

Fellows at ESO



Gaël James

Gaël James

Astronomy always interested me as a child, but the truth is that I had thought of many other professions before choosing this one. At least until I met two very enthusiastic astronomy professors while I was studying physics at Orsay University near Paris, in 1999. Not only did they pass on to me their passion for trying to understand the Universe, but, knowing about my origins and my growing interest to come back to South America, they also showed me the first pictures of the VLT while it was still being built and told me about its impressive first scientific achievements. The international aspect of the project and its foreseen impact on astronomy were definitely something of which I wanted to be a part.

I followed a Masters course at the Paris Observatory and had first contact with ESO for my thesis. After this, I obtained my PhD at the Paris Observatory studying chemical abundances of heavy elements in globular cluster stars. This work relied on high-resolution spectroscopic data taken at the VLT. During my PhD I also discovered the pleasure of observing in several observatories around the world, amongst which of course were La Silla and Paranal. I finally joined ESO as a fellow in October 2005 after completing my PhD and having spent a year as a teaching and research assistant in Paris.

Now, I work at the Paranal Observatory as a support astronomer. In particular,

I am the Instrument Fellow for UVES, the VLT high-resolution ultraviolet and visual échelle spectrograph. In a few months, I will take over as its 1st Instrument Scientist. This has given me a lot of experience with an instrument that I regularly use for my science. Coupled with the rare human experience of working with highly dedicated professionals in a challenging but friendly environment, this has made my experience at ESO a great success.

Lorenzo Monaco

I received my PhD in astronomy from Bologna University in 2004. Before joining ESO in June 2005, I also covered a post-doctoral position at the Trieste Observatory. Therefore, the position at ESO was going to be my first experience in an international institution and I was very much looking forward to it.

Working at ESO is a wonderful experience for a young astronomer. The number of seminars at the ESO Vitacura office in Santiago, together with the visiting scientist programme, provides the opportunity to meet a number of scientists working on very different fields. Furthermore, the environment is enriched by the continuous flow of people joining ESO, from senior astronomers to fellows and students. On the other hand, due to the observatory duties, some difficulties do exist in meeting colleagues in Santiago. Occasions like the traditional VVV, Vitacura Vino y Verbos, are thus

very stimulating. At the VVV everyone is invited to briefly present any news considered interesting. Being in charge of organising the VVV for about one and half years was a nice opportunity to be directly involved in the Vitacura science life.

My research activity is focussed on the study of resolved stellar populations in the Local Group with the main aim of understanding the processes which drive galaxy formation. In particular, recently I spent a large part of my time computing chemical abundances from high-resolution spectra of Red Giant Branch stars in the Sagittarius dwarf spheroidal galaxy, which certainly represents the most striking ongoing merger event in the Milky Way.

At the La Silla Observatory I spend most of my time working with the 3.6-m telescope instruments. Supporting these instruments is very instructive. With EFOSC2 I could use observing modes with which I was not familiar (e.g. low-resolution spectroscopy, polarimetry), while with HARPS I could refine my expertise with high-resolution spectroscopy. Taking care of an instrument is a very stimulating task.

Spending a few years at ESO allowed me to start many new collaborations. I could expand both my technical and science-related knowledge and I was able to start investigating fields to which I had not been exposed.



Lorenzo Monaco