Nuclear X-ray sources in nearby galaxies

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1. Introduction and methodology

The "search for dwarf Seyfert nuclei" of Ho et al. (1995; 1997) has resulted in the publication of a statistically complete sample of ~ 470 spectrally classified nearby galaxy nuclei (hereafter referred to as the HFS sample). The demographics of this sample show that 11% of nearby galaxies have a Seyfert-type nucleus, 33% harbour a Low Ionisation Nuclear Emission-line Region (LINER) and 42% have a nucleus characterised by HII emission. The remainder of the galaxies showed no nuclear optical emission lines (NOEL). Here, we present the initial results of an examination of the X-ray properties of the HFS sample. This has been achieved by cross-correlating the HFS sample with the WGACAT (White et al. 1994), a catalogue of the soft X-ray sources detected in the pointed observation phase of the ROSAT PSPC. Though this catalogue has incomplete sky coverage and a bias towards observations of AGN, the results of the correlation still allow us to discern possible trends in the X-ray properties of the sub-samples and to identify individual sources of potential interest.

We have only considered WGACAT sources within the central 18' radius of the PSPC detector and observations with at least 8 ks integration time. This reduced catalogue was cross-correlated with the HFS galaxies, and a total of 58 coincidences of an X-ray source within 30'' of a galactic nucleus were found. A further 7 HFS galaxies within PSPC fields were not detected; a 95% upper limit on their nuclear X-ray flux was found by inspection of archival data.

2. Preliminary results

Fig. 1 shows clear trends in the luminosity ranges encompassed by the various HFS sub-samples. This is confirmed in Table 1, which gives the median luminosity for each sub-sample. Clearly, HII galaxies are the X-ray faintest sub-sample, whereas the broad-line nuclei (including both classical Seyferts and LINERS) are the brightest. Hardness ratios were calculated for all the detected sources from the WGACAT data. The 0.1 - 0.4 keV vs 0.4 - 0.9 keV hardness ratio (HR1) shows little distinction between classes, but there is some difference between the 0.4 - 0.9 keV vs 0.9 - 2 keV (HR2) values. The median values of HR2 are equivalent to an unabsorbed power-law continuum with $\Gamma \approx 1.7$ for the broad-line Seyfert/LINERs, and $\Gamma \approx 2.3$ for their narrow-line counterparts. This is consistent with the central regions of the galaxy being unobscured in the case of broad-line nuclei (with the hard X-ray AGN power-law continuum being directly visible). The softer spectra of the narrow-line nuclei may arise from thermal emission or in the reprocessing of the nuclear continuum in material surrounding the galactic nucleus. The NOEL nuclei are seen to have X-ray counterparts, which are quite luminous. These nuclei tend to be seen in elliptical host galaxies; thus it may be that the nuclear X-ray source is in fact the peak of bright extended emission from the hot ISM in these galaxies.

Acknowledgements. This research has made extensive use of the Leicester Database and Archive Service (LEDAS). TPR acknowledges the financial support of PPARC.

References