



Everything you need to know about Planet X: The mysterious 9th planet

Description

Research has long suggested that stars like our Sun rarely occur individually. Usually, there are one or more sibling stars scattered nearby. The fact that the Sun doesn't have an established twin is problematic to our understanding of how star formation works — beginning with massive molecular clouds chock full of the gas and dust needed for them to collapse under their own weight and begin the internal ignition of nuclear fusion. It is thought that more than four-fifths of star systems may be made up of two or more stars orbiting together. The majority of these systems are likely binary, consisting of two stars orbiting a common center of mass. As many as 85 percent of stars are estimated to belong to such systems.

In research published by the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* back in 2007, “Embedded binaries and their dense cores” was one of the first deep dives into whether the Sun ever had a twin. Several research papers have been released in the intervening years, but one particularly interesting story, published in 2020, used updated technology to delve into the core question, and it just so happens to bring the mysterious Planet X into the discussion.

What is Planet X?

Until the late 18th century, our solar system was thought to host just six planets: Mercury, Venus, Earth (naturally), Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, all of which could easily be seen through the most basic of telescopes, or even with the naked eye in optimal conditions. It wasn't until 1781 that renowned astronomer, Sir William Herschel, discovered the existence of an icy blue planet — originally believed to be a star, then a comet — orbiting the Sun from a distance that is roughly 18 times greater than that of Earth.

On average, it lies about 1.8 billion miles (2.9 billion kilometers) away from the Sun, but at their closest approach to one another, they are separated by approximately 1.6 billion miles (2.6 billion kilometers). On the flip side, they can be as far away as 1.98 billion miles (3.2 billion km). It takes Uranus 84 years to complete one trip around the Sun.

by Jaime Trosper

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