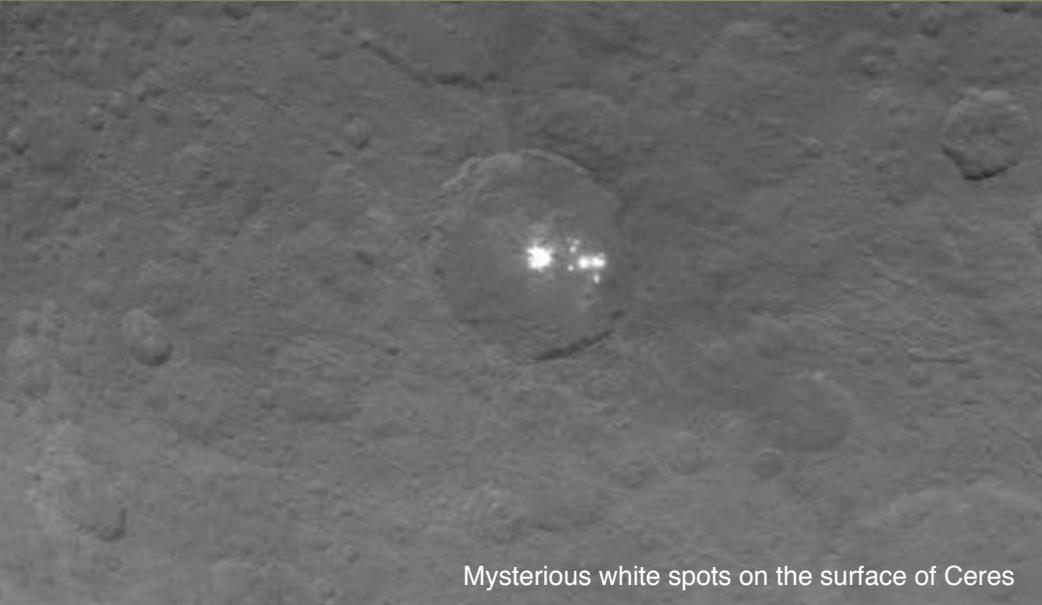


Tessmann Focal Points



Mysterious white spots on the surface of Ceres

The Year Of Dwarf Planets

This has been a remarkable period for space discovery and astronomy. Over the last year, three spectacular planetary visitations have taken place.

The European Space Agency's (ESA) Rosetta spacecraft had a close encounter with Comet 67P and landed a probe that captured the first photograph from the surface of a comet. Rosetta has continued to orbit the comet, recording and studying the violent birth of 67P's tail as it nears the sun. The growth of the tail is so violent, in fact, that it has almost twice knocked Rosetta's out of commission, forcing the ESA to reposition the spacecraft at a safer distance.

On March 31, NASA's intrepid Dawn spacecraft reached the largest asteroid, Ceres. In 2011, Dawn visited the second largest asteroid, Vesta, and discovered that this asteroid was in fact a protoplanet that was shattered long ago by an encounter with an unknown object. As a result, Vesta lost its chance to join the pantheon of planets in our solar system.

After a year of study, the spacecraft left Vesta behind, heading for the largest asteroid, Ceres. Astronomers at Mission Control were intrigued by two white spots spotted on the surface of Ceres as the spacecraft drew closer.

Could these features be lakes of ice, ice geysers or highly reflected material? Dawn is now using its high resolution cameras and sensors to study this intriguing mystery. Answers may be forthcoming in the next few months. Ceres is the only spherical asteroid and is considered a dwarf planet

Ceres is not the only dwarf planet to receive a visitor this year. The New Horizon spacecraft launched in 2006 will be encountering Pluto on July 14th of this year. It is beginning to send back the first ever photographic images of this frozen world and its moon system. The spacecraft has already made one

remarkable discovery. It has sent back a video of Pluto and its largest moon, Charon. It turns out that the two worlds orbit about a common center of gravity that is outside of both worlds—in other worlds, Pluto and Charon orbit each other. New Horizons has revealed the first double dwarf (or binary world) discovered in our solar system.

We have never seen the surface of Pluto and no doubt will discover even more remarkable features soon.

NASA Artifacts

Want to display and study NASA artifacts at your school? NASA has posted this notice:

NASA Artifacts posted and available for school, museum, library and planetarium requests.

Screening Period 27:

Start Date: 05/04/2015;

Internal prescreening ends 05/25/2015;

External prescreening ends 06/15/2015

(Includes Wind Tunnel Test Models, Aircraft Models, flown Skylab Experiment articles, publications and memorabilia).

<http://gsaxcess.gov/NASAWel.htm>

Next posting will be in September.

Pluto image captured on May 12

