

Swarthmore College Astronomers Discover New Star in Southern Cross (Forwarded)

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- *From:* Andrew Yee <ayee@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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News & Information
Swarthmore College
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

Contact: Alisa Giardinelli
Phone: (610) 690-5717

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Swarthmore Astronomers Discover New Star in Southern Cross

A research team at Swarthmore College discovered a previously unknown companion to the bright star, beta Crucis, in the Southern Cross. As a prominent member of the well-known constellation Crux, or the Southern Cross, it appears on five national flags: Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa. The discovery was announced at the American Astronomical Society meeting held in Seattle Jan. 5-10.

The companion star was discovered accidentally while the research team was using the orbiting Chandra X-ray Observatory to study the x-rays emitted by beta Crucis itself. "We were interested in how the highly supersonic stellar winds of hot, luminous stars produce x-rays," says team leader David Cohen, associate professor of astronomy. "We were surprised to see two strong x-ray sources where we had expected to see only one."

Astrophysics major Michael Kuhn '07 of Charlottesville, Va., presented the findings in Seattle. His work analyzing the x-ray data from both beta Crucis and its newly-discovered companion is the basis for a forthcoming paper on this project in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

Cohen's research team also includes Swarthmore College Associate Professor of Astronomy Eric Jensen and Marc Gagné, associate professor in the geology and astronomy department at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Their project was funded by NASA and by a Eugene M. Lang Summer Research Fellowship from Swarthmore.

Higher quality images from the press release, as well as supplementary

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images and information, are available at
<http://astro.swarthmore.edu/~cohen/bcru>

For more information:

Prof. David H. Cohen
Dept. of Physics and Astronomy
Swarthmore College, Swarthmore PA 19081
(610) 328-8587 (office)