



Registration is open for the two-day conference "Light Pollution and its Impact: The Ninth European Symposium for the Protection of the Night Sky", to be held in Armagh on Friday 18th and Saturday 19th September 2009.

This international meeting is one of the main pillars of the Armagh Observatory's activities in support of the United Nations International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009). It is also a contribution to one of the IYA2009 Cornerstone projects "Dark Skies Awareness" and part of the all-Ireland IYA2009 programme (see <http://astronomy2009.ie/>).

The meeting has been funded by the Republic of Ireland's 'Discover Science and Engineering' (DSE) programme with additional support from (among others) the Royal Irish Academy Committee for Astronomy and Space Science, the Irish Light Pollution Awareness Campaign (ILPAC) and the Northern Ireland Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure through grant-in-aid to the Armagh Observatory.

IYA2009 is a year-long series of activities in every country of the world to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of Galileo's first use of a telescope in 1609 to make astronomical observations. The worldwide programme of lectures, discussion, exhibitions and other activities for IYA2009 is designed to be open and accessible to all and everyone is welcome to all meetings.

The conference "Light Pollution and its Impact" is also designed to be open and accessible to all, and everyone is welcome to register and attend the proceedings. For more information or to register to attend either the conference or the free public lecture in Armagh, contact the Armagh Observatory or visit the conference web-site: www.lightpollution2009.eu/.

The main proceedings of the meeting (Friday 18th and Saturday 19th September) are preceded by two keynote Free Public Lectures "What is Light?" by broadcaster and science journalist Leo Enright. He will explore the history of Ireland's sometimes tenuous connection with luminosity, while naming and shaming some modern big wicks.

The first of these free public lectures is at the Royal Irish Academy (see <http://shop.ria.ie/shop/events.asp>) at 7.00pm on Wednesday 16th September. The second (a repeat of the first) is at the Market Place Theatre, Armagh, at 7.30pm on Thursday 17th September. If you wish to register for the Armagh public lecture, please contact Aileen McKee at the Armagh Observatory (E-mail: ambn@arm.ac.uk; Tel: 028-3752-2928).

The following two days have a packed programme of lectures and debate, notably a keynote review by the well-known astronomer and broadcaster, Dr John Mason, and expert talks covering the detrimental social and environmental impact of light pollution and ways to reduce it, for example "intelligent" street lighting. For more information and to register for the meeting, contact the Armagh Observatory or visit the conference web-site: www.lightpollution2009.eu/.

The meeting will also describe the dramatic impact of light pollution on wildlife such as insects, birds and bats, how it impacts on public health, and how good lighting practice can improve public safety at night and help to mitigate climate change and growing public expenditure on lighting, by avoiding wasteful energy production simply to power lights shining uselessly into space.

Reducing light pollution reduces greenhouse gases and helps to reduce our carbon footprint. Concern about light pollution is not just for astronomers. In the words of the Astronomer Royal, Lord Rees, "You don't need to be an ornithologist to want to be able to see some birds in your garden, and you don't need to be an astronomer to want to be able to see the stars. The night sky is part of our environment, indeed the only part that has been experienced, equally, by all cultures at all times."

A further important part of the meeting is devoted to science education. This will include an innovative cross-border education session organized by Robert Hill (Northern Ireland Space Office, Armagh Planetarium). The session involves children from eight schools from as far afield as Dublin, Belfast and Magherafelt. The children will work in teams to explore some of the interdisciplinary and city-planning aspects of light pollution within the new science curriculum using a newly developed "3-D Light Pollution Challenge" computer gaming programme.

Finally, there is an evening visit on Friday 18th September to a dark-sky observing and archaeoastronomy site, namely the Beaghmore Stone Circles and Alignments, Co. Tyrone, and a further public lecture as part of the meeting given in the Armagh Planetarium by Professor Don Pollacco (Queen's University Belfast) "Exoplanets --- the Hunt for the Earth Analogue", at 6.30pm on Saturday 19th September.

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Participants at the conference include many of the world's leading experts on light pollution, including representatives from the Irish Light Pollution Awareness Campaign, the British Astronomical Association's Campaign for Dark Skies, and the International Dark-Sky Association, which this year is celebrating its 21st "coming of age" year since its founding. Coming just weeks after the world's professional astronomers passed a resolution "Defence of the Night Sky and the Right to Starlight" at their recent triennial General Assembly in Brazil, in August 2009 (see <http://www.darksky.org/>, and <http://www.darkskiesawareness.org/files/resolution-b5.pdf>), the Ninth European Symposium for the Protection of the Night Sky is a timely opportunity to learn about light pollution and assist in efforts, locally and farther afield, to reduce the problem and eventually stop it.

Everyone with an interest in the natural environment should be concerned about light pollution. It is an unnecessary waste of energy and interferes with people's appreciation of the night sky, a visual amenity that has inspired and been experienced equally by all cultures at all times.

Full details about the meeting are available at the conference web-site: www.lightpollution2009.eu/.

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