

MEETING REPORT

Eyes on ISON – on the comet's trail*

Eyes on ISON is a campaign to engage school children and non-astronomers to gaze at a rare celestial event of the comet ISON (also known as C/2012 S1, a large 'sun-grazing' comet) that will pass as close as a million kilometres from the sun on 28 November 2013. Now, visible through a telescope, the comet will become visible to the naked eye in the early morning skies after October, when this dusty snowball will form a spectacular tail. It will continue to be seen till the end of December this year, getting brighter as it moves closer to the sun. The comet, first discovered in 2012 by two Russian astronomers, Vitali Nevski and Artyom Novichonok, bears the name

*Based on 'Eyes on ISON – on the comet's trail', a national-level training workshop held during 20–22 August 2013 at Centre for Contemporary Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.

of their night-sky survey programme – the International Scientific Optical Network (ISON).

A consortium of astrophysicists, amateur astronomers, science activists and artist-designers from all over Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry came together during a two-day national-level workshop in Bangalore to catalyse the mass campaign on the comet ISON's trail. Workshop coordinator and an official of Bharath Gyan Vigyan Samithi, H. S. Jaykumar detailed the activities that have been planned under the campaign. These include providing free, downloadable, multilingual resource material, science experiment sessions, astronomy fairs, night-sky gazing camps and setting up comet-tracking communities both in schools and in public domain throughout the country. The campaign aligned to RTE 2009 is also working towards incorporating 'learning

science by doing' into the school curriculum.

The campaign supported and catalysed by the National Council for Science and the Technology Communication, Department of Science and Technology, New Delhi was jointly organized by Bharath Gyan Vigyan Samithi together with Centre for Contemporary Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Workshops similar to the one conducted at Bangalore will be held in all the Indian states, which will train nearly 2500 science communicators, teachers and enthusiasts. Later, district-level workshops will also be conducted. The aim is to reach 2.5 crore students through this campaign, according to Jaykumar.

Megha Prakash, S. Ramaseshan Fellow.
e-mail: prakash.megha@gmail.com

A mini symposium on biosciences

A mini symposium was held during the Annual Meeting of IASc by the editorial board members of the *Journal of Biosciences* on 13 July 2013 in Bangalore. Some of the board members presented their work as a part of this open-house symposium.

The session started with a talk on stem cell therapy and regenerative medicine by Geeta Vemuganti (School of Medical Sciences, University of Hyderabad) highlighting the use of stem cell therapy and tissue engineering in the field of medicine and its implications in treatments like retinal cell therapy, bone marrow transplants and spinal cord injuries. This was followed by a presentation by

Rajiv Saxena (South Asian University, New Delhi) on nanoparticles which, of late, have found widespread applications in biomedical research and commercial projects. He also gave an overview of his research on single-walled carbon nanotubes, their effects on multiple biological systems and also their beneficial effects on health.

Renee Borges (IISc, Bangalore) dwelt upon the interactions between plants and animals using chemical and visual cues. She focussed and highlighted her long-term study on the mutualistic interactions between figs and fig wasps. The symposium concluded with a lecture by Durgadas Kasbekar (Editor, *Journal of*

Biosciences) on his studies on *Neurospora crassa* and *Neurospora tetrasperma*. He spoke about the advantages of experimenting with *N. tetrasperma*, as it is a pseudohomothallic species which has a different sexual cycle compared to *N. crassa*, and provides scope to conduct experiments relating to genetic translocations. He also discussed his research plans to genetically transfer *N. crassa* translocations into *N. tetrasperma* and to test whether the resulting specimen expresses the desired qualities of *N. crassa*.

Ipsita Herlekar, S. Ramaseshan Fellow.
e-mail: iherlekar@gmail.com