

'Devil Comet' Just Made Its Closest Pass of Earth

A rare stellar event took place this past Sunday, June 2, as Comet 12P/Pons-Brooks, or more commonly called the "Devil Comet" made its closest pass on its 71-year rotational visit to Earth.

The people of Earth need not fear the wayward space object; even at its closest point to our planet it is still some 143 million miles away and poses no risk of any Armageddon-like scenario where Bruce Willis would have to save us from the space rock.

For comparison, the Sun and Earth are separated by a distance of 93 million miles.

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It gets its nickname "devil comet" from the twin tails it emits from explosions of gas. The comet continues to confound scientists, while many viewers of the comet have also alluded to it bearing resemblance to the Millennium Falcon from Star Wars.

This mostly once-in-a-lifetime event was at its brightest point back in April, as it was passing by its closest orbit of the Sun, a whopping 74.4 million miles. Meanwhile, amateur astronomers would need the help of at least a pair of binoculars to have caught a glimpse of the fleeting comet this past Sunday, even with its large amount of explosions taking place within the last eight months.

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"I would say it's somewhat unusual in the number of outbursts it's been having," Dr. Dave Schleicher, astronomer at Lowell Observatory in Arizona, says. "On the other hand, it's not like you have good records from the past to really let you know what is typical. And I suspect given the fairly large number of outbursts that have happened over the last eight months, that this is very clearly an usual occurrence for Pons-Brooks."

As reported by CNN, "Astronomers have been observing Pons-Brooks in the hopes of uncovering more details about its rotation rate, or the rate at which comets spin as they move through space. Pons-Brooks has a rotation period of 57 hours, which is longer than expected, and astronomers want to know if the jets of material releasing from the comet are speeding it up or slowing it down."

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