

Hubble catches a galaxy duo by the 'hare'

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This image from the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope shows the unusual galaxy IRAS 06076-2139, found in the constellation Lepus (The Hare). Hubble's Wide Field Camera 3 (WFC3) and Advanced Camera for Surveys (ACS) instruments observed the galaxy from a distance of 500 million light-years. Credit: ESA/Hubble & NASA

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This particular object stands out from the crowd by actually being composed of two separate galaxies rushing past each other at about 2 million kilometers (1,243,000 miles) per hour. This speed is most likely too fast for them to merge and form a single galaxy. However, because of their small separation of only about 20,000 light-years, the galaxies will distort one another through the force of gravity while passing each other, changing their structures on a grand scale.

Such galactic interactions are a common sight for Hubble, and have long been a field of study for astronomers. The intriguing behaviors of interacting galaxies take many forms; galactic cannibalism, galaxy harassment and even [galaxy collisions](#). The Milky Way itself will eventually fall victim to the latter, merging with the Andromeda Galaxy in about 4.5 billion years. The fate of our galaxy shouldn't be alarming though: while galaxies are populated by billions of stars, the distances between individual stars are so large that hardly any stellar collisions will occur.

Provided by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

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