Latest results on gamma-ray pulsars with *Fermi*

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1. – Gamma-ray pulsars pre-*Fermi*

Gamma-ray astronomy has a long history, going back to the 1960s. In the 1990s, the Energetic Gamma Ray Experiment Telescope (EGRET), on board the *Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory* (CGRO([1]), 1991–2000), detected almost 300 gamma-ray sources, a majority of which were unidentified [Hartman et al. (1999)]. The seven gamma-ray pulsars detected by CGRO (6 by EGRET, and PSR B1509–58 by COMPTEL), shared many characteristics (e.g. young and highly energetic, mostly double-peaked) but also covered various categories: *radio-loud*, *radio-quiet* (Geminga), *soft* (MeV) , but the somewhat limited statistics (particularly above 5 GeV), made it challenging to discriminate between the leading pulsar emission models [Thompson (2004)]. For a review of the EGRET era results, immediately preceding the launch of *Fermi*, see Thompson (2008).

2. – The *Fermi* era

The *Fermi* gamma-ray space telescope, launched on 11 June 2008, is a giant leap forward for gamma-ray astronomy. The Large Area Telescope [Atwood et al. (2009)] (LAT), the main instrument on *Fermi*, uses silicon strip detectors (far superior to the old gaseous detectors), making it the most sensitive instrument in the ∼0.5–300 GeV energy range for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the LAT recently detected its billionth

([1]) The second of NASA's great observatories.

gamma ray (∼1000 times the number of gamma rays detected by EGRET in its lifetime) and is showing no signs of aging. Not surprisingly, *Fermi* quickly made a big impact in many areas, and pulsars in particular, for example uncovering a large population of *radio-quiet* gamma-ray pulsars hiding among the *previously unidentified* EGRET sources [Abdo et al. (2009), Saz Parkinson et al. (2010)]. The most recent catalog released by the LAT Collaboration, the Third LAT source catalog (3FGL), contains over 3,000 sources, of which approximately one third are *unassociated* [Acero et al. (2015)]. Uncovering the nature of LAT *unassociated* sources is (and will remain for many years) a key pursuit for the gamma-ray (and broader) astrophysics community. In this context, a number of statistical methods (e.g. machine learning techniques, neural networks), in combination with multi-wavelength follow-up observations are helping to identify the likely nature of many of these sources [Chiaro et al. (2016), Saz Parkinson et al. (2016)]. For a detailed review of the "Gamma-ray Pulsar Revolution", see [Caraveo (2014)].

2˙1. *Recent pulsar results with Pass 8*. – The event selection algorithms developed for the LAT are the result of a long, iterative process, with the various releases known as *Passes*. *Pass 6* data were publicly released after launch but based only on *pre-launch* information. *Pass 7* data, released in August 2011, incorporated knowledge gained from the first few years in orbit. The *Pass 8* release represents a complete redesign of every aspect of the event selection, leading to a significant increase in effective area, an improvement in the point-spread function, and a reduction in background contamination [Atwood et al. (2013)]. Because every *Pass* results in the entire *Fermi* data (from the beginning of the mission) being reprocessed, the release of *Pass 8* produced scientific results immediately after its release, without the need to wait for *additional* data.

A significant number of known pulsars suddenly showed gamma-ray pulsations with *Pass 8*, despite being previously undetected [Laffon et al. (2015)]. The *Pass 8* data also improved significantly the sensitivity of LAT blind searches for pulsars. The Einstein@Home survey, for example, recently reported 17 new (mostly radio-quiet) gamma-ray pulsars [Clark et al. (2017)]. The number of gamma-ray pulsars detected by *Fermi* (now over 200) continues to increase, with the rate of discovery showing no signs of tapering off([2]). Interestingly, millisecond pulsars (MSPs) represent roughly half the entire gamma-ray pulsar population, with some of them meeting the stringent criteria to be added to the pulsar timing arrays, thus aiding in the search for graviational waves [Ray et al. (2012)]. One of the most interesting new gamma-ray pulsars detected by the LAT is PSR J0540–6919, in the Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC), located at ∼50 kpc, making it the first extra-Galactic gamma-ray pulsar (and hence the most distant) ever detected [Ackermann et al. (2015)]. Curiously, PSR J0537–6910, also in the LMC and with very similar characteristics, still shows no gamma-ray pulsations.

2˙2. *Gamma-ray binaries with Fermi*. – Another gamma-ray source in the LMC that has recently attracted a great deal of attention was first identified, rather mun-

([2]) `https://confluence.slac.stanford.edu/x/5Jl6Bg` danely, as P3 [Ackermann et al. (2016)]. This source turns out to be a gamma-ray binary with a 10.3 day orbital period, as confirmed also by radio and X-ray observations [Corbet et al. (2016)]. Coming over four years after the discovery of 1FGL J1018.6–5856 (J1018), the first gamma-ray binary discovered by *Fermi* [Corbet et al. (2011), Ackermann et al. (2012)], this new gamma-ray binary broke several records (most luminous gamma-ray binary, first extra-Galactic gamma-ray binary), and like J1018, is likely powered by an energetic pulsar [Corbet et al. (2016)].

