Disappearance of Visible Spots

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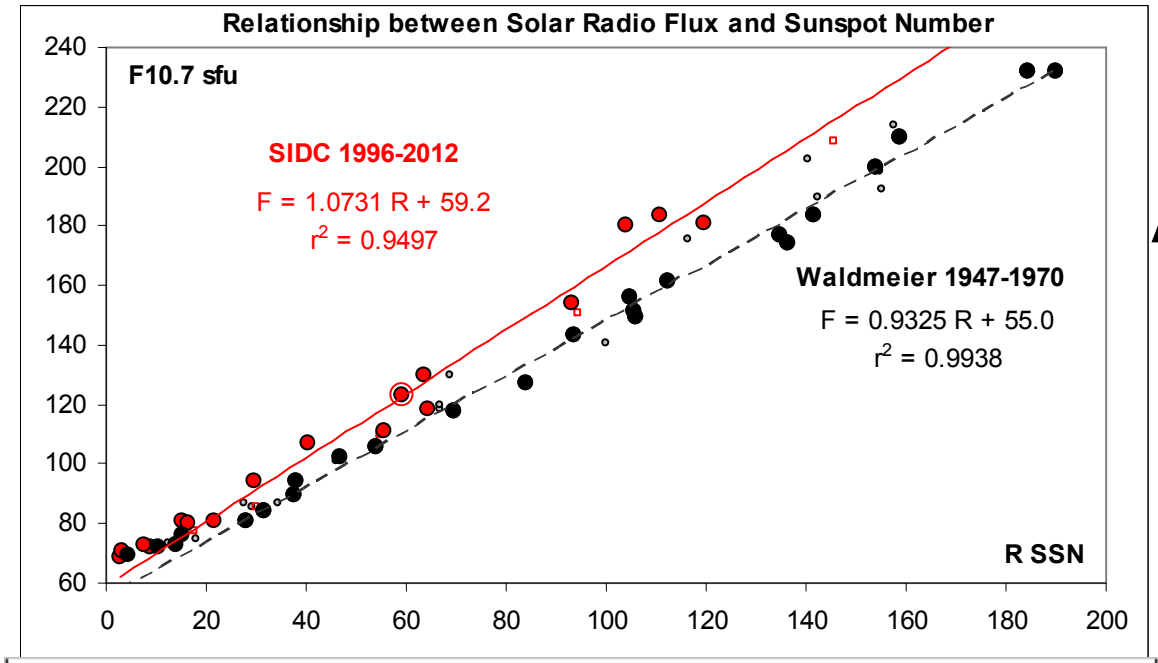
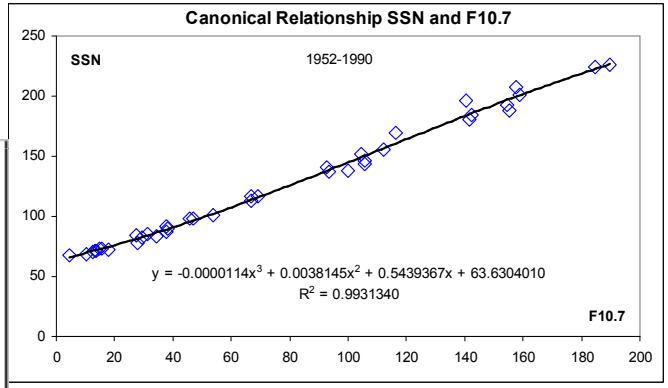
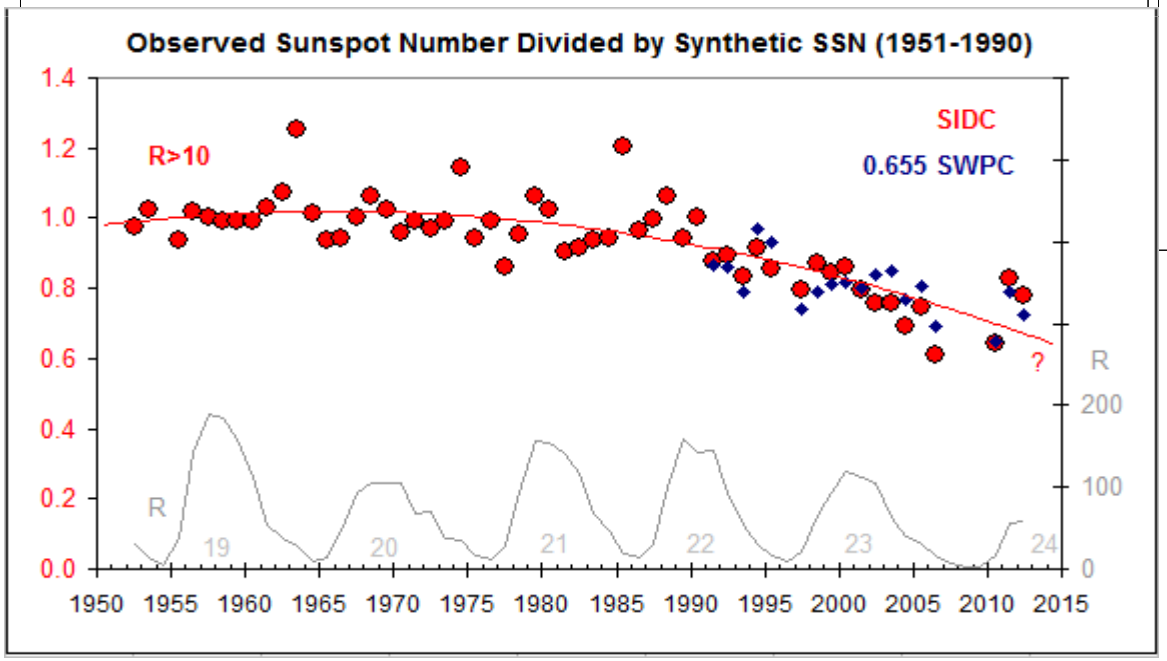
Sunspot, NM, 24 Sept. 2012

