

Knowing the people who come to public astronomical observatories: The case of Akita prefecture, Japan

N. Kawamura

Akita University, Tegata-gakuen, Akita, 010-8502 Japan
email: norihito@ed.akita-u.ac.jp

The purpose of this research is to know and gain a better understanding of people who come to astronomical observatories and to find out more about their experiences and thoughts on astronomy. To find some of the issues about science communication in astronomy, the author carried out questionnaire research studies involving high school students and junior high school and elementary school teachers.

One of the questions to high school students dealt with what heavenly bodies they wanted to observe when they had a chance to use a telescope. Generally, the students tend to want to see the heavenly bodies in our solar system.

Some questions to teachers dealt with actual situations in teaching astronomy, dealing with any problems, and having telescopes as teaching instruments in school. Almost all elementary school teachers were assigning homework to observe the stars, but almost all the teachers who were assigning these homework projects found some difficulties. E.g. one of the major problems was that teachers could not instruct students directly. About 70

The author's co-worker carried out questionnaire research at every astronomical event with the visitors who came to our observatory center. One of his questions dealt with what heavenly bodies they wanted to observe. The visitors tend to want to see planets, nebulae, and clusters using a telescope. In addition, they also tend to want to watch temporary events such as eclipses. In short, people hope that a telescope will give them a better view of the moon, planets and stars. Understanding astronomy may not be the main reason why they visit an observatory.