While many (if not most) gamma-ray binaries are thought to contain pulsars, in most cases the pulsar has eluded detection (e.g. LSI+61°303, LS 5039). In one recent case, however, the pulsar (J2032+4127) was discovered *first*, while the binary nature of the system was uncovered subsequently. When first discovered in a blind search by *Fermi*, PSR J2032+4127 was thought to be an isolated gamma-ray pulsar [Abdo et al. (2009)]. Long-term timing in radio, however, reveals it to be in a binary system with a very long (∼decades) orbital period [Lyne et al. (2015)]. Recent multi-wavelength monitoring observations report an increase in X-ray emission from the system (by a factor of ∼20 since 2010 and a factor of ∼70 since 2002) and refined its orbital period to be 45–50 yr, with its time of periastron predicted to be in November 2017 [Ho et al. (2017)].

The LAT has also been very successful at finding so-called "black widow" or "redback" systems: eclipsing binary millisecond pulsars *eating* away their low-mass companion star, with their radiation beams. Some of these systems are first identified through their multi-wavelength emission, such as the case of 0FGL J2339.8–0530 [Romani & Shaw (2011)]. Radio follow-up searches in this case revealed a pulsar [Ray et al. (2014)] and gamma-ray pulsations were also detected ([3]). Long term gamma-ray timing of PSR J2339–0533 recently revealed dramatic orbital-period modulations ascribed to a change in the gravitational quadrupole moment [Pletsch & Clark (2015)]. Due to the eclipsing nature of these systems, radio non-detections are frequent, making gamma-ray searches complementary. Indeed, in one case, the pulsar was discovered in gamma rays first [Pletsch et al. (2012)], with radio pulsations coming later [Ray et al. (2013)]. A number of redback candidates have been identified (e.g. 3FGL J2039.6–5618 [Romani (2015), Salvetti et al. (2015)], 3FGL J0212.1+5320 [Li et al. (2016), Linares et al. (2017)]) and searches for these pulsars are ongoing.

2·3. *Variable and transition gamma-ray pulsars*. – Until recently, gamma-ray pulsars were thought to be *steady* sources([4]). The long-term monitoring of large numberes of pulsars over a period of years, however, has started to reveal more complicated behavior in some sources. PSR J2021+4026, a bright, *radio-quiet* gamma-ray pulsar discovered by *Fermi* early on in the mission [Abdo et al. (2009)] experienced an abrupt drop in flux of ∼20%, associated with a ∼4% increase in spindown rate, also accompanied by changes in the pulse profile, making this the first known variable gamma-ray pul-

([3]) See talk by A. Belfiore at the 2013 Aspen Meeting on Physical Applications of Millisecond Pulsars, `http://aspen13.phys.wvu.edu/aspen_talks/Belfiore_Gamma_Ray_Searches.pdf`
([4]) In fact, a key characteristic distinguishing pulsars from AGN is precisely the *low variability*

sar [Allafort et al. (2013)]. The most recent observations appear to show that the flux of J2021+4026 has now gone back to its original values [Ng et al. (2016)].

An even more dramatic transition was detected in PSR J1023+0038, the so-called "missing link" pulsar known to have previously been in a Low Mass X-ray Binary state, subsequently switching to a rotation-powered state. Recently, this system experienced new state transition, with a five-fold increase in gamma-ray flux accompanying the disappearance of the radio pulsations [Stappers et al.(2014)].

Another pulsar that has benefitted from the long-term monitoring capabilities of the LAT is PSR J1119–6127 [Camilo et al. (2000)]. This young, energetic pulsar associated with supernova remnant G292.2–0.5 has an extremely large inferred surface magnentic field ($\sim 4 \times 10^{13}$G), and was detected as a gamma-ray pulsar early on by the LAT [Parent et al. (2011)]. Recently, the *Fermi* GBM [Younes et al. (2016)] and *Swift* [Kennea et al. (2016)] detected a series of strong SGR-like bursts, followed by hard X-ray pulsations [Antonopoulou et al. (2016)], in conjunction with a large spin-up glitch [Archibald et al. (2016)]. Radio pulsations disappeared [Burgay et al. (2016)], reappearing two weeks later [Burgay et al. (2016)]. Unfortunately, despite a one-week LAT Target of Opportunity (TOO) pointed observation (increasing the exposure by a factor of $\sim$2.4), no significant changes in gamma-ray flux were detected [Tam et al. (2016)], and no significant pulsations were detected post-burst [Younes et al. (2016)].

Finally, the recent possible detection of pulsed *soft* gamma-ray emission from PSR J1846–0258 (up to 100 MeV) is of great interest [Kuiper & Dekker (2016)]. This pulsar shares many similarities with PSR J1119–6127: large magnetic field and past *magnetar-like* bursts following a large glitch. Thus, it represents another possible "transition" pulsar, making it a worthwhile target to monitor, going forward.

3. – Conclusions

Since its launch, almost nine years ago, *Fermi* has produced a long list of discoveries in the field of gamma-ray pulsars. More surprisingly, the rate of these discoveries does not appear to be slowing down. *Fermi* continues to detect new pulsars in every category: young, MSPs, radio-loud, radio-quiet, etc. Finally, the longer data sets and the development of *Pass 8* are now enabling *Fermi* to delve deeper into new parameter space, revealing a range of *variability* in gamma-ray pulsars that was hitherto unknown.

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