



The Virtual Telescope Project

Enjoy the Universe from your Desktop

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The Virtual Telescope for the International Year of Astronomy: the sky is for all.

As declared by the United Nations, under the initiative of the International Astronomical Union and UNESCO, 2009 is the **International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009)**. Scientists and amateur astronomers worldwide will join to share the wonders of the Universe with the whole community. A unique occasion to help every woman and every man to look at the sky, discovering its beauty and understanding how scientific knowledge can contribute to a more equitable and peaceful society.

The **Virtual Telescope Project**, a fully robotic astronomical facility engaged both in research and science education, will join this international effort, offering a number of events. Thanks to its cutting-edge technologies, those activities will be broadcasted over the internet, in real time, so people will be able to participate, no matter where they live. As usual since the Virtual Telescope started in 2009, the Internet will be intensively used to help people worldwide enjoying the night sky, in such a prestigious and ambitious framework as the IYA2009.

The program with the events already scheduled at the Virtual Telescope is available at www.virtualtelescope.eu, and will include conferences, meetings, Urban Astronomy live sessions. One of the main events will be the **First Robotic Messier Marathon Online**, scheduled for **March 27, 2009**. For the first time, a fully robotic telescope will be used to observe as much Messier objects (some of the brightest and beautiful celestial bodies) as possible in a single night, sharing the incoming images in real time, while a live video/audio comment will be broadcasted over the Internet. This way, lot of people will look at those celestial gems from their own native countries, very likely for the first time.

Another important event will be: **"Galileo, Jupiter and Neptune: three old friends"**. Next year we will celebrate the 400th anniversary since Galileo used a telescope to explore the Cosmos. Tracking Jupiter and its four bigger moons, one of his major discoveries, on Dec 1612 Galileo also saw planet Neptune, confusing it for a star. Again, the same happened in Jan. 1613. Next 2009, after a few decades of unfavourable conjunctions, Jupiter and Neptune will "meet" again up there. The Virtual Telescope will offer a unique opportunity on July 2009 and Dec. 2009 to follow that celestial encounter, offering for several days a continuous coverage of the event. A wonderful event to celebrate the 400th birthday of the astronomical telescope!

Also, a key event will be " **'The Universe never Sleeps' – observing the sky for 24 hours**", when the Virtual Telescope will offer a 24hours long, online observing session, showing how modern Astronomy is a night-and-day affair. A special real-time observing session will start on 1 April 2009, at 22:00 UT and will be shared over the Internet, thanks to the cutting-edge technology used at the Virtual Telescope. Initially stars, nebulae, planets, galaxies and more will be observed, with live comments by the astrophysicists working at the



observatory. At day, the solar, H-alpha telescope will point our star, under the guide of the scientific staff. Then, back to the nightly side of the Universe, up to the end of the event.

The Virtual Telescope will make possible to everybody, no matter the previous astronomical experience, to "enter" the Universe. The Internet approach will be particularly suitable for those unable, for a number of reasons, to reach a traditional observing facility, including disabled persons: for them the Virtual Telescope will offer special events.

This effort will fulfil both the IYA2009 and the Virtual Telescope Project goals.

Interested people are invited to join the Virtual Telescope mailing list, to stay tuned on the future developments.

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- *Santa Barbara Instruments Group* (www.sbig.com)
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We thank those helping us making this a real idea.

Interested parties willing to act as sponsors are kindly requested to contact the Virtual Telescope staff

About the Virtual Telescope.

The Virtual Telescope is a project of the Bellatrix Astronomical Observatory (Italy). It consists in a number of robotic telescopes, remotely accessible via the Internet for observing the skies, 24h/day, also in real time. All the instruments match the highest standards and the professional scientific support assure the maximum return to scientists, amateur astronomers, students and teachers.

After two years since it was launched, the Virtual Telescope did important discoveries (exoplanets, minor planets, variable stars), grabbing more than 60 thousands of images. To earlyJan. 2009, its website was surfed by more than 360,000 unique visitors and it served about 1.6 millions pages, numbers which are a record for an Italian, private research and science communication facility.

To learn more visit the following website: <http://www.virtualtelescope.eu>

About the International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009).

The International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) will be a global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture, highlighted by the 400th anniversary of the first use of an astronomical telescope by Galileo Galilei. The aim of the Year is to stimulate worldwide interest, especially among young people, in astronomy and science under the central theme "The Universe, Yours to Discover". IYA2009 events and activities will promote a greater appreciation of the inspirational aspects of astronomy that embody an invaluable shared resource for all nations.

To learn more visit the following website: <http://www.astronomy2009.org>



About the Messier Marathon.

A Messier marathon is an attempt to find as many Messier objects as possible during one night. Depending on the location of the observer, and season, there is a different number of them visible, as they are not evenly distributed in the celestial sphere. The Messier catalogue was compiled by French astronomer Charles Messier during the late 18th century and consists of 109 relatively bright deep sky objects (galaxies, nebulae, and star clusters).

To learn more visit the following website: <http://www.seds.org/MESSIER/>