

Facts About Comets



Basic Information About Comets

1. Comets originate from a region of space outside the solar system called the Oort Cloud.
2. Gravitational effects will send a comet into the inner solar system where it may be captured by the Sun and become a periodic comet much like Haley's Comet. If the comet has enough velocity it will round the Sun and never be seen again.
3. Comets are icy bodies composed of frozen water, gases, and dust likened to a "dirty snowball."
4. Comets such as Hale-Bopp (shown above) warm up as they approach the Sun and dust and gas begins to stream off the comet's nucleus generating two tails, a dust tail (the one pointing up in the photo), and a gas tail (the one pointing to the left in the photo).
5. Some comets have orbited the Sun so many times that they have lost all or most of their ice and gas and are now "dead." Dead comets may be much like some of the asteroids that are found between Mars and Jupiter.
6. Some comets pass too close to the Sun (sungrazers) and are vaporized by the heat; while some comets may hit a planet such as Shoemaker-Levy 9 did in 1992 when it hit Jupiter.