

# Can one buy the right to name a planet? IAU responds

April 13 2013

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In the light of recent events, where the possibility of buying the rights to name exoplanets has been advertised, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) wishes to inform the public that such schemes have no bearing on the official naming process. The IAU wholeheartedly welcomes the public's interest to be involved in recent discoveries, but would like to strongly stress the importance of having a unified naming procedure.

More than 800 planets outside the Solar System have been found to date, with thousands more waiting to be confirmed. Detection methods in this field are steadily and quickly increasing—meaning that many more

exoplanets will undoubtedly be discovered in the months and years to come.

Recently, an organisation has invited the public to purchase both nomination proposals for exoplanets, and rights to vote for the suggested names. In return, the purchaser receives a certificate commemorating the validity and credibility of the nomination. Such certificates are misleading, as these campaigns have no bearing on the official naming process—they will not lead to an officially-recognised exoplanet name, despite the price paid or the number of votes accrued.

Upon discovery, exoplanets and other [astronomical objects](#) receive unambiguous and official catalogue designations. While exoplanet names such as 16 Cygni Bb or HD 41004 Ab may seem boring when considering the names of planets in our own Solar System, the vast number of objects in our Universe—[galaxies](#), stars, and planets to name just a few—means that a clear and systematic system for naming these objects is vital. Any naming system is a scientific issue that must also work across [different languages](#) and cultures in order to support collaborative worldwide research and avoid confusion.

To make this possible, the IAU acts as a single arbiter of the naming process, and is advised and supported by [astronomers](#) within different fields. As an international scientific organisation, it dissociates itself entirely from the commercial practice of selling names of planets, stars or even "real estate" on other planets or moons. These practices will not be recognised by the IAU and their alternative naming schemes cannot be adopted.

However, the IAU greatly appreciates and wishes to acknowledge the increasing interest from the general public in being more closely involved in the discovery and understanding of our Universe. As a result in 2013 the IAU Commission 53 [Extrasolar Planets](#) and other IAU

members will be consulted on the topic of having popular names for [exoplanets](#), and the results will be made public on the IAU website. Meanwhile, astronomers and the public are encouraged to keep using the existing accepted nomenclature—details of which can be found on the Astronomy for the Public section of the IAU web page, under [Naming Astronomical Objects](#).

Provided by International Astronomical Union

Citation: Can one buy the right to name a planet? IAU responds (2013, April 13) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-04-planet-iau.html>

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