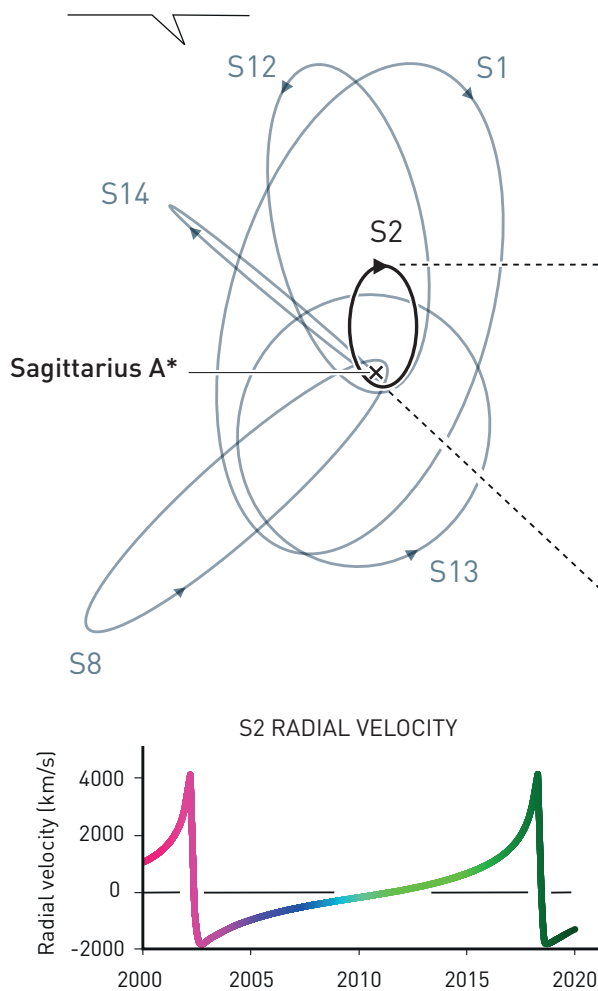


Stars closest to the centre of the Milky Way

The stars' orbits are the most convincing evidence yet that a supermassive black hole is hiding in Sagittarius A*. This black hole is estimated to weigh about 4 million solar masses, squeezed into a region no bigger than our solar system.

Some of the measured orbits of stars close to Sagittarius A* at the centre of the Milky Way.



The S2 star's radial velocity increases as it approaches Sagittarius A* and decreases as it moves away along its elliptical orbit. Radial velocity is the component of the star's velocity that is in our line of sight.

Astronomers were able to map an entire orbit of less than 16 years for one of the stars, S2 (or S-02). The closest it came to Sagittarius A* was about 17 light hours (more than 10,000 million kilometres).

