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Uranus Facts

Uranus has a very unique rotation–it spins on its side at an almost 90-degree angle, unlike other planets. It is the seventh planet discovered in the Solar System that also led to the discovery of the last planet, Neptune they are both referred to as ice giants. Officially recognized in 1781 after many observations in the past, it is the third-largest planet of the Solar System.

Key Facts & Summary

- Since ancient times it was not recognized due to its dimness and slow orbit. However, in 1781 Sir William Herschel a German born Astronomer and Composer who lived and died in Slough announced its discovery being the first planet discovered with the help of a telescope.
- It was given the name Uranus, after the Greek god of the sky Ouranos.
- It is the only planet whose name is derived directly from a figure of Greek mythology.
- The mean apparent magnitude of Uranus is 5.68 with a standard deviation of 0.17, making it near the limit of naked eye visibility.
- Uranus is the seventh planet from the Sun and is around 1.8 billion miles or 2.9 billion kilometres away.
- It has the third-largest planetary radius and fourth-largest mass in the Solar System.
- It has a radius of 25.362 km or 15.759m, and has about 14.5 times the mass of Earth and four times its diameter – about 51.118 km or 31.763 m.
- It is on an average distance of 19.2 AU away from the Sun and 18.8 AU away from Earth.
- Its volume is about 63 times greater than Earth's, which means that 63 Earths can fit inside it.
- It orbits the sun quite unusually, being the only planet whose equator is nearly at a right angle to its orbit, with a tilt of 97.77 degrees. Because of this, it rotates in the opposite direction than most planets, from East to West.
- It takes Uranus 84 years to complete an orbit of the Sun, the longest of all the planets in the solar system. It also has one of the shortest days. One rotation on Uranus takes about 17 hours.
- Uranus has the coldest planetary atmosphere in the solar system, -224 degrees Celsius.
- Uranus and Neptune share similar compositions, and classified as ice giants.
- Uranus has a similar atmosphere to Jupiter and Saturn in its primary composition of hydrogen and helium yet, it contains more "ices" such as water, ammonia, methane and traces of other hydrocarbons.
- Though it appears featureless, without the cloud bands or storms associated with the other giant planets, it does have complex, layered cloud structure with water thought to make up the lowest clouds and methane the uppermost layer of clouds.

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