

# The French Network for Observing Comets and Small Solar-System Bodies

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For the apparition of P/Halley the CNRS set up RCP639 (Cooperative Research Programme), one part of which was to coordinate French amateur work. This carried out a training programme, at first by publishing (with help from ESO) an observational manual (eds: J.L. Heudier, J.C. Merlin and M. Festou), and then by a series of courses covering astrometry, photography, visual magnitude estimation, and drawing of jets. These courses were provided by J.L. Heudier, J.C. Merlin and T. Laverge, and were taken by about 100 observers. The author was asked to undertake the organization of the section so that it might become a permanent network of observers of comets and minor bodies.

At present the network comprises more than 220 participants, clubs and individuals, grouped into 19 regions. A meeting bringing together about 30 of the best amateur observers was held at Calern on June 6–8, and the observations obtained for the apparition of Comet Halley have been collated with a view to their publication by the CNRS. Those present at the meeting, and many others, have asked that the network be kept in being. With some restructuring, the CNRS will be asked to form it into a strictly amateur Cooperative Research Programme.

The network has important assets (and can obtain others). These include: a) about one hundred trained observers, with an observing manual and positional reduction programmes; b) an observatory at Plan de la Tour (in the Var), with a 300 × 500-mm telescope built by REOSC, which is capable of reaching mag. 18 with a 9° field, and a photographic laboratory. Information about use of the telescope can be obtained from D. Albanese, 103 rue Jean Aicard, Fréjus (Var).

If the network is continued, it will be able to use IT methods currently under development to enable anyone to access programs for calculating ephemerides, and identification of minor bodies in the Solar System, that are used for the Schmidt at Calern. This will be possible only with the help of CNRS.

At the meeting it was decided to continue training courses, to prepare new project lists, more suitable for each type of activity, and finally, to appeal to the major amateur organisations to help in the network's activity and thus enable it to form a part of international observational work.