

BBC

THE ANIMALS WHOSE LIVES RELY ON THE NIGHT SKY

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Sky at Night

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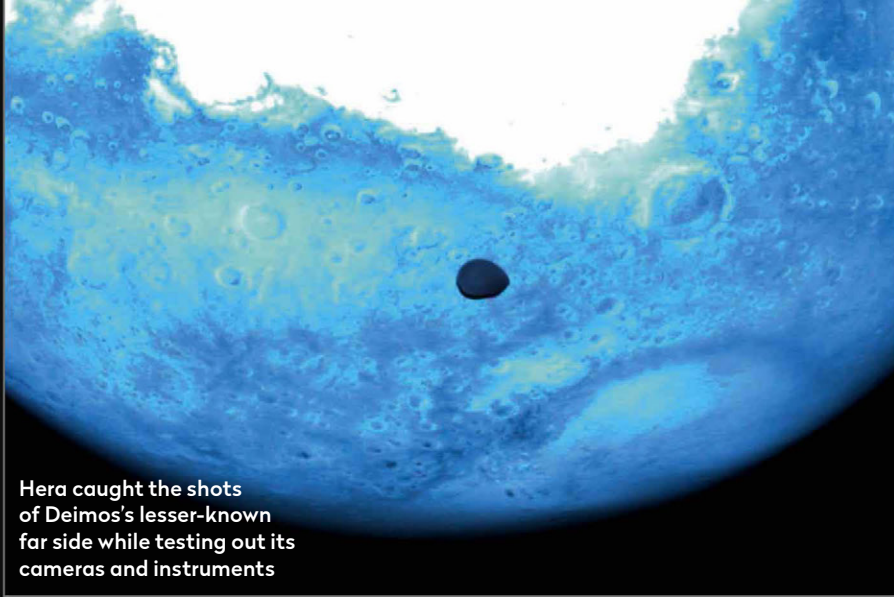
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Hera caught the shots of Deimos's lesser-known far side while testing out its cameras and instruments



The 12.4km moon was photographed from just 1,000km away as Hera got a gravity assist from Mars

Mars's mystery moon

While testing its instruments, Hera got a rare look at Deimos

Measuring just 12.4km (7.7 miles) across, Mars's diminutive moon Deimos is often overlooked. Tidally locked to the Red Planet, it is usually missed by spacecraft near Mars that only see the side of it that's closest to the planet. However, when ESA's Hera mission came within just 1,000km (620 miles) of it, it snapped some rare pictures of the moon's 'far side'.

Hera, which launched in October 2024, passed Mars on 12 March during a gravitational-assist manoeuvre on its way to the asteroid Dimorphos. In 2022, NASA's DART spacecraft deliberately smashed into asteroid Dimorphos's moon Dimorphos as part of a planetary defence mission to test how

we might one day deflect a potentially hazardous asteroid. Hera is currently en route to its job observing the effects of that impact, arriving at the Didymos system in late 2026. The Hera team used the Mars fly-by as an opportunity to test Hera's cameras and instruments on Deimos, gaining a unique view of its smallest moon.

"These instruments have been tried out before, during Hera's departure from Earth, but this is the first time that we have employed them on a small distant moon for which we still lack knowledge – demonstrating their excellent performance in the process," says Michael Kueppers, Hera's mission scientist. www.esa.int



▲ Smooth, city-sized Deimos was seen from above, appearing to cross the Red Planet