

Fellows at ESO



Vincenzo Mainieri

I did my undergraduate studies in physics at the University of Rome and at that time I was not particularly interested in astronomy, but more in particle physics. I finally got interested in those shining objects up there when a friend showed me Jupiter using a small amateur telescope from the balcony of a flat in Rome, trying to find some clear sky between the buildings.

When I started a PhD in physics in Rome in 2000, I wanted to spend a period abroad and came to ESO for a short visit of two months. It was the right move at the right time. Thanks to my supervisor, Piero Rosati, I was introduced to the X-ray survey community and at that time the deep X-ray surveys with Chandra and XMM-Newton were starting and new science was available. I was able, during my thesis, to study, with unprecedented photon statistics, the X-ray spectral properties of active galactic nuclei (AGN).

I found the ESO environment and the campus in Garching a very stimulating place to work. So much so that after my PhD I decided not to move far, but simply to cross the street to the Max-Planck-Institut für Extraterrestrische Physik. There I was part of the X-ray group led by Günther Hasinger. I participated in the multi-wavelength follow-up studies of several of the major X-ray surveys, trying to understand the evolution,

as a function of redshift and environment, of the properties of AGN. In the last few years I have been widening my interests – moving to the optical, infrared, submillimetre, and finally radio, bands. I was quite happy in September 2006 to cross the street once more and come back to ESO as a Fellow. During these two years of the fellowship I have been studying how the luminosity of an AGN affects its geometry and how these properties are connected with the host galaxy.

For my functional duties, I am following-up the science cases for a multi-IFU spectrograph for the E-ELT and am also participating in the preparations for the X-shooter commissioning.

After two very enjoyable and useful years as a fellow, I am looking forward to the next step – as an Assistant Astronomer in the User Support Department, where I will start working in October.

Suzanna Randall

According to my parents, my fascination with astronomy started when I was just a toddler, and would not stop staring at the Moon. My own first astronomical recollection is seeing photos of Mars' moons taken by some satellite – I was about seven years old and completely fascinated by the notion that a camera could have left Earth, let alone send back pictures of what to me seemed the most exotic and remote place imaginable. For years I collected pretty pictures of galaxies, nebulae and planets and occasionally braved the cold to observe stars in our back garden with my binoculars, only to all but forget about astronomy as a teenager.

However, upon finishing school I remembered my childhood passion and decided to move from small-town Germany to the bustling metropolis of London to study Astronomy at UCL. During my studies I had the opportunity to observe at several different observatories, and was hooked on both astronomy and travelling. I was then accepted for a PhD at the University of Montreal, apparently on the premises that my supervisor had “never had a student from the UK before”. Focusing on the asteroseismology of pulsating subdwarf B stars, I had more than my fair share of observing, spending five weeks at a time at the 1.5-m on Mt. Bigelow in Arizona.

Eager to move to bigger telescopes, I applied to ESO as a Fellow, and with perfect timing received an offer the day before defending my thesis in Montreal. While I am stationed in Garching, my functional duties regularly take me to Paranal, where I work as a support astronomer at the VLT. For me, this is one of the most exciting aspects of my job, as I feel that I am at the forefront of astronomical research, and work with people from around the world in a unique and dynamic environment.

