

Planetary Wonderings

January Focus: International Year of Astronomy

By Mary-Frances Bartels, NASA Solar System Ambassador

Happy New Year and welcome to 2009, the International Year of Astronomy! What is the IYA? It is a global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture, highlighted by the 400th anniversary of Galileo's first use of an astronomical telescope. It was declared by the United Nations (<http://www.astronomy2009.org/>) and approved by the International Astronomical Union. In the US NASA (<http://astronomy2009.nasa.gov>) has created monthly themes, focusing on a given space-related topic and a specific night sky object. January's "hot topic" is *Telescopes and Space Probes* and night sky object is Venus. A vast treasure of resources and activities related to IYA can be found on the web. The Astronomical Society of the Pacific has made "discovery guides" for each of NASA's monthly themes. They may be found at <http://www.astrosociety.org/iya/guides.html>. Video podcasts of NASA's object of the month may be found at <http://education.jpl.nasa.gov/amateurastronomy>. Those without astrophotography equipment might want to control a real telescope and take a picture of one of a number of objects available at the MicroObservatory (<http://www.microobservatory.org>).

One hundred forty nations are participating in IYA's concerted effort to bring the universe to the people. <http://365daysofastronomy.org/> offers daily podcasts, written and recorded by enthusiasts around the world, for each day of the year. Topics in January include the five-year anniversary of the Spirit and Opportunity Mars Rovers, being an "armchair astronaut," and dark matter and energy. Anyone with an interest is invited to participate in making a podcast for this project.

This year marks significant anniversaries of a number of events in astronomy. It marks the 400th anniversary of Galileo's use of a telescope and Kepler's publication of *Astronomia Nova*. It is also the 350th anniversary of the publication of Huygens's *Systema Saturnium*. Closer to home, of note is the 50th anniversary of the Luna 1 mission to the moon, and of course, the 40th anniversary of man's lunar landing.

Resource of the Month: From *Space Today Online* - <http://tinyurl.com/89slrj>
Read about the history *and future* of the telescope.

Activity of the Month: Learn about the Galileoscope. Here may be your opportunity to own a real telescope without spending a lot of money. IYA scientists have crafted a Galileoscope, a telescope very close in design to the one Galileo used, but using modern optics. While Galileo's telescope could not resolve the rings around Saturn, because of modern lenses the Galileoscope should show this feature, even in an urban setting. A video made through a prototype showing the moon is available on YouTube at <http://tinyurl.com/a258e9>. Though not available yet, the kit should sell for around \$10. Watch <http://astronomy2009.us/optics/galileoscope> for availability.

Suggestions, questions, and comments about "Planetary Wonderings" are welcomed and may be directed to stargazer @ keeplookingup.net (remove spaces). Past columns may be found at www.keeplookingup.net (click on "Planetary Wonderings" on the right side of opening screen) and at <http://www.freelists.org/archives/astronomyed/> (columns from Jan. 2007 to the present).

Remember to *keep looking up!*

Sources (not mentioned in the article): Solar System Ambassador training materials