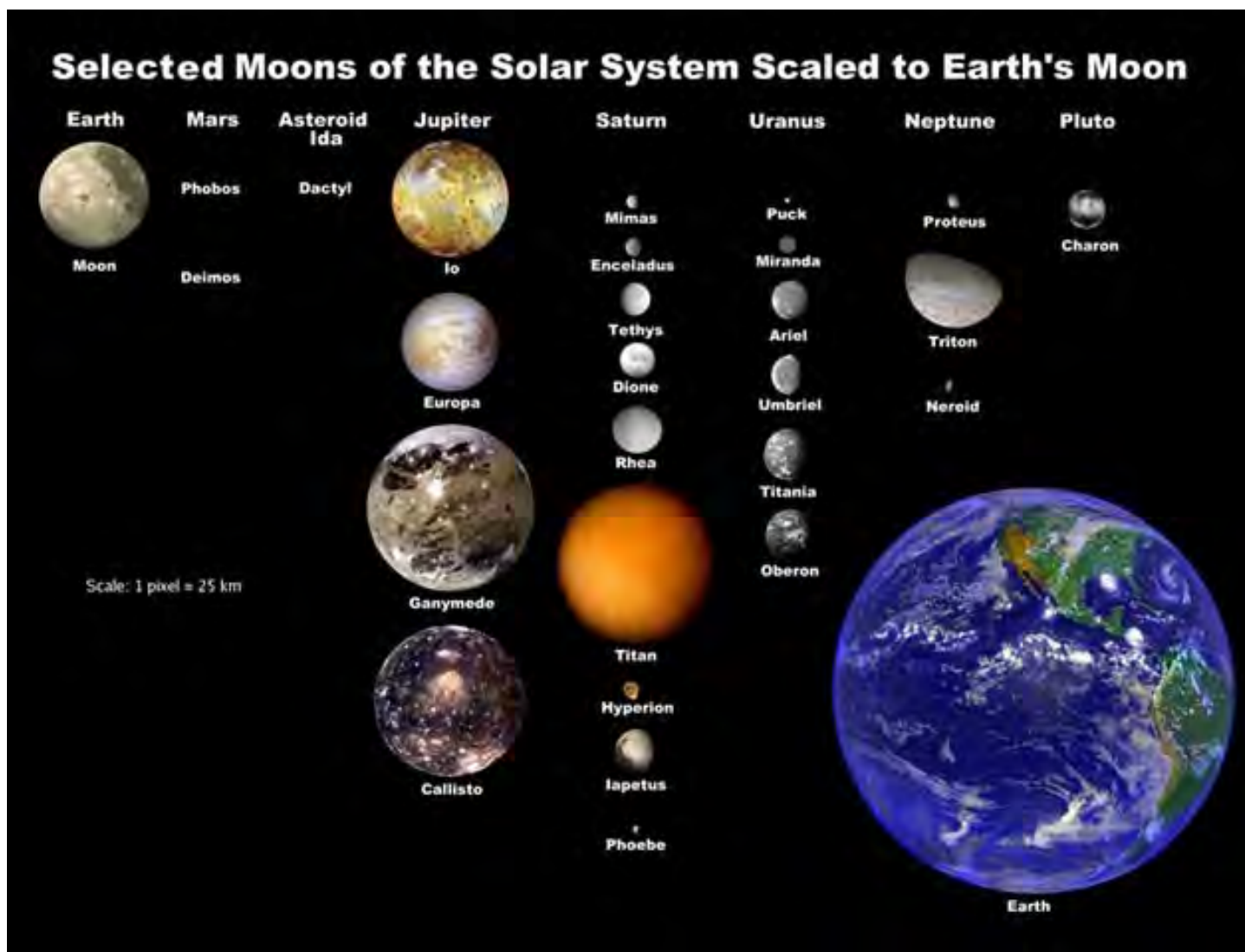


The Moons of the Solar System

As of October 2008, there are 176 known natural moons orbiting planets in our Solar System. 168 moons orbit the "full-size" planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune), while 8 moons orbit the smaller "dwarf planets" (Ceres, Pluto, Haumea, Makemake, and Eris).



Major moons of the solar planetary system, showing relative sizes compared to Earth, our blue life giving home in the Universe. Many people think that moons are smaller than planets. This, however, is not true. There are several moons in the Solar System which are larger than both the planets Mercury and Pluto. Neither are the moons less exciting than the planets. There are moons with volcanos, atmospheres, and even quite possibly liquid water oceans. The difference between what we call a moon and what we call a planet has to do only with around what the world revolves, or circles. If the object circles the Sun it is called a Planet, however, if it circles another world instead of the Sun then it is called a moon. Moons sadly are often ignored, even though they are just as large, splendid and exciting as the planets.

The Moons of Saturn

Of all the planets, Saturn reigns supreme, well at least in the moon department. That is because Saturn has more moons than any other planet, 62 currently, and counting. Of these 62 moons, 53 are classified officially as moons, 9 are provisional (unofficial) moons. Although most of Saturn's moons are small, a few such as Titan (second largest) are very large. Many of Saturn's moons orbit around the edge of the planet's rings. They help to keep the rings in place, just as a shepherd keeps sheep in place. For this reason we call these moons Shepherd Moons.

The eighth moon orbiting Saturn is Enceladus. In Greek mythology Enceladus was a Titan who was defeated in battle by the gods, and buried under Mount Etna by Athena, goddess of reason and the arts. Discovered in 1789 by **William Herschel**, Enceladus is the brightest object besides the Sun in the Solar System. We cannot see it from Earth without a telescope, because it is small and far away. The smooth surface of Enceladus tells scientists that it has recently been active. Scientists do not know for sure whether it is water, volcanic or other material that has erupted in the last 100 million years giving this moon such a smooth face. AK, with