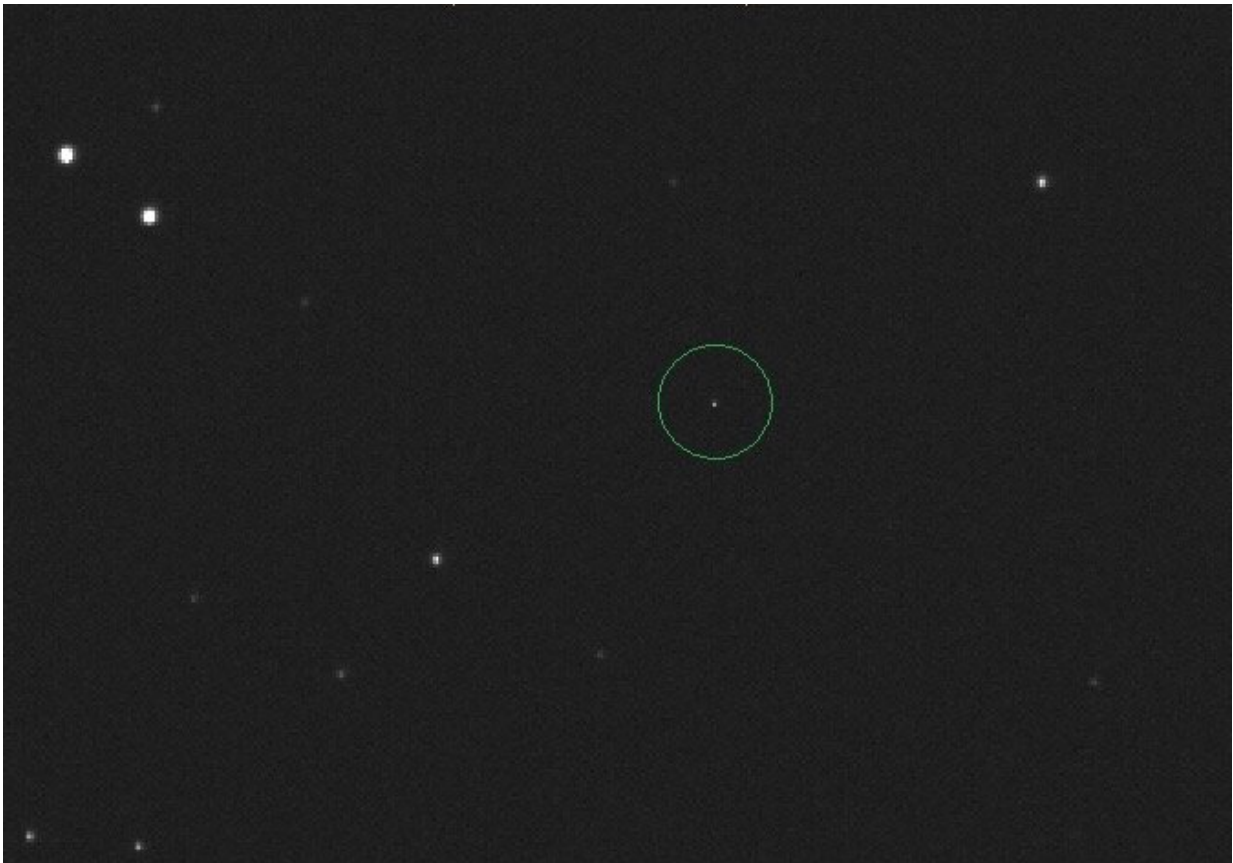


Graduate student first to spot asteroid speeding past Earth

November 25 2020



A still image of an asteroid (circled), which has the temporary designation of ALA2xH captured Wednesday, Nov. 18 by Western University graduate student Cole Gregg. Credit: University of Western Ontario

For as long as he can remember, Cole Gregg has been interested in

space. Last week, the Western University graduate astronomy student had a night he'll never forget as he spotted a previously undiscovered asteroid flashing through the night sky.

Studying at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Gregg is one of a number of astronomers with remote access to a [telescope](#) based in Nerpio, Spain at an observatory known as Astrocamp.

While operating the telescope, located on a mountaintop in Spain, Gregg noticed a bright dot moving rapidly across his field of view. Upon further investigation with Western astronomy professor Paul Wiegert, the object proved to be a small asteroid estimated at 50 to 100 meters in diameter passing through near-Earth space.

"It's a rare treat to be the first person to spot one of these visitors to our planet's neighborhood," said Wiegert, Gregg's research advisor, "Astronomers around the globe are continuously monitoring near-Earth [space](#) for asteroids so this is certainly a feather in Cole's cap."

Gregg spotted the asteroid, which now has the temporary designation ALA2xH, on Wednesday, Nov. 18. Once the asteroid was observed, the observation measurements were sent to the Minor Planet Center (MPC) in Cambridge, Mass. When MPC determines the observation is unique, which it was, it gets placed on their 'Near-Earth Object Confirmation Page' (NEOCP), where the estimated orbit of the [asteroid](#) is calculated in hopes of capturing an image of it again. But Gregg says, no luck yet.

"We have been attempting to image ALA2xH again since the initial observation, but without luck due to weather and unavailability of the telescopes," said Gregg.

Despite all that is going on in the world right now, Gregg says it has been amazing to continue to take images remotely with a telescope over the

internet.

"Although my current project is focused on searching the sky for asteroids, you never are fully ready to see one that no one has yet and all from the comfort of my own home. There is something very cool about that," said Gregg.

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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