

## PREFACE

The loss of a sky free from light pollution and radio interference is no less an environmental and cultural loss than the loss of clean air, forests, or diversity of species. The capabilities of optical observatories are continually eroded by urban growth and its baneful accompanying sky illumination. From even the most remote locations radio astronomers cannot escape radio interference because it increasingly originates from orbiting satellites. Sadly, a minority of the children of Europe and North America grow up knowing the Milky Way and meteors. As the general public and the astronomical community become bathed in this electromagnetic fog, these children are now becoming the legislators and business leaders upon whom the science of astronomy relies for its support. Action must be taken, and quickly.

This pioneering special issue is an important tool with which astronomers and other concerned professionals can learn more about these issues and get involved in the various efforts to improve the situation. I salute the Italian astronomers, both amateur and professional, who have done excellent work to characterize and reduce light pollution. I also invite them to become active at the international level through organizations such as the International Dark-Sky Association ([www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)) and the International Astronomical Union (especially Commission 50). The current IAU effort is centered on Symposium No. 196, "Preserving the Astronomical Sky," to be held in Vienna in July 1999 (full information at the above Web address). This meeting will discuss all of the above issues in detail, as well as make resolutions for consideration by the UN Committee for the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. For example, might not the dark night sky be declared a World Heritage Site?

The battles are tough, but not hopeless. One only needs to look at the history of the past decade to see that amazing things can happen in a relatively short time. Please join the authors of this volume in preserving for the future our common heritage of the sky.

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