

# MEET THE ALIENS

Alien civilisations are likely to exist, but hopefully they won't be as scary as this lot

**SINCE** scientists discovered planets similar to Earth beyond our solar system, they have wondered whether there may be life forms like ours living on them.

The answer is still definitely “maybe”, but astrophysicists at Nottingham University have now worked out that we could have as many as 36 intelligent intergalactic neighbours.

Professor Christopher Conselice led the study. He said: “I think it is extremely important and exciting because for the first time we really have an estimate for this number of active intelligent, communicating civilisations that we potentially could contact.”

The theory is that, as so many millions of galaxies and planets exist, the chances are high that some kind of intelligent life must have developed on other worlds, in the same way that it has on Earth.

In 1961, an astronomer called Frank Drake tried to work out how many alien civilisations there could be. What became known as the Drake equation set out seven factors that you would need to estimate the number. But some of the factors were very hard to measure.

Now, Professor Conselice and his team have altered the equation to make their predictions more accurate. They have assumed that

the conditions for life would be similar to those on our own planet and that life would develop in a scientific way and not randomly. It depends on factors such as star formations and chemical reactions, which we know were vital in the development of life on Earth. This makes it easier to calculate how many other planets are capable of supporting life.

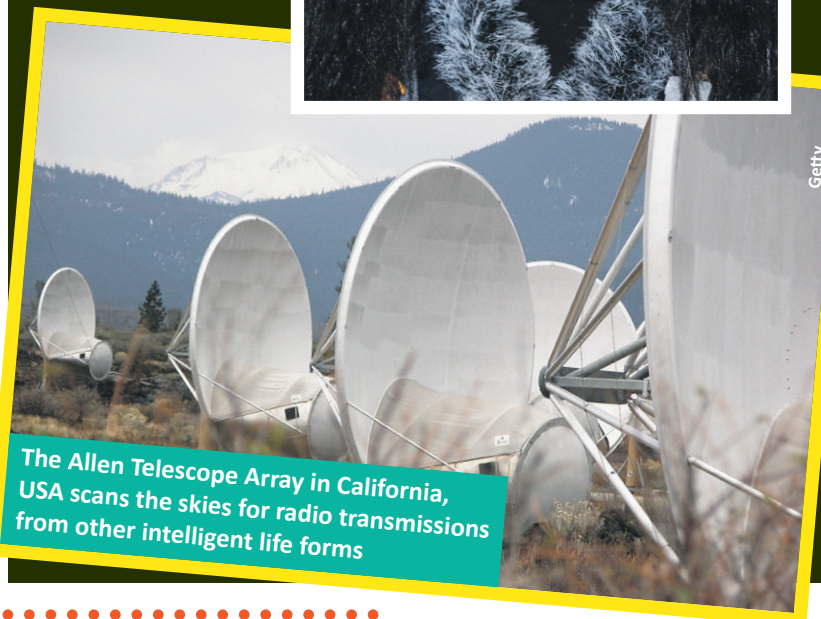
Professor Conselice reckons that, although it is only a theory at present, other life forms would look very similar to us. He said: “We wouldn't be super shocked by seeing them.”

Contacting them is going to take some time, however, as the nearest likely location of an intelligent life form is 17,000 light years away! It would take 6,120 years for a two-way communication between humans on Earth and aliens on that planet.

We will not actually know if Professor Conselice's study is correct until we find other forms of life, or they find us.

In the meantime, the search for alien life goes on. And there are definitely enough books, films and TV series to keep our appetite for aliens alive!

A Star Trek fan dressed as a Klingon alien. Scientists think real-life aliens may look similar to us



The Allen Telescope Array in California, USA scans the skies for radio transmissions from other intelligent life forms

## LIVING TO 100

**LIVING** an illness-free life beyond 100 years of age may be more likely, thanks to a new study by the University of California in the USA.

Diluting the blood plasma (the fluid that carries blood cells) of old mice with a special solution has reversed the signs of ageing. Experiments showed that the brain, liver and muscles all improved after the mice were injected with a solution of proteins and salts.

It is an exciting development that could mean today's young people stay youthful and healthy for much longer.



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This report is from the Science Museum in London



**WHEN** you think of do it yourself (DIY), you probably imagine making and building things yourself, such as decorating, putting up shelves or assembling flat-pack furniture.

But DIY goes far beyond home improvements. Although it's traditionally thought to have its roots in the 1950s and '60s, doing it yourself was by no means a new phenomenon back then. The 19th century saw many books describing practical projects, a pastime enjoyed by both men and women, in detail. Skilled turner Mary Gascoigne published her *Handbook of Turning* in 1842, explaining the art of woodturning using a lathe – a sort of carving machine to make decorative objects for the home.

You can read a brief history of DIY at [tinyurl.com/ScienceMuseumDIY](https://tinyurl.com/ScienceMuseumDIY).