

# Killer Asteroid May Hit Earth!



## Cosmic Catastrophe!

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**Anthony Carr, STARGAZER 2011, p28**

## Asteroid eerily similar to space rock that destroyed huge Siberian forest in 1908

TERRY DAVIDSON  
Toronto Sun

**It will come from space, be as massive as half a football field, have the explosive power to decimate hundreds of square miles of land and will hurtle perilously close to Earth.** The speed will be a blinding 8 km per second.

It is called 2012-DA14, an asteroid that NASA scientists have been watching closely in anticipation of February 15 of next year, when the mammoth piece of solid space rock will soar past the Earth a mere 24,000 kms from the planet's surface. It will be passing even lower

than the altitude at which many man-made satellites orbit.

And while officials at the U.S. space agency say there is "zero" chance of impact, they still consider it a rare and intimate brush with what will be the largest asteroid to get this close to Earth since NASA began seriously watching them almost 14 years ago.

In fact 2012-DA14 is eerily similar to an asteroid that destroyed hundreds of square miles of for-

est in remote Siberia a little over a century ago.

**"It's the largest object that has come this close to the Earth since we began our ... tracking program,"** said Lindley Johnson of NASA's Near-Earth Object observation program, who imagined that DA14 would "do some serious damage at ground level" if it were to hit the planet.

His colleague, NEO manager Don Yeomans, gave some perspective of how close DA14 will come: It

will pass inside the geosynchronous ring, the area around 34,000 kms above the Earth where communication satellites loom. But the possibility of this potentially destructive celestial nomad hitting a satellite, he said, is highly unlikely.

But both Yeomans and Johnson said NASA will be watching DA14 closely — and for a long time. While DA14 is a "zero" on NASA's impact-risk scale for its near-Earth pass next February, said Yeomans, it has

a very "Earth-like orbit" and will pass again in 2020. It is during that second pass the chances of impact increase — albeit ever so slightly.

"In 2013, not a problem. In 2020, almost certainly not a problem — but you can't rule it out," said Yeomans, adding that DA14 has a slim chance of around 1 in 77,000 of hitting the Earth in 2020. But then, he added, if an impact were to ever happen, it would probably be in the ocean, and not big enough to cause a tsunami.

When talking about DA14's upcoming pass in 2013, he is quick to draw on the analogy of the Tunguska event, an incident in 1908

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## ANTHONY CARR

## STARGAZER

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