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Engaging the public at the bluedot festival

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Events such as music festivals present a novel way of accessing members of the public who would not normally engage in science outreach. In July 2016, we welcomed more than 14,000 visitors to the inaugural bluedot festival at Jodrell Bank Observatory, part of the University of Manchester.

Against the backdrop of the iconic Lovell Radio Telescope, the festival not only featured major names in music such as Jean-Michel Jarre and Underworld, but also included cultural events as well as an interactive science programme. Live science and planetarium shows and talks by eminent scientists, took place alongside an interactive science arena, known as the Star Field, where more than 200 scientists engaged with the public covering areas as diverse as carnivorous plants and the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), which will be the World's largest and most sensitive radio telescope.

The bluedot festival provided an opportunity to reach a much more diverse audience than that normally seen at a science centre, such as the Discovery Centre at Jodrell Bank. Indeed our survey of people attending bluedot suggests that 39% of visitors over the festival weekend had never visited a science centre before and more than 35% of visitors felt they were more interested in science after attending bluedot.

Having received awards for 'New Festival on the Block' and 'Mind Blowing Spectacle' (for Brian Eno's light installation) at the Association of Independent Festival Awards, the bluedot festival will return to Jodrell Bank in July 2017. This year we hope to welcome more than 20,000 visitors, giving them an opportunity to learn from, and engage with, a broad range of UK science.

I will present an overview of the vast array of outreach activities that we used to engage visitors during the bluedot festival, highlighting those which proved particularly successful, and which we will be taking forward for planning future outreach events.

Primary author: Dr KAY, Hilary (Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, University of Manchester)

Co-authors: Mr SLOAN, Jamie (Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, University of Manchester); RILEY, Julia (Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, University of Manchester); Dr GRUTZBAUCH, Ruth (Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, University of Manchester); Prof. ANDERSON, Teresa (PI on this project, Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, University of Manchester); Prof. O'BRIEN, Tim (CoI on this project, Jodrell Bank Centre for Astrophysics, University of Manchester)

Presenters: Mr SLOAN, Jamie (Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, University of Manchester); Dr GRUTZBAUCH, Ruth (Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, University of Manchester)

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