

Quiet year for close encounters

By **FRANK LONGHURST**

Either unidentified flying objects are taking it easy this year, or they are avoiding close encounters with earthlings.

Mr Harry Griesberg, the co-ordinator of the Australian Centre for UFO Studies, Gosford, said yesterday that this year had been surprisingly quiet, with very few sightings in Australia or anywhere else in the world.

Mr Griesberg and about 22 other UFO-watchers are in Canberra for a three-day conference, which started at the Belconnen Way Motel yesterday, to discuss scientific research into UFO reports.

Of the 15 "most interesting" reported encounters last year, Tasmania was by far the most popular visiting place, with nine reported sightings confirmed by the centre as "unidentified".

Mr Griesberg said that it was unlikely that Tasmania was being visited any more frequently than any other part of Australia, but that because of its relative smallness and the relative enthusiasm of the UFO-watchers who reside there, sightings were more fre-

reside there, sightings were more frequently reported.

Four sightings were confirmed in Queensland, and one in Western Australia.

About 95 per cent of all sightings could be satisfactorily explained, Mr Griesberg said. The remaining percentage was considered "unidentified", and became the subject of future study by the centre.

Of the 15 most interesting cases, several had recurring factors. Most encounters were with lights, or the presence of light with no obvious source.

Motorists were the most frequent subjects of interest to the UFOs. Cars were tracked, sometimes for several kilometres, and were presumably ob-

served by the occupants of the objects.

During this time, witnesses have recorded that vehicle engines became uncontrollable, seemingly under some form of external control, lights flickered on and off, batteries were flattened and petrol was consumed in surprising quantities.

The centre documents each confirmed encounter, but will not be drawn into opinionating on UFOs. They may be extra-terrestrial, but there has been no evidence to support that theory.

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Mr Griesberg said that serious students of "UFOlogy" would keep open minds on the subject.

"Even if someone said that they saw a rocket ship, and it had wings and wheels and a little man inside was waving at them, we would not put a tag on it, we would investigate it of course, but if no logical explanation could be found, it would simply be unidentified", he said.

And until some concrete evidence was found to the contrary, "unidentified" is how they would remain.

The conference will continue until tomorrow. Mr Griesberg said that anyone who had questions about UFOs would be welcome to come along and ask them.