ESO, the European Southern Observatory, was created in 1962 to “...establish and operate an astronomic observatory in the southern hemisphere, equipped with powerful instruments, with the aim of furthering and organising collaboration in astronomy...” It is supported by eight countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. ESO operates at two sites. It operates the La Silla observatory in the Atacama desert, 600 km north of Santiago de Chile, at 2,400 m altitude, where several optical telescopes with diameters up to 3.6 m and a 15-m submillimetre radio telescope (SEST) are now in operation. In addition, ESO is in the process of building the Very Large Telescope (VLT) on Paranal, a 2,600 m high mountain approximately 130 km south of Antofagasta, in the driest part of the Atacama desert. The VLT consists of four 8.2-metre and three 1.8-metre telescopes. These telescopes can also be used in combination as a giant interferometer (VLTI). The first and the second 8.2-metre telescopes (called ANU and KUEYEN) are already in regular operation, and the third and the fourth telescopes (called MELIPAL and YEPUN) have already delivered pictures of excellent quality. Over 1200 proposals are made each year for the use of the ESO telescopes. The ESO Headquarters are located in Garching, near Munich, Germany. This is the scientific, technical and administrative centre of ESO where technical development programmes are carried out to provide the La Silla and Paranal observatories with the most advanced instruments. There are also extensive astronomical data facilities. In Europe ESO employs about 200 international staff members, Fellows and Associates; in Chile about 70 and, in addition, about 130 local staff members.

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M. Sarazin: Chile Astroclimate, a Biennial Update
M. Sterzik, M. Kürster: News from the 3.6-m Telescope
C. Waelkens: The Observing Programme Committee – an Evolving Process

Contents

TELESCOPES AND INSTRUMENTATION

S. Cristiani, S. D’Odorico, T.-S. Kim: Exploring the Lyman forest at z = 2 with UVES

THE LA SILLA NEWS PAGE
H. Jones: 2p2 Team News

REPORTS FROM OBSERVERS
F. Paresce, G. de Marchi, G. Andreuzzi, R. Buonanno, F. Ferraro, B. Paltrinieri, L. Pulone: Crowded Field Photometry with the VLT: the Case of the Peculiar Globular Cluster NGC 6712
S.I. Ellison, L. Yan, I.M. Hook, M. Pettini, P. Shaver, J.V. Wall: Revealing High-Redshift Galaxies: Results from a New Damped Lyman-α System
D. Currie, D. Le Mignant, B. Svensson, S. Tordo, D. Bonacini: 3D Structure and Dynamics of the Homunculus of Eta Carina: an Application of the Fabry Perot, ADONIS and AO Software
II. Spikes and Bullets

OTHER ASTRONOMICAL NEWS
M. Dennefeld: The Second NEON Observing Euroschool
C. Madsen and R. West: Success for “Physics on Stage” Festival in Geneva

ANNOUNCEMENTS
A Challenge for Astronomers, Software Engineers, Electrical/ Mechanical Engineers
Personnel Movements
Scientific Preprints (October – December 2000)
ESO Workshop Proceedings Still Available

MESSENGER INDEX 2000 (Nos. 99–102)