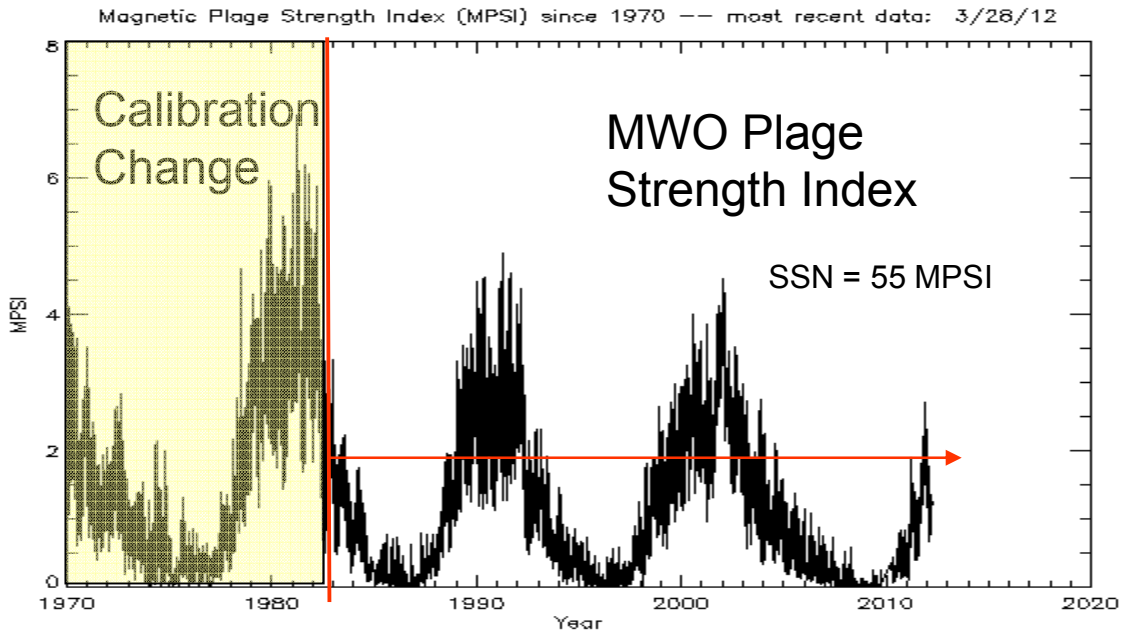


Is the SSN Always a Good Measure of Solar Activity?



