

Texto para as questões de 1 a 4

8. Search for Habitable Planets

We know of one *habitable* planet in the Universe, habitable meaning suitable for supporting life such as that we are familiar with. That one habitable planet is our own: Earth. For centuries, some people have speculated that there may be many many such planets in other planet-star systems. Until the latter part of the 20th century, there was no evidence that planets of any sort around other stars even existed, much less habitable planets like Earth. That's not surprising. It's nearly impossible to see exoplanets because they are very distant, very faint and lost in the overwhelming glare of the stars they orbits. As of July 2007, four exoplanets were observed with direct imaging methods—planets that were very large and orbiting very faint stars with very large orbit radii. But although we cannot easily observe exoplanets directly, we have detected lots of them by certain effects they have on the stars they orbit.

The first detection of extrasolar planets was made by Alexander Wolszczan in 1994 by measuring the periodic change in arrival time of radio pulses from a pulsar—an incredibly dense neutron star remains of a supernova that normally emits very regular pulses of radio waves.

Planets orbiting other stars are called exoplanets, or extrasolar planets. Planets in any way similar to Earth are called terrestrial planets.