

THE BEAUTY OF THE EAGLE NEBULA

The Eagle Nebula, also known as Messier 16 or M16, consists of a star cluster and many emission nebulae and dark nebulae, in the direction of the constellation Serpens the Serpent. It's the location of several famous structures including the Pillars of Creation, whose photo you see here. →

In the late 18th century, when this object began to be catalogued by astronomers, only the star cluster could be seen, and it was designated as M16 in Messier's catalogue of things not to be confused with comets. Later, this star cluster became known as the Snow Queen Cluster.

The advent of astrophotography revealed a large area of glowing hydrogen gas that was invisible to the unaided eye, and that looked somewhat like an eagle with outstretched wings, giving rise to the current common name of Eagle Nebula.

As higher resolution photography and then digital photography began to reveal more and more features, particularly the dark patches (aka dark nebulae), many distinct features within the Eagle Nebula were given individual names. **Today, the informal name of the Eagle Nebula is taken as referring to all of these in one collective designation. Some of them are famous, and all are beautiful.**

Take a look at the photos here, and delve deeper into this region of space, which is one of the most interesting and beautiful we know. **You'll find the Eagle Nebula M16 to the right of the famous Teapot asterism of the constellation Sagittarius.**

The Eagle Nebula suddenly burst upon the world's collective consciousness in 1995, when the Hubble Space Telescope focused its attention on a dark nebula in the center of the Eagle.

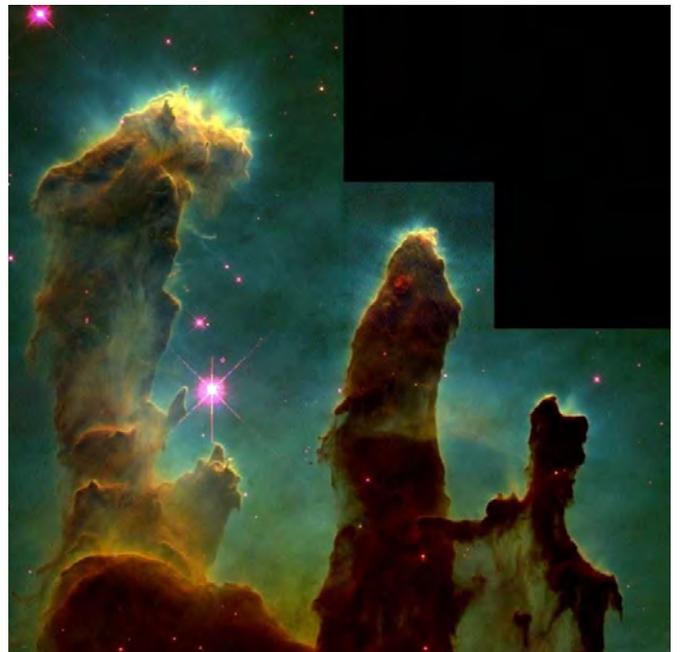
The dark protrusions of dense gas were found to be the site of new star and solar system formation, and the resulting photograph became known as the Pillars of Creation and gave most people their first view of new stars and solar systems at the dawn of their creation.

Similar areas, such as the Stellar Spire on the left side of the Eagle, are also forming new stars, through a combination of processes. The cold, mostly hydrogen gas of the nebula has already fuelled the formation of a series of young, hot stars. As the gas continues to collapse under its own gravity into the dark forms we see, new stars and solar systems are formed and continue to grow as they attract more and more gas to them. However, the intense light pressure from the new stars that have formed and their solar winds are eroding away the dense, cold gas pockets, diminishing new star formation and dispersing the nebulae. →

Enjoy the view while you can. Sadly, data from other telescopes has shown that the Pillars and Spire are likely already gone, victims of a massive shock wave from a supernova explosion that happened 8,000 to 9,000 years ago.

Its light has already gone past us, but the slower-moving shock waves would have taken thousands of years more to sweep through the Eagle Nebula, destroying the delicate structures we find so entrancing. The light of that destruction is already on its way to us, so in a few thousand years, people will be seeing a very different Eagle in the sky.

AK, with notes from EarthSky and Wikipedia



The famous Pillars of Creation taken by the Hubble Space Telescope. It's one of the features within the Eagle Nebula

distinct features within the Eagle Nebula were given individual names. **Today, the informal name of the Eagle Nebula is taken as referring to all of these in one collective designation. Some of them are famous, and all are beautiful.**



Behold the awesome beauty of the Eagle Nebula, aka M16.