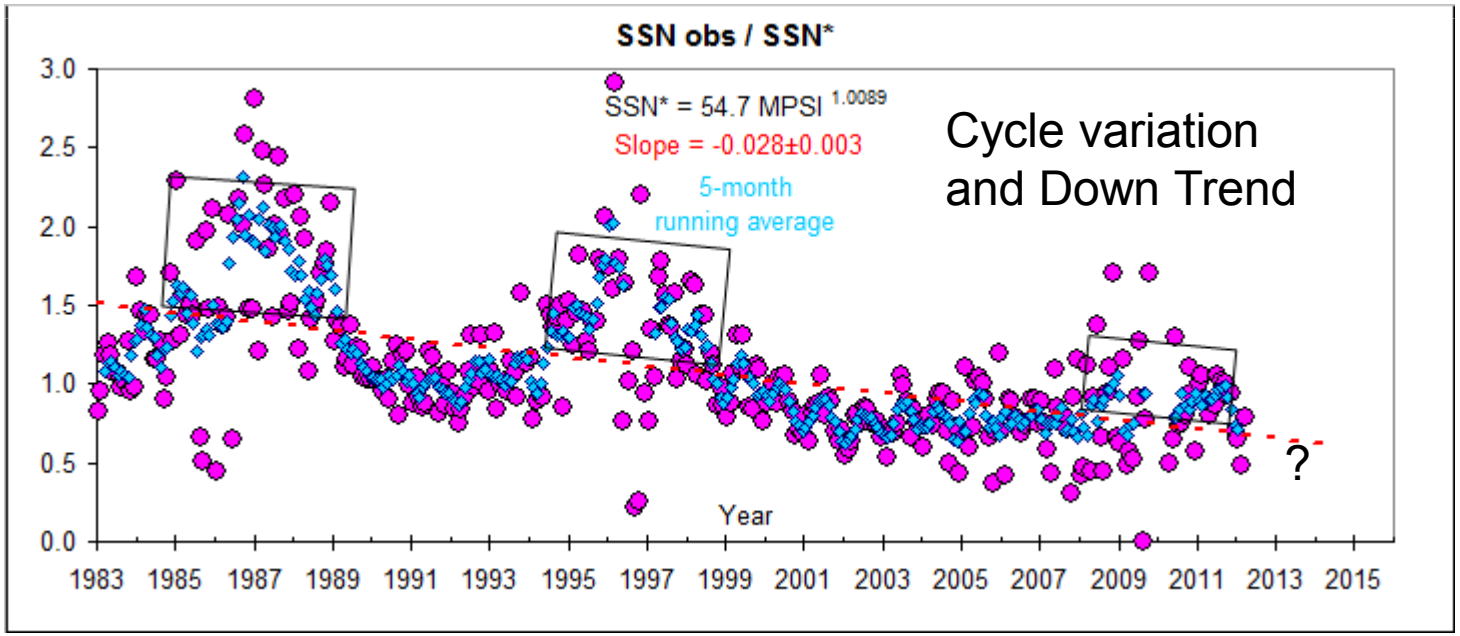


Since ~1990 we record progressively fewer sunspots than expected from observations of F10.7 microwave flux

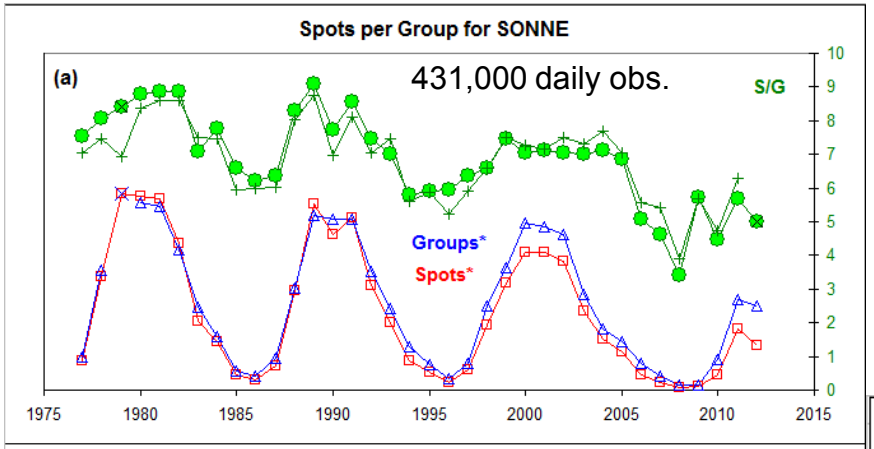


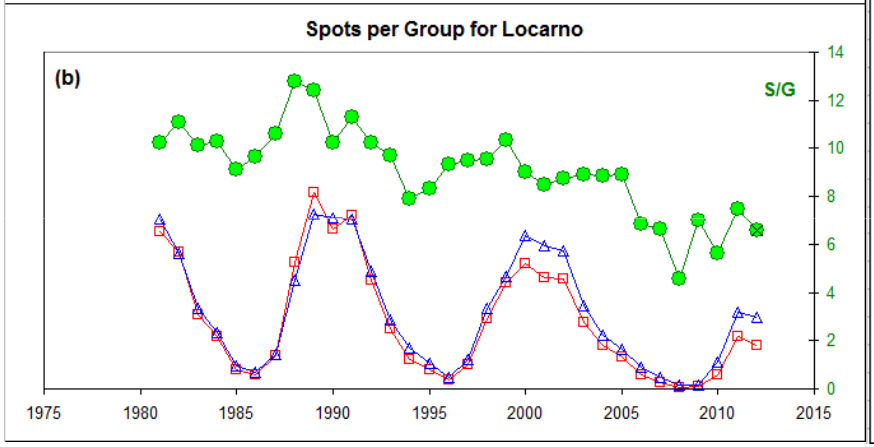
We see fewer sunspots for given MPSI

MPSI is the sum the absolute values of the magnetic field strengths for all pixels where that value is between 10 and 100 gauss. The sum is then divided by the total of number of pixels in the magnetogram.

