

ESO, the European Organisation for Astronomical Research in the Southern Hemisphere, was created in 1962 to "... establish and operate an astronomical observatory in the southern hemisphere, equipped with powerful instruments, with the aim of furthering and organising collaboration in astronomy..." It is supported by eleven countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. ESO operates at three sites in the Atacama desert region of Chile. The Very Large Telescope (VLT), is located on Paranal, a 2 600 m high mountain approximately 130 km south of Antofagasta. The VLT consists of four 8.2 m diameter telescopes. These telescopes can be used separately, or in combination as a giant interferometer (VLTI). At La Silla, 600 km north of Santiago de Chile at 2 400 m altitude, ESO operates several optical telescopes with diameters up to 3.6 m. The third site is the 5 000 m high Llano de Chajnantor, near San Pedro de Atacama. Here a new submillimetre telescope (APEX) is being completed, and a giant array of 12-m submillimetre quality antennas (ALMA) is under development. Over 1 600 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 Paranal and La Silla observatories with the most advanced instruments. ESO has about 600 employees.

The *ESO MESSENGER* is published four times a year: normally in March, June, September and December. ESO also publishes Conference Proceedings, Pre-prints, Technical Notes and other material connected to its activities. Press Releases inform the media about particular events. For further information, contact the ESO Public Affairs Department at the following address:

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The ESO Messenger:  
Editor: Peter Shaver  
Technical editor: Jutta Boxheimer  
www.eso.org/messenger/

Printed by  
Peschke Druck  
Schatzbogen 35  
81805 München  
Germany

ISSN 0722-6691

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## Front Cover Picture: *First image of an extra-solar planet*

See the press release reprinted on page 25 for details. Two major articles on extra-solar planets are also published in this issue: Pont et al. (page 19) and Pepe et al. (page 22).