

Media invitation, 26 November 2019

Hans Sigrist Symposium 2019: Fascinating Exoplanet Science

The Hans Sigrist Symposium, which is taking place on Friday, December 6, 2019, is to address the topic of exoplanet research – and will therefore revolve around the question of whether Earth-like planets orbit other suns in the universe. The occasion coincides with the presentation of the prestigious Prize of the Hans Sigrist Foundation, which is based at the University of Bern, to the Dutch Astronomer, Prof. Dr. Ignas Snellen. The keynote speech by Ignas Snellen is entitled "The Search for Extraterrestrial Life".

Following the presentation of the Nobel Prize for Physics to three exoplanet researchers, the exploration of extrasolar planets has recently witnessed a considerable surge in interest. The Swedish Academy based its decision on the importance of this area of research to a considerable extent because of its search for extraterrestrial life.

And the groundbreaking work of Ignas Snellen is helping this search to take some major strides forward: The 49-year-old scientist has developed a method which enables the molecules in the atmospheres of exoplanets to be clearly identified. This technology paves the way for the detection of what are known as 'bio-signatures' beyond our solar system in the future: Molecules and other determinants, with which the scientific proof of life is able to succeed.

This year's symposium has been organized by the Center for Space and Habitability CSH, the world-leading, interdisciplinary space research center at the University of Bern. Its Director, Astrophysicist Prof. Dr. Kevin Heng, was Chairman of the Hans Sigrist Prize Committee for the academic year of 2018/19: "This year's Hans Sigrist Symposium is a celebration of one of the youngest and most dynamic disciplines in science: the study of exoplanets. We have thrown a few surprises into the program, including a panel discussion at the end. You will hear about the history of exoplanets, its latest developments, the intersection between exoplanet science and medicine, and the usefulness of 'useless science'."

"The Foundation is excited about the upcoming Hans Sigrist Symposium, where, this year, top scientists will speak about issues involved in research about space that also have implications for life on earth, including talks on the building blocks of life and medicine in the age of artificial intelligence", adds Prof. Dr. Norbert Trautmann, president of the Hans Sigrist Foundation.

Award winners receive 100,000 CHF to help further their research. They are not only invited to speak in Bern at the annual Hans Sigrist Symposium but also take part in the University's Dies academicus ceremony the following day, where they receive the prize.

CSH director Kevin Heng comments on the subject matters of this year's symposium in an interview published by the online-magazine "uniaktuell": [Exoplanet Research: A Rising Star of Science](#).

Personal details: Prof. Dr. Ignas Snellen

Born 1970, Geldrop, The Netherlands

1993, undergraduate degree in Astronomy, Leiden University, The Netherlands

1997, Ph.D. in Astronomy, Leiden University, The Netherlands

1997–2000, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Cambridge, UK

2000–2004, University Lecturer, Astronomy, University of Edinburgh, UK

2004–2009, Assistant Professor of Astronomy, Leiden University, The Netherlands

2009–2012, Associate Professor of Astronomy, Leiden University, The Netherlands

Since 2012, Professor of Astronomy, Leiden University, The Netherlands

Media professionals are kindly invited to the Hans-Sigrist-Symposium:

Date: Friday, December 6, 2019, 8.30 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.

Location: UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, Lecture Hall A003, 3012 Bern

Program: Please find the program attached or go to www.sigrist.unibe.ch/symposium

Free admission, language of conference is English

Speakers:

Prof. Dr. Adam Burgasser, Department of Physics, University of California, San Diego (USA)

Prof. Dr. Brice-Olivier Demory, Center for Space and Habitability CSH, University of Bern

Prof. Dr. Matthias Erb, Institute of Plant Sciences, University of Bern

Prof. Dr. Kevin Heng, Center for Space and Habitability CSH, University of Bern

Prof. Dr. Douglas Lin, Astronomy & Astrophysics Department, University of California, Santa Cruz (USA)

Prof. Dr. Ignas Snellen, Leiden Observatory, Leiden University (NL)

Prof. Dr. Norbert Trautmann, Hans Sigrist Foundation, University of Bern

Prof. Dr. Raphael Sznitman, ARTORG Center for Biomedical Engineering Research, University of Bern

Prof. Dr. Susanne Wampfler, Center for Space and Habitability CSH, University of Bern

Please register by December 5 at medien@unibe.ch / Phone +41 31 631 41 42.

Interview requests can be sent to the same address.

Hans-Sigrist-Prize

Each year, the Hans Sigrist Foundation Board decides the field of the prize from a selection of proposals, from which an internationally-compiled expert committee nominates candidates worldwide. This year's prize committee was led by Prof. Dr. Kevin Heng from the Center of Space and Habitability. The Hans Sigrist Foundation Board makes the final decision regarding the award. Prize winners can use the prize money (100,000 CHF) to fund further their research.

[More information about Hans-Sigrist-Stiftung](#)

Award winners receive the prize at the University's Dies academicus ceremony, which takes place the day after the symposium each year. This year's dies academicus takes place on Saturday, December 7, 2019, 10 a.m. in the Casino Bern (Casinoplatz 1, 3011 Bern). The media invitation for the Dies academicus is to follow shortly.

[More information about the Dies academicus](#)

Further Information about the Hans Sigrist Foundation:

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Yours sincerely

Media Relations

University of Bern