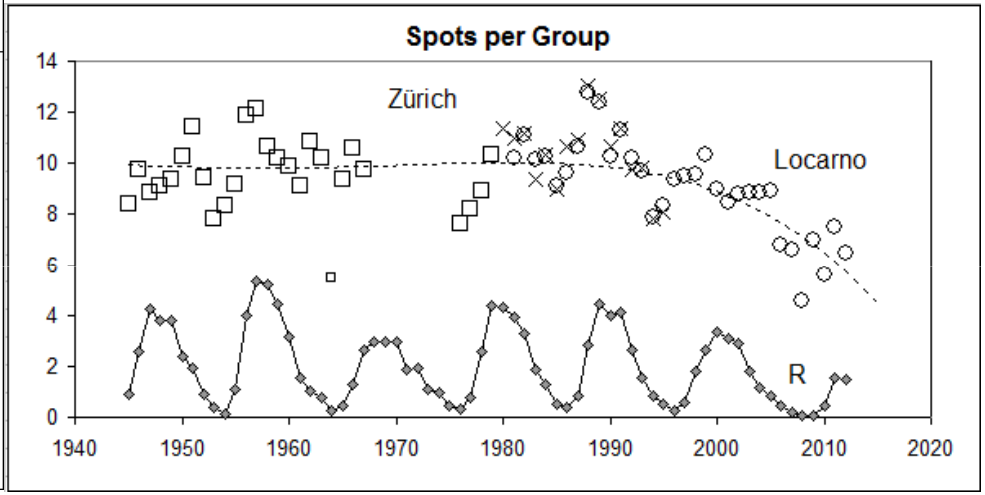


Same result if Ca II or Mg II index is used





We Observe Fewer Spots per Sunspot Group

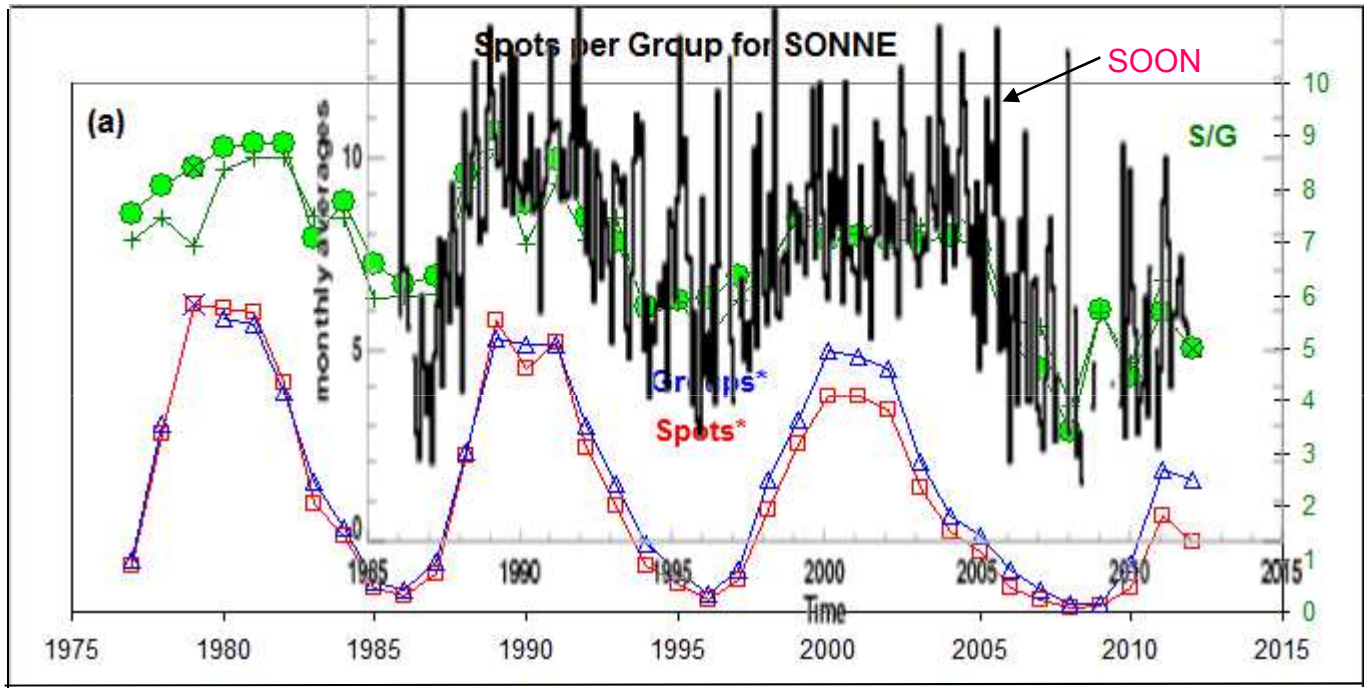


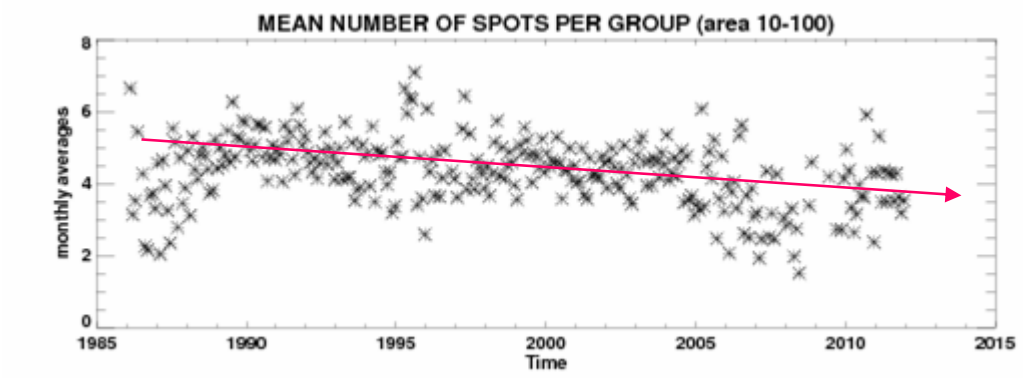
There is a weak solar cycle variation on top of a general downward trend seen by all observers

We are losing the small spots

What could be the cause of that?

