

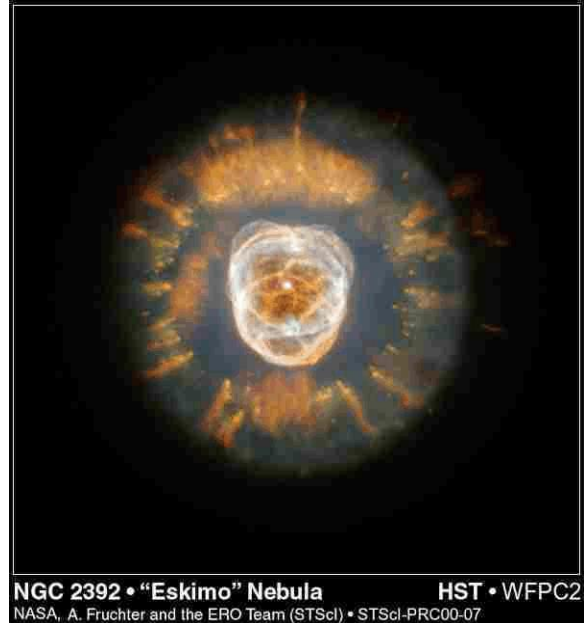
The Night Sky Naturalist, by Bob Vickers

The Eskimo Nebula

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Planetary nebulae have been described as the flowers and butterflies of space. Some of the Hubble photographs of these objects really do look like blossoming flowers with multilayered petals or like the colorful spreading wings of a butterfly.

Others, like the Eskimo Nebula take on a different appearance. Also called the Clown Face Nebula, photographs show that the central part of this object looks a little like a distorted face, while an outer nebulous ring takes on the appearance of a fringed hood. Robert Burnham, Jr., in his venerable guide, *Burnham's Celestial Handbook*, says that "...the whole nebula irresistibly suggests the classic and unforgettable features of W.C. Fields." While it takes larger apertures to actually see the facial features, smaller aperture scopes reveal a beautiful and bright planetary.



Discovered by Sir William Herschel in 1787, The Eskimo Nebula (NGC 2392 or Caldwell 39) lies about halfway between Kappa and Lambda Geminorum. It appears as a very faint and fuzzy ninth magnitude star through binoculars.

The nebula is a small but bright planetary measuring 47.9" x 43.0" and has an overall visual magnitude of 9.2. Its central star shines at magnitude 10.4. An 8.5 magnitude star lies 1.5' north of the nebula and a 12th magnitude star lies 1' to its northwest. Distances to many planetaries are still uncertain but The Eskimo Nebula appears to be in the neighborhood of 4500 light years away.

Without a UHC filter and at low power, this planetary is a bit like NGC 6826 (The Blinking Nebula) in that averted vision tends to bring out the nebula, while staring at the central star causes the nebula to fade.

The following is an excerpt from my Caldwell notebook:

24th of March, 2003 – 12.5" scope @ 180x w/skyglow broadband filter - A fine, bright planetary. Central star is clearly visible in a bright core. A dim outer ring of nebulosity is separated from the core by a darker ring between.

The Eskimo Nebula is also one of the Herschel 400's. Here is an excerpt from that notebook:

22nd of December, 2005 – 12.5" scope @ 242x w/ UHC filter - A beautiful and bright PN! Blue-gray in color. Central star easily visible. Core is a not quite circular bright disk becoming slightly brighter toward the center. Surrounded by a dark ring and then a dimmer halo visible w/ averted vision. The inner disk is mottled.

I could not see actual "facial features" with my scope during either these or subsequent observations, only mottling in the core. But a larger aperture scope should bring out more of the markings. What can you see?