

## Image: A strange ring galaxy

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Image Credit: NASA, R. Lucas (STScI/AURA)

(PhysOrg.com) -- Is this one galaxy or two? Astronomer Art Hoag first asked this question when he chanced upon this unusual extragalactic object.

On the outside is a ring dominated by bright blue stars, while near the center lies a ball of much redder stars that are likely much older. Between the two is a gap that appears almost completely dark.

How Hoag's Object formed remains unknown, although similar objects have been identified and collectively labeled as a form of ring galaxy.

Genesis [hypotheses](#) include a galaxy collision billions of years ago and the gravitational effect of a central bar that has since vanished.

This image, taken by the [Hubble Space Telescope](#) in July 2001, reveals unprecedented details of Hoag's Object and may yield a better understanding.

Hoag's Object spans about 100,000 light years and lies about 600 million light years away toward the [constellation](#) of the Snake (Serpens). Coincidentally, visible in the gap (at about one o'clock) is yet another ring galaxy that likely lies far in the distance.

Provided by JPL/NASA

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