



SPACE NEWS

N° 6

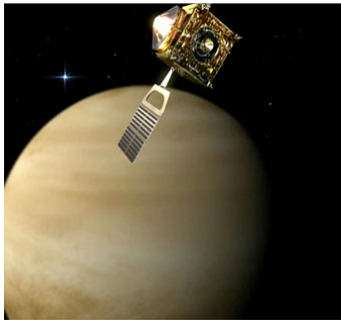
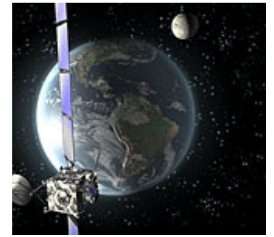
12th November 2007

Last week in space



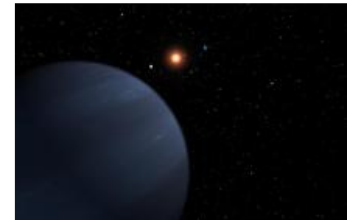
Another beautiful photograph captured by the Hubble Space Telescope. This time we're looking at two big, beautiful spiral galaxies, tearing each other apart. The large, face-on spiral is NGC 3808, while its duelling partner is the smaller, edge-on NGC 3808A. And between the two is a long today tail of stars, gas and dust, transferring from one to the other.

ESA's comet chaser, Rosetta, is on its way to its second close encounter with Earth on 13 November. The spacecraft's operators are leaving no stones unturned to make sure Earth's gravity gives it the exact boost it needs en route to its destination.



Watching the stars set from the surface of the Earth may be a romantic pastime but when a spacecraft does it from orbit, it can reveal hidden details about a planet's atmosphere. The technique is known as stellar occultation. Jean-Loup Bertaux, Service d'Aeronomie du CNRS, France was the first to suggest its use on an ESA mission. It works by watching stars from space, while they drop behind the atmosphere of a planet under investigation, before disappearing from view below the planet's horizon.

Our Solar System has 8 planets, but another, 55 Cancri, is catching up fast. Astronomers today announced the discovery of a 5th planet in the system, located 41 light-years away. This newly discovered planet weighs in with 45 times the mass of the Earth, and might look similar to Saturn in composition and appearance. But the news gets better, it's in the star's habitable zone, and could have water-covered moons. The discovery of a 5th planet around 55 Cancri was made by astronomers from UC Berkeley, and several other collaborating universities, with funding from NASA and the National Science Foundation.



Not to be missed next week

Monday 12th November: Conjunction between the moon and Jupiter

Wednesday 14th November: The asteroid 8 Flora (magnitude 8.0) can be found close to ksi Taureau (magnitude 3.8)

Friday 16th November: The Cassini spacecraft will carry out a fly-be of the moon Rhéa at a distance of about 74 000 km. To see images of the fly-by, take a look here: saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/home/index.cfm

Saturday 17th November: Cassini again, this time the spacecraft will be taking a look at the moons Enceladus, Pandora, Calypso and Epimetheus.