

NASA captures Earth flyby of 'space peanut'

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Washington: NASA scientists have captured a peanut-shaped asteroid that approached close to Earth last weekend. The next time an asteroid will approach Earth this close will be in 2054.

The asteroid named 1999 JD6 appears to be a contact binary—an asteroid with two lobes that are stuck together.

On July 24, the asteroid made its closest approach to Earth at a distance of about 7.2 million kms, or about 19 times the distance from Earth to the moon.

“Radar imaging has shown that about 15 percent of near-Earth asteroids larger than 600 feet, including 1999 JD6, have this sort of lobed, peanut shape,” said Lance Benner of NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, in a statement.

To obtain the views, researchers paired NASA’s Deep Space Network antenna at Goldstone, California with the National Science Foundation Green Bank Telescope in West Virginia.

The images show the asteroid is highly elongated, with a length of approximately two kms on its long axis.

NASA’s asteroid-tracking mission places a high priority on tracking asteroids and protecting our home planet from them.

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