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# Scientists' debate over life in space includes strong believers, skeptics

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — Scientists searching for intelligent life in outer space say the odds, if not the evidence, tell them extraterrestrials exist, but one skeptic says that's doubtful, otherwise aliens would have visited Earth by now.

"I'd be willing to bet one hundred bucks that between now and the time I die we'll find evidence of intelligent life," said Al Hibbs, a retired space scientist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Hibbs moderated a debate on the issue Friday during the annual meeting of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, a group that debunks claims of supernatural powers.

Committee member Carl Sagan, a Cornell University astronomer, said before the debate that, "in a universe of 100 billion galaxies, each of which has a few hundred billion stars, the idea that our sun is the only star with an inhabited planet is laughable.

"Where do we come off to imagine we're the only kind of life in the universe?"

The speakers agreed there has yet to be a single confirmed report of an unidentified flying object, or UFO, from another planet, but most said they believe intelligent life must exist beyond Earth.

Because there is evidence that planets may exist around a dozen nearby stars, and because the chemical evolution that produced life on Earth exists throughout the known universe, the probability of intelligent life elsewhere is 100 percent, said Frank Drake, dean of natural sciences at the University of California's Santa Cruz campus.

Drake said it's possible extraterrestrial tourists view Earth as "a zoo," and already are here, in "Gray Line buses hovering above us," but choose not to reveal their presence.

"We are, as best we can tell, the result of completely normal processes, therefore life should be abundant in the universe," said Drake, who also is president of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute, a NASA-funded effort to search for radio signals from alien civilizations.

But Robert Rood, a University of Virginia astronomer, argued that, if advanced, intelligent civilizations exist elsewhere in our Milky Way galaxy, at least one would have colonized the galaxy and reached Earth by now.

"Even at five centuries (of travel time) to reach the nearest star, taking a few thousand years there until it got crowded, and then going to the next star, it takes only 20 million to 30 million years to get across the galaxy," a mere instant in the galaxy's multibillion-year history, Rood said.

He also said it's possible the formation of Earth's moon in a way that created ocean tides on Earth may be unique, thus making the evolution of the first life for s in tidal pools a fluke that occurred only here.

But, when asked if an extraterrestrial life form might exist and simply choose not to explore the galaxy, Rood replied: "That's certainly possible. . . . It requires a certain conceit on our part to think we're the only civilization among all those stars."

Jill Tarter, an institute astronomer, said the organization is seeking $65 million from NASA to finance a new 10-year systematic search of the heavens for radio signals that could be signs of an alien civilization.

Radio and optical astronomers in seven nations have conducted 48 separate searches for signs of extraterrestrial life in the last 27 years, "yet no one has found anything," Tarter said, adding that she isn't discouraged, since such searches weren't systematic.