

Swiss duo win award for spotting distant planets

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A pair of Swiss astrophysicists who were the first to discover a planet from beyond our solar system were honoured Tuesday with a major Spanish science award.

Michel Mayor, 70, and Didier Queloz, 45, took the BBVA Frontiers of Knowledge Award for basic sciences for their "pathbreaking development" of new techniques that allow us to peer at planets revolving around stars.

The two scientists invented a technique known as radial velocity to spot

planets moving around sun-like stars. It works by detecting changes in the star's light caused by the [gravitational pull](#) of a planet.

This led to the discovery in 1995 of a giant planet, baptised 51 Pegasi b, "which spawned a revolution in astronomy," said the international jury that conferred the 400,000-euro (\$519,000) award.

Today there are more than 500 so-called [exoplanets](#).

"At that time there were very few people doing this, it was a kind of bizarre, weird project," Queloz said.

"We had built this really precise machine and thought it was going to take years to detect a planet. Then, suddenly, after a couple of months there was the first signal," he said in a BBVA Foundation statement.

Mayor said he believed the work was a recognition for the duo's nearly 20 years of "game-changing" work.

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