

ESO HARPS Instrument Discovers Smallest Ever Extra-Solar Planet (Forwarded)

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Text with all links and the photos are available on the ESO Website at URL:
<http://www.eso.org/outreach/press-rel/pr-2004/pr-22-04.html>

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Fourteen Times the Earth

ESO HARPS Instrument Discovers Smallest Ever Extra-Solar Planet

Summary

A European team of astronomers [1] has discovered the lightest known planet orbiting a star other than the sun (an "exoplanet").

The new exoplanet orbits the bright star μ Arae located in the southern constellation of the Altar. It is the second planet discovered around this star and completes a full revolution in 9.5 days.

With a mass of only 14 times the mass of the Earth, the new planet lies at the threshold of the largest possible rocky planets, making it a possible super Earth-like object. Uranus, the smallest of the giant planets of the Solar System has a similar mass. However Uranus and the new exoplanet differ so much by their distance from the host star that their formation and structure are likely to be very different.

This discovery was made possible by the unprecedented

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