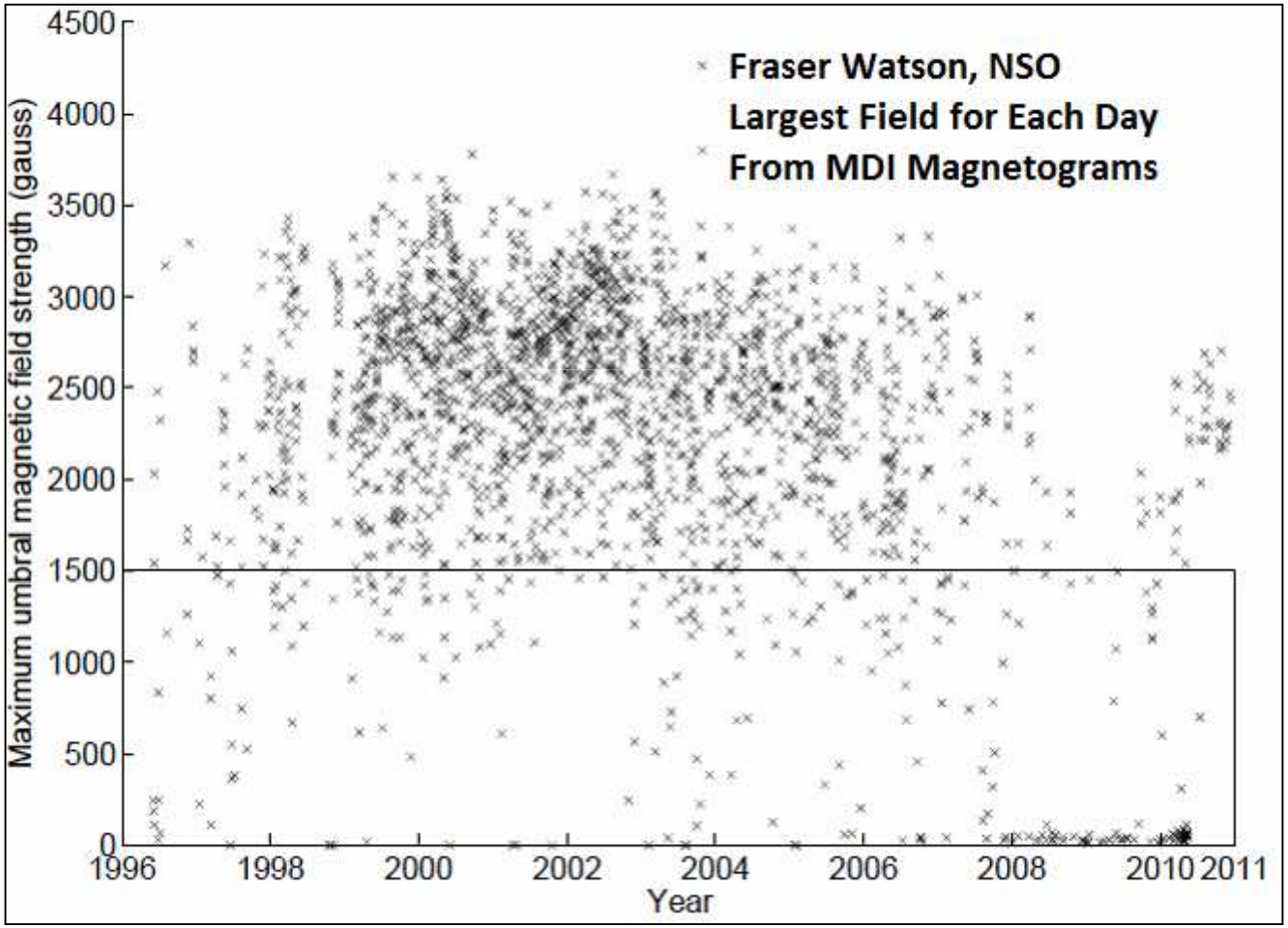
Confirmation Using the SOON Data





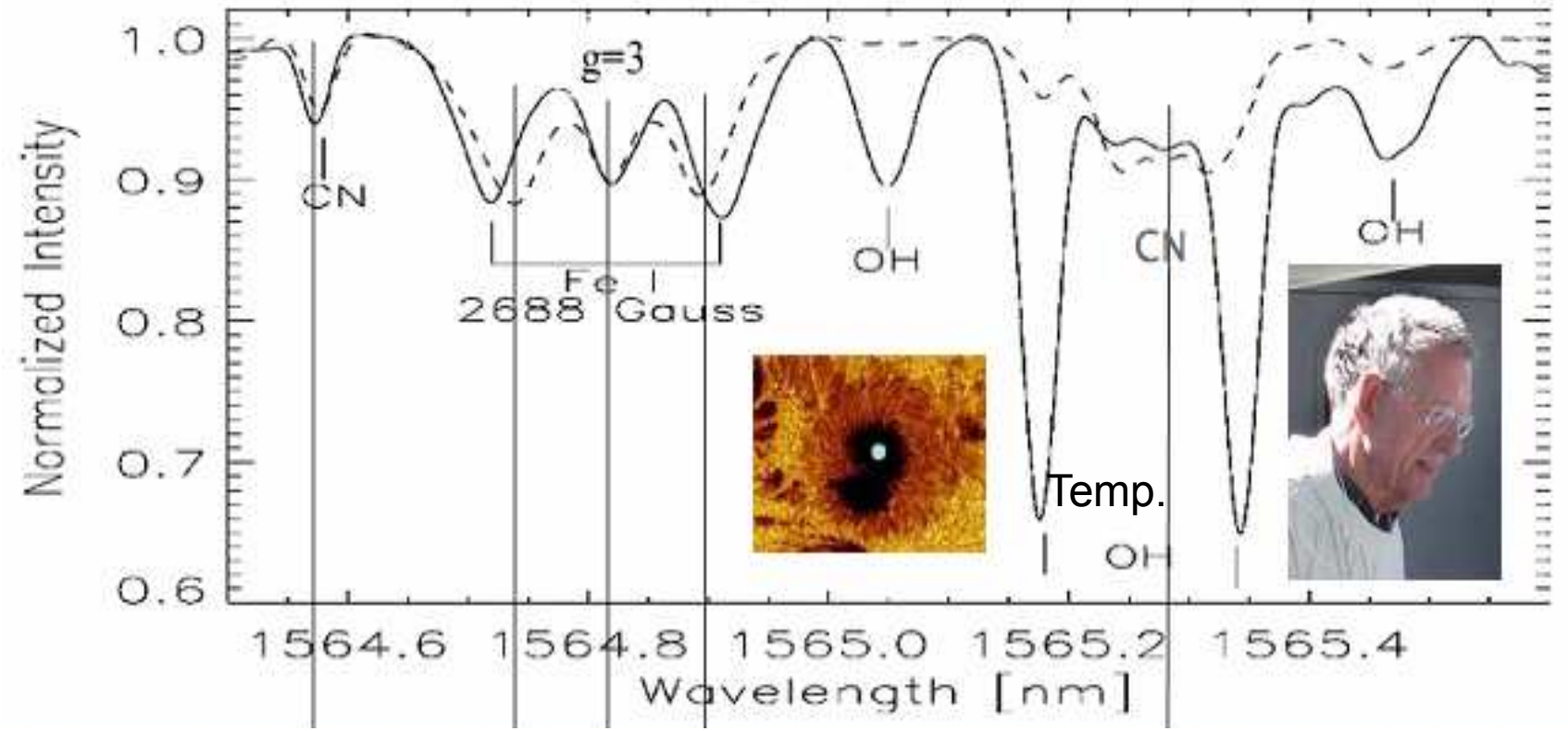
Giuliana de Toma reports the number of spots per group recorded by the SOON network. The result is similar to the decrease seen by the SONNE network. The same decrease is seen in the number of spots per group for very small groups.

