



NASA ASTROBIOLOGY INSTITUTE ANNUAL REPORT YEAR [July 2002 - June 2003]



Intl. Partners: Astrobiology Society of Britain

Astrobiology Society of Britain
Executive Summary
Director/Leader: Charles Cockell

Introduction

The Astrobiology Society of Britain emerged in 2003 from the UK Astrobiology Forum and Network. In an effort to formalize the network, which was previously an informal e-mail list of those in the UK interested in Astrobiology, the society was established. The Society maintains affiliate status with the NAI and is the professional society representing the astrobiology community in the UK. Its membership is international in scope and it has members from the US and European countries. The main purpose of the Society is to organize meetings and aid discussion amongst astrobiologists in the UK and to involve itself in international efforts such as fund raising for international fellowships.

Recent developments

UK Astrobiology Conference

In March 2003, the UK held its first astrobiology meeting in Girton College, Cambridge. The meeting was split into two days. The first day was a general meeting covering many aspects of astrobiology from the origins of life to robotic astrobiology. It was an inclusive day, with discussion encouraged amongst any members of the community with interests in astrobiology who wished to attend. The second day was a more specialist day, focusing on the conditions for the origin and emergence of life. Over 80 people attended the conference, including representatives from UK corporations with an interest in astrobiology.

Astrobiology Society of Britain

During the Girton meeting it was proposed that the UK astrobiology forum and network be disbanded and replaced by a new society that would more formally represent the interests of the UK astrobiology community. Whereas previously the forum was an unelected informal committee, the committee of the new society would be an elected, accountable structure. Over 50 people paid an initial membership fee of £5.00 to join the society. Following the meeting elections were held for the committee and the society was established.

Other developments

The Society comes into being during an exciting time for the UK in

astrobiology. The UK–led exobiology lander, the Beagle 2, is on its way to Mars and is expected to begin its work on the surface of Mars in December 2003. The Open University held its inaugural opening of its Center for Astrobiology early in the year, demonstrating the interest in astrobiology amongst UK universities. Other meetings with astrobiology themes have been held in the UK; for example the Society for General Microbiology held a special session on astrobiology. Within this context, the environment for the existence of the Society is good.

Future developments

The Society will hold its first committee meeting in September 2003, where the direction and future plans of the society will be discussed. Possible directions of the Society include:

- Planning another UK astrobiology meeting
- Raising funds with the Federation of Astrobiology Organizations (FAO) for an international fellowship.
- Promoting astrobiology by co–sponsoring meetings with other organizations
- Expanding its membership

General publications

Astrobiology 2003. Abstracts of the UK Astrobiology Meeting, Girton College, Cambridge (www.astrobiologysociety.org.uk)