

Hubble Space Telescope turning 25 this month

April 16 2015, by Bob Yirka



The achievements of those working on the Hubble Space Telescope (a joint U.S. and European effort) will be noted around the world next week on April 24th, the twenty fifth anniversary of its launch into orbit. Astrophysicist Mario Livio (who has been working with the telescope since 1991) has outlined some of the more memorable moments space scientists have had while working with the telescope in a Comments piece in the journal *Nature*, and offers suggestions for the future. The journal has also published a News Feature piece focusing on the scientists and engineers who have labored to keep the telescope working and who have analyzed the data and images sent back to Earth, along with an accompanying *Nature* Video series with interviews with key people on various projects associated with the telescope.

The development, building and launching of the Hubble Space Telescope marked a major milestone in both technological and cosmological terms, allowing scientists to see things that had never been seen before. The anniversary will be highlighted by a symposium held by The Space Telescope Science Institute from April 20 - 23, celebrating the achievements by those who have worked to make the telescope such a success. To date, the telescope has been used to conduct over a million observations with researchers publishing over 12,000 papers based on what they have found. It helped space become mainstream, Livio notes, with images of distant places regularly making their way onto news and social media sites. But, he argues, the age of the telescope cannot be ignored, it will likely only be useful for another five years or so; he thinks we ought to be even more ambitious—by building a new [space telescope](#) with a 39 foot primary mirror (Hubble's largest is 21.3 feet) with new technology that could take images that are 25 times sharper than Hubble.

Livio also believes that the focus of new space telescopes should be fixed firmly on looking for life outside of our solar system—he thinks if we build good enough telescopes we should be able to place meaningful statistical constraints on the likelihood of life existing elsewhere, or better yet, find evidence that it exists.

The anniversary of the telescope also serves to highlight how far cosmological science has come over the past quarter century, and sheds some light on new projects in the works, such as the James Web Space Telescope, scheduled for launch in 2018, and the more long-term, WFIRST/AFTA project.

More information: *Nature* 520, 287–289 (16 April 2015) [DOI: 10.1038/520287a](#)
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