

Stunning photo previews the death of our Sun

November 24 2005



A beautiful image has been released today by the Gemini Telescope showing the death of a star (planetary nebula M2-9) as it transforms from a regular star to a white dwarf.

In the process the star casts off an ethereal envelope of gas in concentric shells - the formation of these shells are still a mystery to astronomers

and this image is part of new data that will help them to advance our understanding of the phenomenon.

It is thought that when our Sun has used up all its hydrogen fuel in 4-5 billion years it will meet a similar fate.

The image was taken at the Gemini North Telescope in Hawaii. Gemini operates twin telescopes that are two of the largest in the world. For this image, astronomers used the newly upgraded ALTAIR adaptive optics system which helps them correct any distortion of light due to the atmosphere (the effect that makes stars appear to twinkle).

Image Credit: Gemini Observatory/Travis Rector, University of Alaska Anchorage

Source: PPARC

Citation: Stunning photo previews the death of our Sun (2005, November 24) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-11-stunning-photo-previews-death-sun.html>

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