

Preface

IAU Colloquium 174 focused on the topic of small galaxy groups. In a sense that means about half of all galaxies, since this is about the fraction which are to be found in groups of a few members. The idea for the conference came from a discussion between Arthur Chernin, Igor Karachentsev and us. We originally envisaged a meeting which would focus on galaxy triplets. The idea accreted a few more galaxies, eventually focusing on small galaxy groups, and this was the first time that a large international meeting had focused on the particular topic.

Defining a small group is not too difficult, at least at the low end — triple galaxies are the smallest groups. The importance of the number three is related to the questions of stability: two major galaxies can form a stable system, a triple system cannot. More generally, a small group is a system where the dynamics are more complex than in binary galaxies, and where the methods of the few body problem can be applied on the galactic scale. Such systems may include many smaller galaxies along with the dominant ones, such as in the Local Group itself; thus the topic of the conference was generally systems of $3+N$ galaxies, where N is at most a few dozens. They cover a wide range of scales from 50 kpc to 700 kpc.

The meeting was sponsored by the IAU, the University of Turku and the Academy of Finland, and we are very grateful for their help and financial support. Around 90 participants from 25 countries gathered in an inordinately hot and dry June at the Alabama Conference Center in Turku, Finland, so that even visitors from the real Alabama were surprised by the heat! Able assistance was rendered by Jaana Lindgren of the University's Conference Center, and by Sirpa Reinikainen, Seppo Mikkola, Jia-Qing Zheng, Matti Koskimies, Pasi Nurmi, Tuomas Savolainen, Harry Lehto, Alexander Mylläri, Mari Hanski, Tapio Pursimo, Leo Takalo, Eira Kotoneva and Raimo Junes all from Tuorla Observatory. Very able press-related help was provided by Paula Heino and Leena Tähtinen. Special thanks go to Rami Rekola and Gene Byrd for all sorts of extra help.

Mauri Valtonen and Chris Flynn

The front cover shows the galaxy triplet HCG 88. Credit: Jaime Perea, Instituto de Astrofisica de Andalucia, and the Nordic Optical Telescope.

Scientific Organizing Committee

Mauri Valtonen (chair)	Finland
Joanna Anosova	USA
Lia Athanassoula	France
Gene Byrd	USA
Arthur Chernin	Russia
Francoise Combes	France
Paul Hickson	Canada
Walter Huchtmeier	Germany
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