Confirmation Using MDI Magnetograms

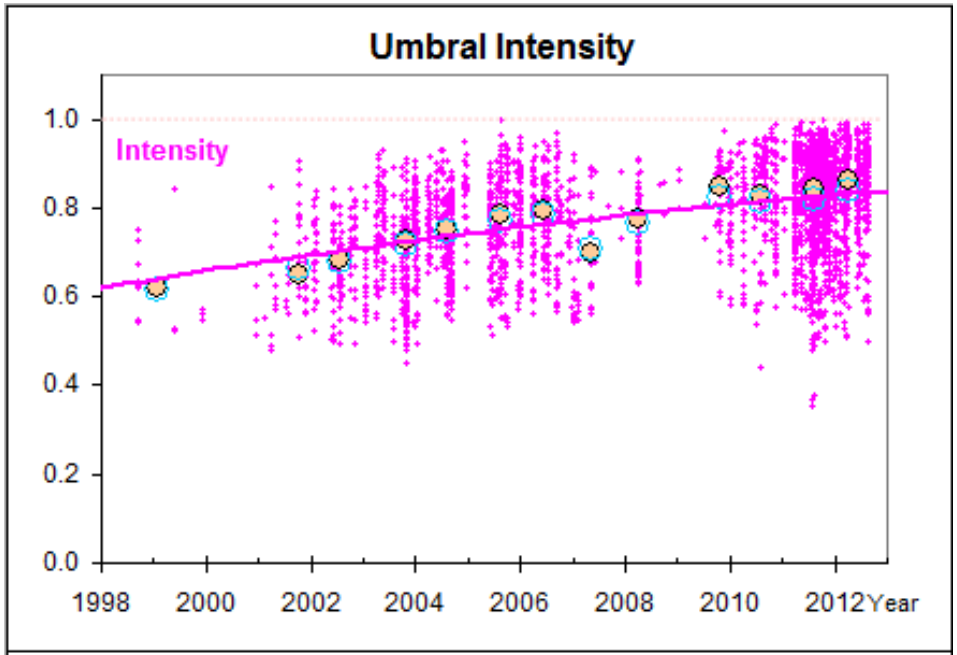


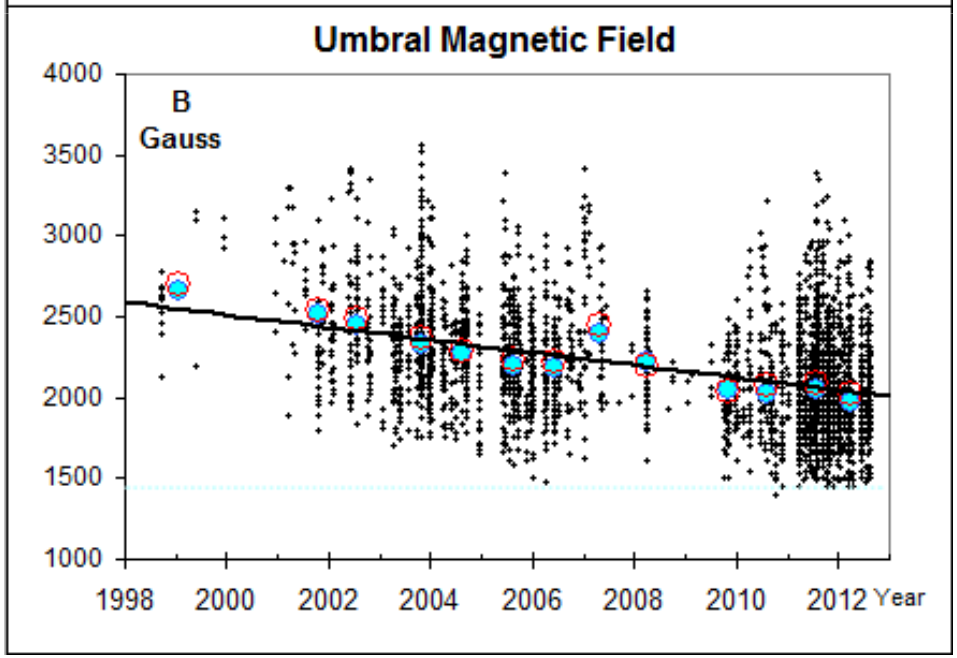
The STARA Algorithm does not perform well for small spots [under ~1500 G]

