

Are We Close to Discovering Planet X?

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Published Dec 1 2014 12:25 PM EST

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2 New Planets In Our Solar System?

Is it possible there are other planets out there within our solar system? As Matt Sampson explains some scientists are very excited about this theory, and say they even have evidence to support it.

The quest to find a Planet X in our solar system beyond Pluto continues — and we may be a step closer to not one, but two undiscovered planetary masses.

This past March, astronomers Scott Sheppard of the Carnegie Institution for Science and Craig Trujillo of Gemini Observatory in Hilo, Hawaii, saw a new object, the most distant known in the solar system. This object, about 200 miles in size, and several near it followed similar orbits, an unusual occurrence, according to Sheppard.

“We would expect their orbits to be fairly random,” he told weather.com. “So we suspect something more massive is shepherding these.” A planet, to be exact. They called it 2012 VP113 or VP for short, after Vice President Joe Biden, and reported [their findings](#) in the journal *Nature*.

Since then, several other scientists have tried to find explanations to the orbit question. Reporting in the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society Letters* in June, two researchers at Madrid’s Complutense University concluded based on their analysis that [two planets “must exist” beyond Neptune and Pluto](#). Another reported in the same journal in August that these planets are likely [even more distant than imagined](#).

Sheppard said other questions remain about these planets, not just whether they exist. “How did this large object get out there and where did it actually form? Did it form in our solar system or did it actually get captured from another solar system?” He noted that because objects like that cannot form in the outer solar system, they must have been “tossed out there” with help from large planets like Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus or Neptune.

As to the always-asked question about whether such a planet could hold life, Sheppard doesn’t completely balk at the idea. “It’s always an interesting question,” he said. “The object, we wouldn’t know anything about its composition to date because we haven’t yet found it, but it could be a very ice-rich world. It could have organics on it, which are ingredients for life. It might have the ingredients for life.”

To date, Sheppard and Trujillo have covered just 5 percent of the sky. He said they hope to up that number to about 20 percent in the next few years. New technologies, like the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope, will help trim down how long this process takes, but they won't be ready to use until the 2020s.

For now, scientists will keep looking beyond the far reaches of our solar system one little bit at a time, capturing people's imaginations with every new discovery. "People were very upset when Pluto got demoted," Sheppard said. "It's very much in the public's mind."