Chasing DX

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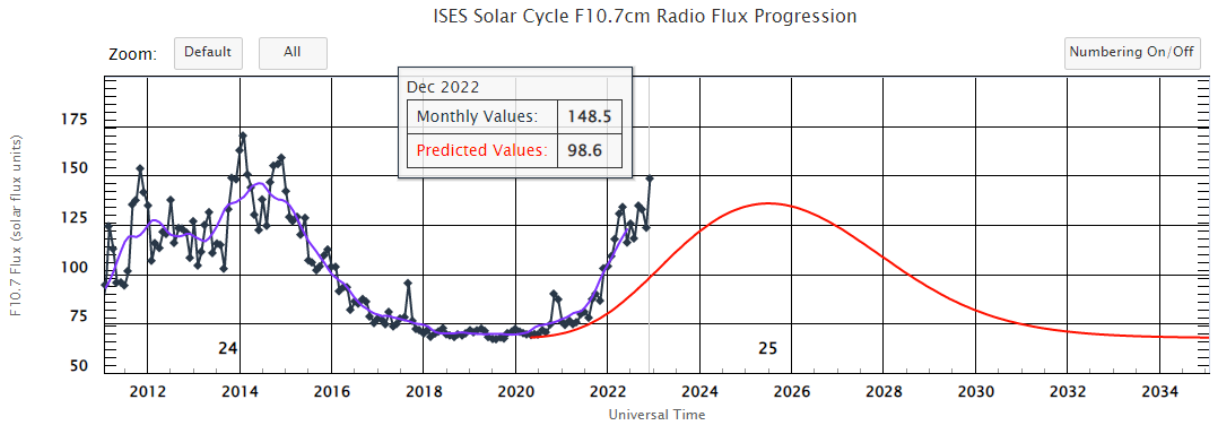
As we moved further into Cycle 25 with improving propagation, I have become more interested in chasing DX. The following is a short article to give you some tips and resources if you want to try your hand at it.

The graph below shows that the December 2022 monthly average solar flux value exceeded the predicted value by over 50%. Actual flux has exceeded predicted flux for all of 2022. At this point, it looks like the predictions that Cycle 25 would be a weak cycle similar to Cycle 24 were too pessimistic.



Note: Screen capture from https://www.swpc.noaa.gov/products/solar-cycle-progression (1/24/23)

Improving propagation and the use of CW or weak signal modulation modes make the chances of capturing those rare DX stations much higher - provided you can get through the pileups. To help with pileups, some recent DX stations are using MSHV for FT8 operation. That software allows the DX station to transmit and respond to multiple FT8 streams simultaneously, improving QSO rate and your chances of getting through. Even "100 watt and a wire" operators should have a good shot at rare DX for the next few years especially using these modes!

The first requirement for chasing DX is to know the frequency, time and how to listen. The how includes mode and if the operator is using different receive and transmit frequencies or "split operation". Of course, you can randomly tune around the ham bands and get lucky, but more likely you will get frustrated and give up. Getting some help on this aspect will go a long way. There are several websites which track DX-peditions and report on their progress from home country to the DX location such as DX News.com, DX WORLD and Announced DX Operations. The larger, well-funded DX-peditions are likely to have their own websites with the most up to date information.

Some DX-expeditions are quite arduous involving long ocean voyages with literally tons of radio equipment and supplies to support multi-week encampments in desolate locations without re-supply. The currently enroute Bouvet Island DX-pedition is one example of this type. Radio operations are likely

to begin around January 27, 2023. Bouvet Island is the second most sought after DXCC entity after North Korea. The last time Bouvet was put on the air was February 2008 and the anticipation of making a QSO with the current team is extremely high.

The funding goal for this project (see 3Y0J Funding) is $715,000! That goal was reached due to the generosity of the Bouvet team (each of the 13 members contributed $20,000 each), individual hams, DX clubs (the Northern CA DX club contributed $100,000) and corporate sponsors. Many DX-peditions will also charge for printed QSL cards and LOTW confirmations usually via ClubLog OQRS, but this is mainly to defray QSL costs. The entire Bouvet Island DX-pedition website (3Y0J)is packed with interesting information and worth a read. There is also a short article on the 3Y0J DX-pedition in the February 2023 issue of QST (pp.78-79).

As you might imagine, the exact operating schedules can change due to unforeseen travel delays, weather conditions, etc. Updated operating schedules can be found on the DX-pedition websites. But one site that I like is the DX calendar (DX News.com Calendar). This shows a month-by-month view of when various DX stations will be operating with links for more details on each.

These resources are very helpful, but how do you know when propagation is good enough for you to have a chance at a QSO? Join the TX DX Society email list (TDXS E-mail List Reflector). It is free and many local members report when they are receiving DX stations. You will want to subscribe to receive each individual posting so that you get DX alerts in a timely manner. You will receive emails that you are not interested in, but they can be easily deleted after scanning the subject line.

I was alerted by TX DX Society emails to FT8WW (Crozet Island) being received in South TX multiple times this month. I was able to receive FT8WW but could not get through the pileups. However, I was able to make a QSO with ET3AA (Ethiopia) after seeing reports by TX DX Society members.

The TX DX Society also operates a DX cluster which you can add to your favorite DX spotting or logging software (dxc.tdxs.net port 7373). However, these spots will not only be from local hams, so it is somewhat less useful. While non-members can use the email list and DX cluster, you might want to support this group by joining. For those who live more than 75 miles from downtown Houston (EL29hs) annual membership is only $12.50.

Obviously, my recent activities barely scratch the surface of chasing DX. Hopefully, it will encourage you to look further into this fascinating topic and join the chase.