

Growing Astronomy Outreach in Madagascar

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Abstract. Madagascar has been proposed among other Southern African countries to host some of the future Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Phase II dishes as well as a pan-african array of radio telescopes known as the African VLBI Network (AVN). The creation of Malagasy Astronomy & Space Science (MASS) stems from the need to increase public awareness of Astronomy and Science, given the participation of the Red Island in these gigantic projects. The volunteer-led organization is committed to becoming an active ambassador of the IAU Office for Astronomy Outreach in the country.

1. Status of Astronomy in Madagascar

Madagascar is an island located in the southern part of Africa, between the Indian Ocean and the Mozambique channel. It has been proposed among other Southern African countries to host some of the future Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Phase II dishes, as well as a pan-african array of radio telescopes known as the African VLBI Network or AVN. Because of its partnership in these gigantic projects, an interest in Astronomy has significantly increased in the country, particularly the young generation.

To effectively spread astronomy awareness in Madagascar, young professional astronomers and local graduate students are working together to organize regular events as part of the Malagasy Astronomy & Space Science Outreach Programme.

2. Malagasy Astronomy & Space Science

Founded in 2016, Malagasy Astronomy & Space Science or MASS is a non-profit association based in Madagascar whose goal is to promote Astronomy and Science. Its primary objectives are: *i)* to serve as a platform of networking and skills transfer for the Malagasy astronomy community; *ii)* to provide support and basic trainings to the graduate students in Astrophysics; *iii)* and to coordinate public outreach activities in the country in collaboration with its IAU Office for Astronomy Outreach (OAO) National Outreach Coordinator.

MASS is mainly a community of young professional astronomers and graduate students from Madagascar. Membership is also open to anyone interested in Astronomy, regardless of their knowledge or experience. The board, led by its founders, establishes an annual outreach programme to effectively reach its audience.

Since its launch, MASS has grown from leveraging social media platforms to communicate with the public (e.g. popularization of astronomical terms in Malagasy, the local language) into organizing public talks and annual primary/high school outreach events.

The Astro Quiz for graduate students is one of the highlights of the Annual Outreach Programme. The initiative is aimed at improving the participants' awareness and insight into basic astronomy. Preparation of its third edition, to be held in the capital, is currently underway. Finally, MASS works closely with a team of (Astro)physics graduate students to launch the first ever Malagasy Astronomy Magazine. The project is funded by Development in Africa with Radio Astronomy (DARA) - Newton Fund and the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development with the goal to sparkle interest in STEM to high school learners, especially those in the rural areas.

Apart from the lack of funding and equipments which limit the choice of activities to be implemented, the Outreach Programme event calendar has to be adjusted to align with the availability of its volunteers where some of the members pursue their studies and research abroad.

3. Way forward & IAU100

As the adhering organization of Madagascar in the IAU since August 2018, MASS is committed to becoming an active ambassador and partner of the Union, and the IAU OAO in particular, in the country.

In preparation of the IAU100 celebration in Madagascar, MASS will officially open its amateur membership to anyone with a passion for Astronomy. The association wishes to grow its community and to optimize the skills of its members in order to bring Astronomy to more Malagasy people. Various events in line with the IAU100 Flagship Programmes are being planned. A nationwide Astro Quiz themed: "100 years, 100 questions" will be organized in collaboration with local partners.

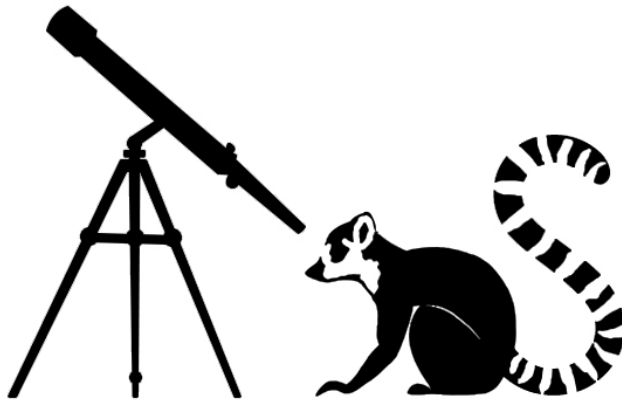


Figure 1. The official logo of MASS: a lemur pointing his telescope skywards. Lemurs are a species endemic to the island of Madagascar.