowing the effort it takes to produce these Newsletters on a more or less regular basis it is worth a big thank-you to all those people who have contributed over the years! And let me state the obvious: volunteers for contributions are always welcome.

This Newsletter brings a number of important scientific and technical highlights. Worth a mention here are the nice results obtained with the telescopes on La Palma of the collision of the Deep Impact probe on comet Swift-Tuttle. ING's current main instrumentation development project, GLAS, which aims to build a laser guide star for adaptive optics, is summarised in this Newsletter as well. I hope you will find these and several other contributions of interest.

An important event for the observatory took place in July when an independent international

panel of scientists reviewed the functioning and future prospects of the ING. This activity was commissioned by the Board of the ING to evaluate the WHT and INT in a wider international context and provide an independent vision of the observatory's current and future scientific health.

The ING finds itself at an important crossroads for various reasons. Since the previous review of this kind a number of major changes have taken place. For example, measures were introduced to drastically reduce the overall operational cost of the telescopes. Furthermore, developments around the world on large telescopes have resulted in changes in the requirements for the ING telescopes from the user community. And on the organisational side, the international agreements that have formed the basis of the scientific partnership on La Palma for a quarter of a century will be up for renewal in 2009. These issues formed the core of the questions on which

## The Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes

The Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes (ING) consists of the 4.2m William Herschel Telescope (WHT), the 2.5m Isaac Newton Telescope (INT) and the 1.0m Jacobus Kapteyn Telescope (JKT), and is located 2350 m above sea level at the Roque de Los Muchachos Observatory on the island of La Palma, Canary Islands, Spain. The WHT is the largest telescope of its kind in Western Europe.

The construction of the ING telescopes was the result of a collaboration between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The site is provided by Spain, and in return Spanish astronomers receive 20 per cent of the observing time on the telescopes. The operation of the site is overseen by an International Scientific Committee, or Comité Científico Internacional (CCI).

A further 75 per cent of the observing time is shared by the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias (IAC). The remaining 5 per cent is reserved for large scientific projects to promote international collaboration between institutions of the CCI member countries.

The ING operates the telescopes on behalf of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC) of the United Kingdom, the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO) of the Netherlands and the IAC in Spain. The Roque de Los Muchachos Observatory, which is the principal European Northern hemisphere observatory, is operated by the IAC.



(Continued from front cover).

the visiting committee was asked to provide its opinion.

The review committee was chaired by Jeremy Mould (NOAO) with Brian Boyle (CSIRO), Bruce Carney (Univ. of North Carolina) and Bruno Leibundgut (ESO) as members. The panel first visited La Palma for two days to commence their work at the observatory. After that, the group met with scientists from the three main user communities as well with representatives of the funding agencies: PPARC for the UK, NWO for the Netherlands, and the IAC for Spain.

At the time of writing, the report from the committee has been submitted to the ING Board and the funding agencies. It now forms part of the background

information that the agencies will require in order to make informed decisions on the future investment in the ING. It is expected that the report will be made public shortly, but in anticipation of that I am pleased to be able to report that the committee placed the ING in an extremely favourable light, saw very good scientific prospects for the WHT for several more years, and gave its full support to the developments that are currently under way.

Depending on the outcome of the ongoing deliberations, the ING may well be producing at least another ten issues of this Newsletter, presenting scientific highlights and developments in future years.

René G. M. Rutten

### The ING Board

The ING Board oversees the operation, maintenance and development of the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes, and fosters collaboration between the international partners. It approves annual budgets and determines the arrangements for the allocation of observing time on the telescopes. ING Board members are:

- Prof. T. van der Hulst (Univ. of Groningen), *Chairperson*.
- Dr. D. Telfer (PPARC), *Secretary*.
- Dr. P. Crowther (Univ. of Sheffield).
- Dr. G. Dalton (Univ. of Oxford).
- Dr. R. García López (IAC).
- Prof. J. Hough (Univ. of Hertfordshire).
- Dr. R. Stark (NWO).
- Dr. C. Vincent (PPARC).

### The ING Director's Advisory Committee

The Director's Advisory Committee (DAC) assists the observatory in defining the strategic direction for operation and development of the telescopes. It also provides an international perspective and acts as an independent contact point for the community to present its ideas. DAC members are:

- Dr. M. McCaughrean (Univ. of Exeter), *Chairperson*.
- Dr. M. Balcells (IAC).
- Dr. P. A. James (Liverpool John Moores Univ.).
- Dr. N. Tanvir (Univ. of Hertfordshire).
- Dr. E. Tolstoy (Univ. of Groningen).

### The ING Newsletter

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