

Is speculation about alien life legitimate science? Or merely a distraction?

Speculation about extraterrestrials seems to be everywhere these days. [Recently] it was “Tabby’s Star” (more officially known as KIC 8462852), whose mysterious dimming and brightening, [according to the latest analysis](#), is likely due to dust blocking different wavelengths of light rather than “alien megastructures.” Before that came reports of an interstellar asteroid—[not a spacecraft](#)—entering our solar system and a [UFO monitoring program conducted by the Department of Defense](#).

The attention given to such stories has some scientists worried, especially as social media amplifies claims of alien contact over other, more prosaic explanations.

“Currently, most SETI-related news seems to be interfering with conventional scientific discoveries, stealing the limelight—without following basic rules of science,” wrote Dutch exoplanet researcher Ignas Snellen of Leiden Observatory, on [a Facebook exoplanets discussion group](#) for professional astronomers.

Although he has “great respect for SETI scientists,” Leiden wrote, “there is no place for alien civilizations in a scientific discussion on new astrophysical phenomena, in the same way as there is no place for divine intervention as a possible solution.”

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SETI has a voluntary list of protocols to follow when something interesting is found. The first principle urges researchers to “verify that the most plausible explanation for the evidence is the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence, rather than some other natural phenomenon or anthropogenic phenomenon, before making any public announcement.”

Read full, original post: [When Reporting News About Aliens, Caution Is Advised](#)