

Distant star and planet get new Cree language names from national contest

February 27 2020, by Andrew Lyle



The global NameExoWorlds competition allowed 100 countries to name a selected exoplanet, such as the one depicted here in an artist's rendering, and its host star. The winning Canadian entry dubbed its star Nikâwiy (Cree for “my mother”) and the exoplanet Awasis (“child”). Credit: IAU/L. Calçada

A giant planet 344 light-years from Earth and the star it orbits have new names in the Cree language, thanks to a national contest.

The [star HD136418 and its exoplanet HD136418b](#) were renamed

Nikâwiw (pronounced NI-gah-wee) and Awasis (pronounced ah-wah-sis), which translate into English as "my mother" and "child."

The contest was part of the International Astronomical Union's [NameExoWorlds](#) contest, in which 100 countries around the world were asked to name planets orbiting stars other than our sun, along with the stars they [orbit](#).

"The original idea for the naming convention came from Amanda Green, a junior-high science teacher in Alberta, and was then modified slightly by Wilfred Buck, a noted Cree educator who specializes in [astronomy](#) education," said University of Alberta astrophysicist Sharon Morsink, who led the Canadian initiative, managed by the Canadian Astronomical Society (CASA).

More than 500 name suggestions were submitted to CASA, and more than 700 people voted on the four finalists, selected by a panel.

If new exoplanets orbiting Nikâwiw are discovered, they will be named after other family members in the Cree language, explained Morsink.

More than 4,000 exoplanets have been discovered so far—so many that scientists now believe almost all of the roughly 100 billion [stars](#) in our galaxy have at least one [exoplanet](#) orbiting them.

"We can determine the size of many of these exoplanets, their density, and how close it orbits its star. This gives us information about possible composition and how hot it might be on the surface of the planet," said Morsink.

"Awasis is probably similar to Jupiter, but orbits close enough to its star, Nikâwiw, that water could be in a liquid state."

Naming these planets—and sparking curiosity about astronomy—is an important way to engage with the universe around us, said Morsink.

"Astronomy is a great way to become more literate about many areas of science. Anytime someone learns a bit more about astronomy, they end up understanding a bit more about the world around them."

Provided by University of Alberta

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