The Livingston & Penn Data

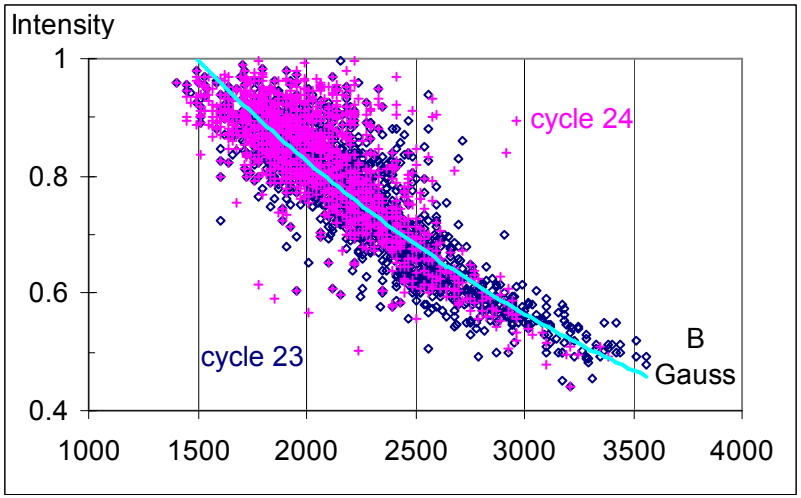


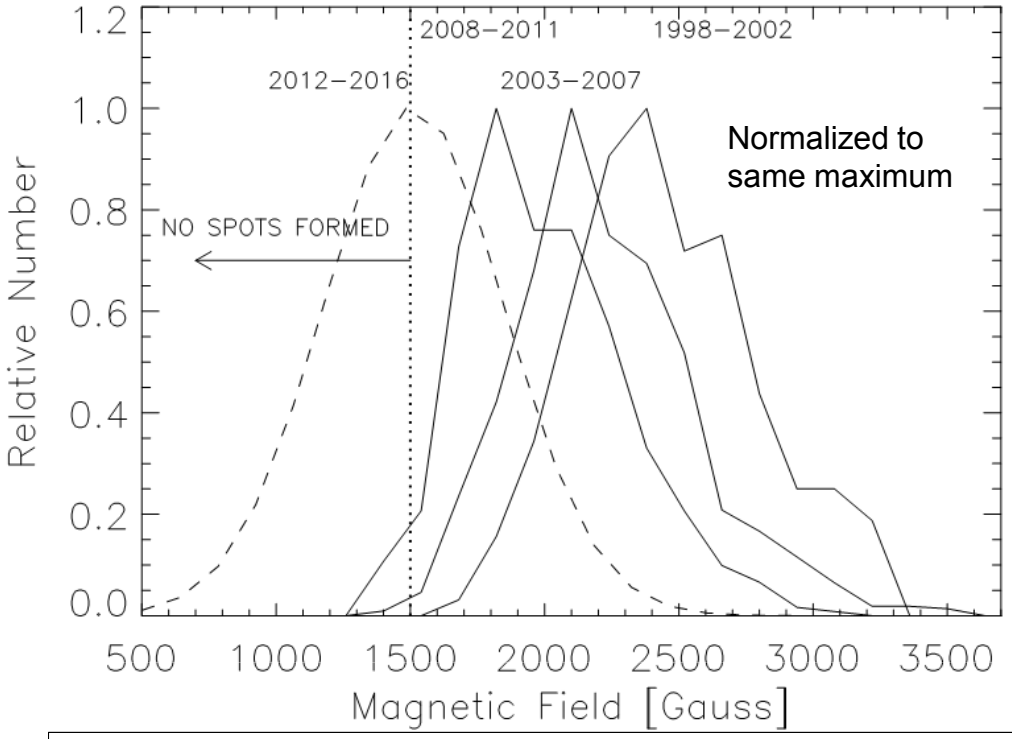
From 1998 to 2012 Livingston and Penn have measured field strength and brightness at the darkest position in umbrae of 3148 spots using the large Zeeman splitting of the infrared Fe 1564.8 nm line..

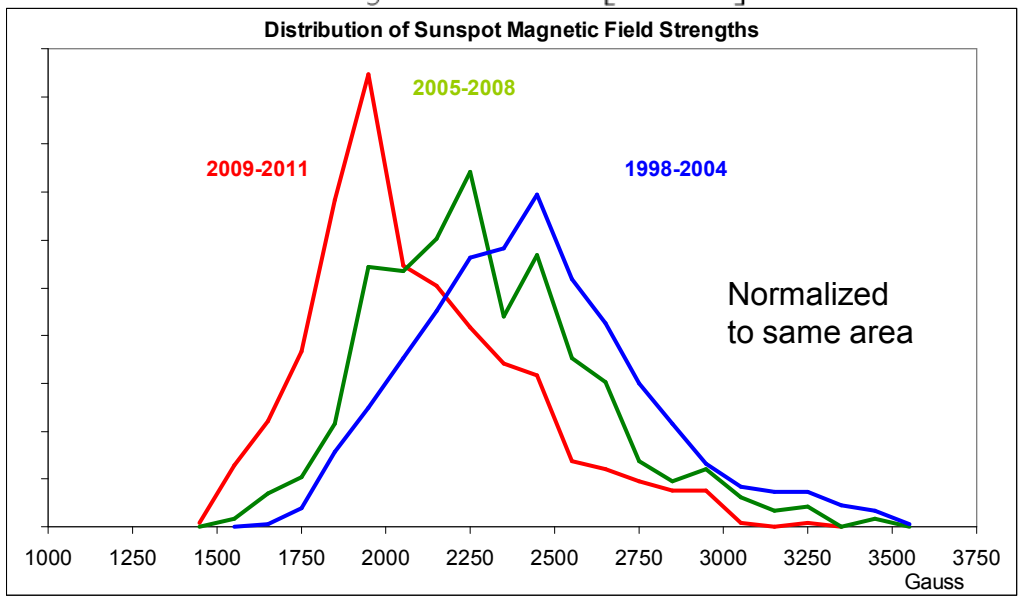




Spot Umbral Intensity [Temperature] and Magnetic Field Changing







Evolution of Distribution of Magnetic Field Strengths

Sunspots form by assembly of smaller patches of magnetic flux. As more and more magnetic patches fall below 1500 G because of the shift of the distribution, fewer and fewer visible spots will form, as observed