

Astronomy proves no joke for well-known comic

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Innocent Twitter banter between a Cardiff University astronomer and well-known Irish TV presenter and comic Dara O Briain has sparked a major on-line search for stars.

Thousands of [Twitter](#) followers of the Irish TV presenter and comic were treated to a lesson in star gazing with the help of a University [astronomer](#) and an internet controlled telescope.

The one-off on-line event followed a chance exchange of [tweets](#).

"Dara O Briain had his first taste of using a robotically controlled telescope when he took part in the BBC's Stargazing Live event earlier this year," said Honorary lecturer and Las Cumbres Observatory director

of Education and Public Outreach, Dr. Edward Gomez from the School of Physics and Astronomy.

"Given his interest in the subject I've become a regular follower of him on Twitter. So when Dara's tweeted that he'd like to use the telescope again, I thought I'd offer him the chance to observe the cosmos and, to my surprise, Dara responded immediately."

With the support of the Institute for Astronomy in Hawaii, Dr Gomez was able to provide Dara with an hour of observing time using one of Las Cumbres Observatory's 2m robotic telescopes in Hawaii. Las Cumbres Observatory is in the process of constructing a global network of 42 robotic telescopes, which will be available to the public and professional scientists remotely via the internet.

What started out as two people discussing using a robotic telescope for an hour, turned into an experience which thousands of people had the chance to share on-line.

Through his Twitter account, the well-known Irish comic and presenter of the BBC programme Mock the Week asked his half-a-million followers for suggestions of what to observe in his session. Using the Twitter hashtag #ShowMeStars anyone on the internet was able to keep up with the observing session as it happened.

"We realised we could have thousands of people watching the observations happen. We rapidly made up a web page which pulled in people's comments from Twitter, alongside the observations as they were coming in," said Dr. Gomez.

"This page proved so popular that our web servers were in danger of collapse. This whole event was totally ad-hoc, but that was part of the serendipitous beauty of it. We were engaging with members of the

public who may never have looked through a telescope or been interested in astronomy previously," he added.

Commenting on his observing experience Dara O Briain said, "Many thanks to all at Las Cumbres Observatory for the kind offer of time on Faulkes [Telescope](#) North. I feel guilty that their reward was for me to crash their servers by directing too many people to them. Still no good deed goes unpunished.

"If it's any comfort it's also a sign of how many people chose to spend their lunchtime with me, traversing the skies, looking at the awe-inspiring sights of the cosmos. And well done for offering that access halfway across the world."

The Show Me Stars website can be found at portal.lcogt.net/showmestars

Provided by Cardiff University

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