

Earliest Use of the Term “Habitable Zone”?

ARE THE PLANETS
INHABITED?

BY
E. WALTER MAUNDER, F.R.A.S.

1913

strict conditions. If we assume that there are a hundred million stars within the ken of our telescopes, we may well believe that not more than one in a hundred of these would fulfil the condition of being a single and stable sun, such as ours. Of the planets revolving round these million suns—stable and efficient suns—can we expect that in more cases than one in a hundred there will be a planet in the habitable zone fulfilling all the other conditions of habitability, of size, mass, inclination of axis, circular orbit, and rotation? Of these ten thousand earths which may be made fit for the habitation of Man, can we assume that

- Studies of exoplanets and habitability use the concept of the “habitable zone,” where thermal conditions allow liquid water to exist on the surface of a planet.
- What may be the first use of the term, and the articulation of what is essentially the ‘Drake Equation’, appears in Maunder’s century-old popular book ‘Are the Planets Inhabited?’ published in 1913.
- This discovery overturns conventional wisdom which attributes the term to the 1950s.

E. Walter Maunder defined the habitable zone in a popular book published in 1913.