100 supernovae discovered from the UK

An extraordinary series of supernova discoveries during August, initially by Mark Armstrong of Rolvenden, Kent and then by Tom Boles of Coddenham, Essex, enabled the 100th supernova found from the UK to be registered. This is certainly a historic moment for UK amateur astronomy.

The flurry of successes began when Mark found a magnitude 17.2 supernova (later designated SN 2003gu) in the galaxy UGC 12331 on an image of August 3. Within days he added another, SN 2003gw in UGC 3252, initially recorded on August 7. Tom Boles found supernova 2003gx in MCG +06-3-7 and 2003hc in UGC 1993, but more excitement was in store.

The night of August 19/20 proved very clear for many UK observers even though very warm, as the extraordinary run of exceptionally hot nights this summer continued. Tom obtained a very large number of images, which necessitated a marathon checking session the following day. He began to find suspects which, being recorded only on a single night, meant that follow-up images were needed on the next available clear opportunity in order to satisfy the requirements of the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams in the USA, who have responsibility for announcing such discoveries.

Fortunately another clear night arrived on Aug 20/21 and no less than four supernovae were confirmed from the previous night's suspects. The first three were designated SNe 2003hi, 2003hj and 2003hk, and a preliminary announcement appeared on Electronic Telegram No 41 issued by the Central Bureau. The sight of three supernovae found by a UK observer on one such announcement must surely be very satisfying for true patriots! The fourth object, supernova 2003hm was announced in Electronic Telegram 42 as the flurry seemed almost set to overwhelm the Central Bureau's staff.

The first supernova ever to be found from the UK in living memory was discovered only seven years ago when Mark found one in the galaxy NGC 673 on an unfiltered CCD image obtained in October 1996. I received his phone call in the 'dead of night' and it took some time to realise the significance of this find. It was to steer the future of supernova hunting by demonstrating just how successful patrollers using CCD equipment can be, provided large numbers of images are secured each clear night and an effective checking system developed.

However even with this lead, it was difficult to envisage that just seven years later, no less than 100 supernovae in distant galaxies would have been found by observers based in the UK. Congratulations to Mark Armstrong, Tom Boles, Stephen Laurie, Steven Foulkes and Ron Arbour who have contributed to this amazing success.

It should be added that during August, discoveries of novae and supernovae by members of the UK Nova/Supernova Patrol based here and abroad coincidentally also passed the 100 mark. This patrol started in 1976 with John Hosty finding the first nova in 1977 and Mirko Villi and Giancarlo Cortini jointly finding the first supernova in 1991, all by visual means. We also extend congratulations to all patrol members who have put in so many hours in the hunt for these elusive objects.

Guy M. Hurst, *Coordinator, UK Nova/Supernova Patrol*