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Archbishop's Seminary Students on a Bee Keeping Experience in Slovakia

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By Jesmond Cutajar ICYB contact person for Malta

The 10th IMYB was hosted by Slovakia at the Secondary Vocational School Stredná odborná škola in Banská Bystrica. This school is the only beekeeping school in Slovakia. Malta participated together with 28 nations from as far away as Canada, Australia, the Lebanon and Egypt. The organisation of this year's event was excellent and the Slovak school had the necessary facilities on campus to host both the beekeeping competition as well as the accommodation and catering for all participants.

IMYB is primarily an educational activity exposing our young to the world of beekeeping. The highlight of IMYB is teaching our teens the various techniques necessary in the management of bees. However, IMYB also has other benefits as it exposes our teens to other social skills. The Maltese young beekeepers were each assigned into a team of around 6 individuals coming from different countries. Each team member brings along a wide range of abilities, beekeeping knowledge and languages. This in itself is a new experience to our Maltese teens because each member learns to use one's social skills to get on in a new multicultural environment.

IMYB is not only about bees. The teens also have time-off from handling bees and their activities included a cultural tour of Banská Bystrica, horse riding and holding a large eagle. Additionally, each participating nation conducts a brief country presentation highlighting key aspects of their country's culture. This in itself is a developmental opportunity for our young beekeepers as they are expected to go on stage and make a public presentation in front of an audience. The Maltese teens gave a presentation about the traditional Maltese honey-ring and also gave the audience the chance to taste the sweet. Another highlight of every IMYB is the closing ceremony. It is a moment of celebration for results achieved but at the same time one has a heavy heart knowing that it is time for goodbyes as the awesome experience draws close to an end. At the end of the event, the results were announced with Germany 3rd, Slovakia 2nd and the Czech Republic 1st. The Maltese team came 24th out of 29 participating countries. Considering that each Maltese member never handled bees before, they took advantage of the learning possibilities available by the technical school staff and by the end of the event they increased their technical awareness on the handling of bees.

In 2020, the 11th IMYB will be held in Slovenia – home of the Carolinian bee and a huge beekeeping country. In neighbouring Višnja Gora a spectacular sculpture of the bee was unveiled for World Bee Day in May 2019.

Before concluding, the Maltese team would like to thank the ICYB, the Slovak organizers of IMYB 2019, the school authorities of The Archbishop's Seminary and the Minister for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change for kindly supporting the team's participation.

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Reportage by Aidan Borg (Year 10)

The International Meeting of Young Beekeepers (IMYB) is an annual event held in different countries where young beekeepers from around the world meet new people who share their interest in the art of beekeeping and take part in a competition.

This year, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to be a part of this experience. I had never before worked with bees, but I didn't let that deter me from going into this competition head on.

After an informative seminar on bees by Mr. Jesmond Cutajar, and some research and preparation on the topic, I felt confident that the competition would be enjoyable. I knew that my lack of hands on experience would be a disadvantage, yet I was still excited for what was to come. Mr. Jesmond Cutajar and Mr. Justin Mercieca accompanied the Maltese team on this exciting trip.

On the first day, I found myself in a room with another Maltese competitor and two Irish teens. They both had experience with beekeeping, and they had also attended the IMYB in years before. This was something new for me as I had never lived in the same room with foreigners. This was a rather interesting thing, as I got to learn about another country and culture from two natives which I spent so much time with. I was also part of a group of competitors from different countries. In the five person group, there was a Canadian, a Ukrainian, a Slovenian, a Georgian and myself and we had a Lebanese leader. The whole group instantly clicked, and we worked together quite finley.

After a short introduction, all groups were tasked with the challenge of taking many different and rather difficult selfies. This definitely helped break the ice in a very short time. After a very intense race to get all the pictures needed, there was the first round of country presentations. These included the Slovak, Irish and Lebanese presentations, all of which were very entertaining.

The second day started off with the opening ceremony. Speeches were given by esteemed guests and a ceremonial marking of all present countries on a map was done by representatives from each country. The ceremony was followed by the first round of competition. We were tasked with multiple activities which are related to the keeping, caring and working with bees. Some of these included the marking of the male bees – drones – with the colour which indicates the year 2019, putting a hive together and sorting out different tools according to their use. After we finished that and ate lunch, we were taken on an excursion Banská Bystrica. We then went for a city tour which guided us around the main city square and around parts of the old city. That evening, the Maltese team gave a presentation about the traditional Maltese honey rings, and gave all members of the audience samples of this sweet.

On Friday, we had an entire day of competition, and various activities including honey extraction, building frames to place into hives, honey tasting, and a theoretical test. These activities were extremely helpful in understanding how to properly take care of bees and how to be able to remove, extract and handle honey. Right after this, various activities like horse riding, lacemaking, and falconry took place. These activities were all very interesting, and the falconry show captivated the entire audience, and everyone was allowed to hold a large eagle. At the end of the day, we had the official closing of the competition.

On Saturday, the last full day in Slovakia, the group of competitors travelled to a cave which was full of beautiful structures. Many hundreds of stalagmites and stalactites give the cave a rather charming appearance. The treks up and down the mountain were filled with scenic views wonderful flora. We then took a chairlift up another, higher mountain. The breathtaking scenery from the peak was another highlight of the day. Saturday ended with a party for all of the competitors.

On Sunday, we were to catch the plane back home. We traveled by coach to the Bratislava airport, and noticing that we had a lot of time on our hands, the Maltese team went to discover Bratislava. We saw many lovely parts of the old city and had some pictures by the Danube River.

I really enjoyed the entire trip, and I very much wish to go to the next IMYB next year, which will be held in Slovenia.

Aidan Borg (Year 10)



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