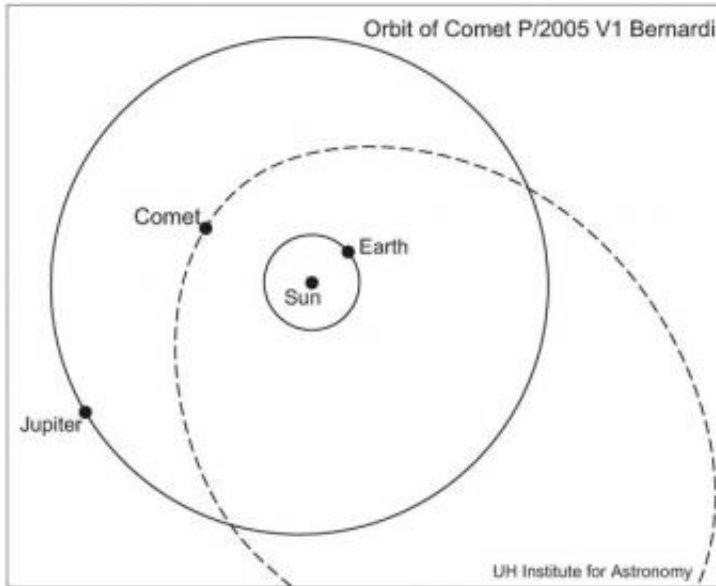


New Comet Discovered from Mauna Kea

December 5 2005



While searching for "killer asteroids" on Halloween night, University of Hawaii astronomer Fabrizio Bernardi found a new comet, the first discovered from Mauna Kea Observatories.

Image: Orbit of Comet P/2005 V1 Bernardi

"While studying images I had taken with the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope, I noticed an object with a faint tail. I checked to see if there were any known comets in that part of the sky, and was surprised to find that there were none," said Bernardi.

"I consulted with my colleagues David Tholen, Andrea Boattini, and Jana Pittichová, and we decided to monitor the object for a few nights. Having confirmed that it was a comet, we reported the find to the International Astronomical Union."

The comet is now officially "P/2005 V1 Bernardi" after its discoverer.

The comet, which orbits the Sun about once every 10 years, does not come close enough to Earth to be visible to the naked eye. When discovered, it was about 280 million miles away from Earth—almost three times the distance from Earth to the Sun. The length of its tail is estimated to be more than 13,000 miles.

Bernardi is working with Tholen, a UH astronomer who heads a NASA-funded program to find asteroids that pass close to Earth and are therefore potentially dangerous.

Source: University of Hawaii

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