

"Mini-moon" discovered orbiting Earth, but won't be there for long

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Image 1. The Catalina Sky Survey Telescope at the University of Arizona College of Science where the discoverers of the mini-moon, Kacper Wierzchos and Theodore Pruyne, work. Photo: Catalina Sky Survey/University of Arizona Lunar and Planetary Laboratory

The moon has some new company. A "mini-moon" has recently joined it.

The "mini-moon" was found on February 15. Kacper Wierzchos and Theodore Pruyne found it. They are scientists. Both of them work with the Catalina Sky Survey. The program studies space objects near the Earth. It is part of the University of Arizona.

Mr. Wierzchos was excited about the "mini-moon." He tweeted about it. The "mini-moon" is called 2020 CD3. The "mini-moon" is one of 1 million known asteroids. It orbits Earth. This means it travels in a circle around Earth. It is the second known asteroid to do this. The first was called 2006 RH120. It was also found by the Catalina Sky Survey.

The "mini-moon" is a small rock. It is about 6 to 11 feet wide. That is about the size of a refrigerator. It entered Earth's orbit about three years ago, Mr. Wierzchos said. The moon, on the other hand, is about 4,317.6 miles wide, according to NASA. NASA is the U.S. space agency.

Derek Buzasi is a professor. He teaches physics at a university. He thinks the asteroid will not stay long. He thinks it will leave after another month or two. He is excited, though. The finding could mean big things for astronomers.

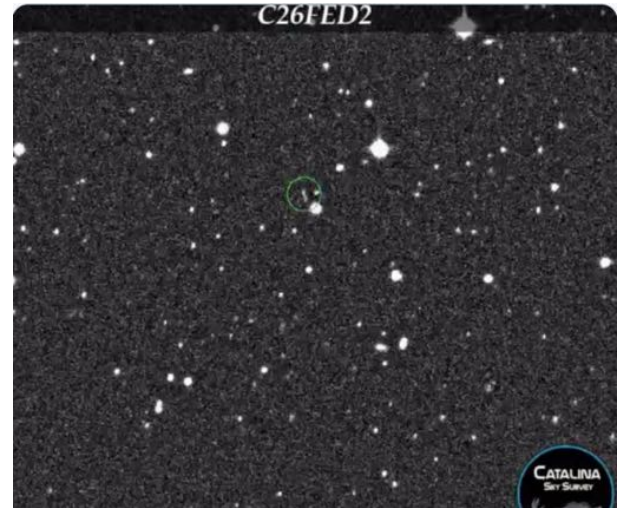
The "Mini-Moon" Will Be Gone Soon

"We know this happens all the time," Mr. Buzasi said. Finding them is hard, though. The "mini-moon" is a reminder that something that size can get close to Earth. Mr. Buzasi believes it is worth spending money to find them.

The "mini-moon" is small. It is also close to Earth. Such asteroids are helpful. Scientists can get samples of the small rock. It is better than sending robots to large asteroids. Scientists want to study these rocky asteroids. They can teach scientists about the early solar system. The center of the solar system is the sun. Planets travel around it. The Earth is one of those planets.

Sadly, the "mini-moon" will not be around long. By June, it will probably have left Earth's orbit.

Our solar system has more than 200 moons. Most of them orbit big planets. Saturn has 82 moons. Jupiter has 79.



Quiz

- 1 What is the article MAINLY about?
- (A) astronomers searching for new moons
 - (B) a small asteroid found orbiting the Earth
 - (C) scientists who work at Catalina Sky Survey
 - (D) the fear that asteroids might hit the Earth

- 2 Read the paragraph below from the Introduction [paragraphs 1-5].

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What is the focus of this paragraph?

- (A) the size of the Earth's orbit
 - (B) the people who work at NASA
 - (C) a way in which objects come into the Earth's orbit
 - (D) a comparison between the "mini-moon" and the moon
- 3 WHY did Kacper Wierzchos tweet about the "mini-moon"?
- (A) He had to let NASA know that they could study it.
 - (B) He was excited that he and another scientist found it.
 - (C) He wanted to tell people what the "mini-moon" was named.
 - (D) He needed to explain how long the "mini-moon" would stay.
- 4 How is the "mini-moon" different from the moon?
- (A) The "mini-moon" orbits the Earth.
 - (B) The moon orbits the Earth.
 - (C) The "mini-moon" is hard to see from Earth.
 - (D) The moon is hard to see from Earth.