

January 2018 Highlight

Dwarf Planet Ceres Reaches Opposition



Image of the asteroid Ceres, taken by NASA's *Dawn* spacecraft. The mysterious, bright region is thought to be composed of salt deposits.

- ★ On January 31st the largest object in the asteroid belt, **1 Ceres**, reaches *opposition* (positioned opposite the Sun when seen from the Earth) and thus will be in great viewing position in night skies, presenting an excellent opportunity to view this object in a modest telescope.
- ★ Hovering around magnitude +6.9, you will need [a finder's chart](#) and/or a go-to telescope to locate this faint object with certainty.
- ★ At opposition, Ceres will be about 149 million miles away, situated in the constellation Cancer.

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Moon



Ceres



The Earth, Moon and Ceres shown to scale

- ★ At 945 km (587 miles) in diameter, roughly the size of Texas, **Ceres** takes 4.6 years to orbit the Sun.
- ★ Launched in 2007, [NASA's Dawn spacecraft](#) visited the two largest bodies in the asteroid belt, the rocky asteroid Vesta and the dwarf planet Ceres.

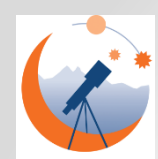
- ★ After spending more than one year orbiting Vesta, *Dawn* entered orbit around Ceres in March 2015, where it remains today.



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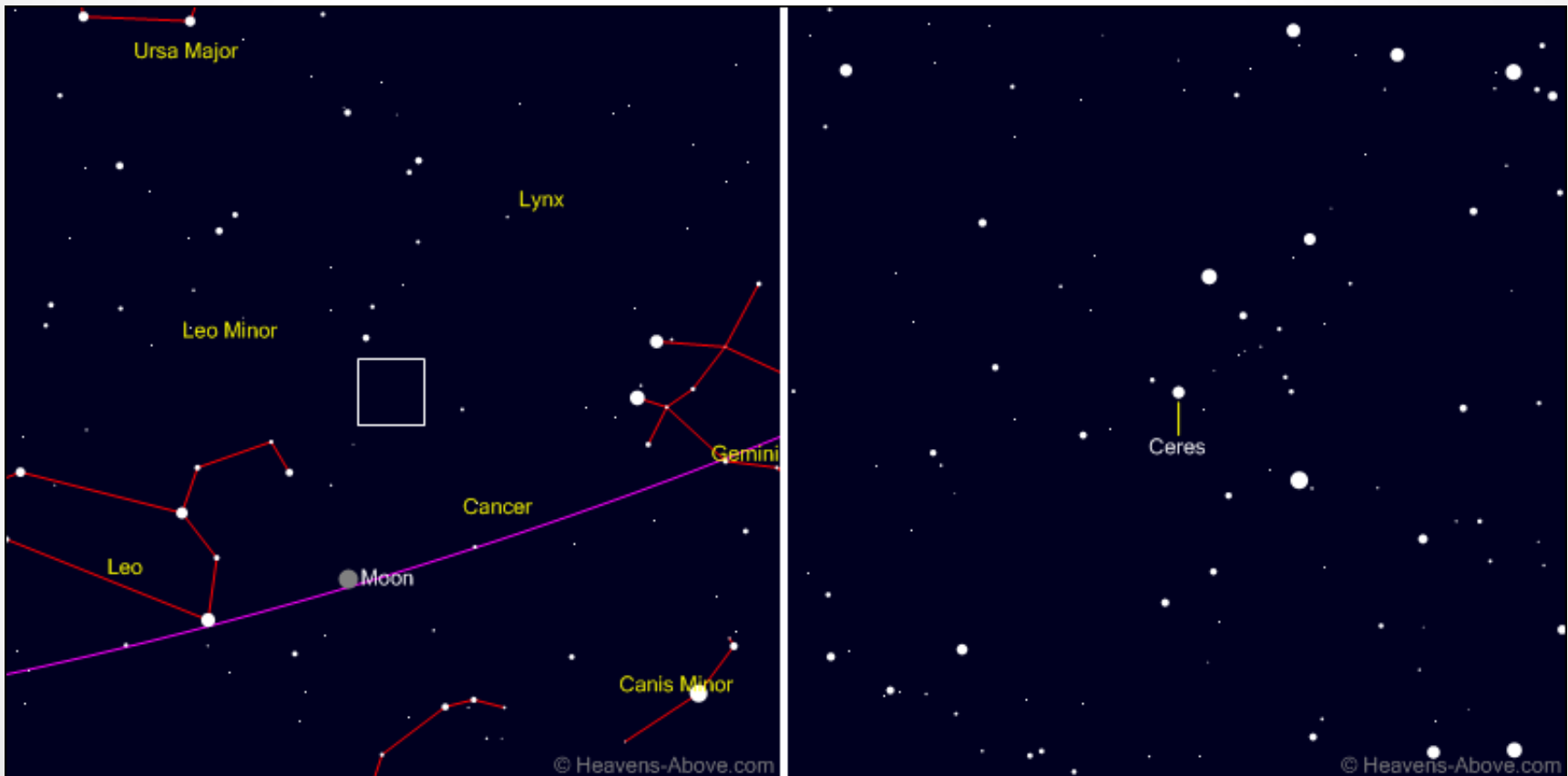
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- ★ **Ceres** was the first asteroid to be discovered, on 1 January 1801 by Giuseppe Piazzi in Palermo, Sicily, and at first it was considered to be a planet.
- ★ In 1851 astronomers demoted Ceres and other known asteroids from the ranks of the planets. Does this sound anything like the 2006 IAU (International Astronomical Union) demotion of Pluto?
- ★ In 2006, Ceres was classified (like Pluto) as a *dwarf planet*.
- ★ It is the largest object in the *asteroid belt*, located between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter.
- ★ *Ceres* is the ancient Roman goddess of agriculture, grain crops, fertility and motherly relationships, and is the origin of our word *cereal*!



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Find location charts for Ceres and other asteroids
at the heavens-above.com website.