

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)  
CALLING PLANET EARTH - SPACE OUTREACH TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC (3)

Author: Mr. Alexandre Sole  
Open University, United Kingdom

## IS BEING A PLANETARY SCIENTIST THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD?

**Abstract**

Planetary science, understood in a broad sense including Astrobiology, is a discipline that in addition to generating great fascination and awe through the questions it tries to answer and the discoveries it makes, helps us understand what our place in the universe is, where we come from and who we are. At the same time, what we have learned through planetary science brings to our attention a planet that is truly unique: the Earth.

Our planet is unique in many respects, the most remarkable of which is that it harbours life, from simple unicellular life to complex organisms and what we call intelligent life. But planetary science may in the not too-distant future end up revealing that our planet is in fact not so unique, that life exists and can thrive in other planetary bodies of our solar system or of other solar systems.

This discipline thus has not only a very strong and appealing scientific content, but its discoveries can also have profound philosophical, social, cultural and even religious implications. Even if we consider planetary science only from a non-biological perspective, its findings have the capacity of leaving us astonished, as over the decades and over the centuries it has shown and described our solar system with an ever-increasing level of detail. We have, for instance, gone a long way since the discovery of the Galilean Moons in the 17th century up until the spectacular images of these moons relayed back to Earth by the Voyager spacecrafts in the late 70s and early 80s and the Galileo spacecraft in the 90s.

Working to answer the kinds of questions that planetary scientists try to answer, and developing the means they use to do so, are therefore probably some of the most exciting and rewarding things that one can do in life. Being a planetary scientist might thus be one of the best jobs in the world.

To find out whether this is so, and to get some insight on things like how one becomes a planetary scientist and what is involved in actually working as one, different facts, and the results of a survey conducted among top planetary scientists and engineers from different countries, are presented.

The author complements this information presenting his own experience learning planetary science at the Open University (UK), and tries to identify some optimal approaches and resources to become professionally involved in this field.