

Schoolchildren Worldwide Compete to “Catch a Star!”

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“Catch a Star!”, an international competition for school students organised by ESO’s Educational Office and the European Association for Astronomy Education, has had its fourth successful year.

The competition encourages students to work together in teams, learning about astronomy and discovering things for themselves by researching information. The most important goal is to develop an interest in science and astronomy through investigation and teamwork. This is why many of the prizes are awarded by lottery, to make the competition inclusive and avoid a sense of elitism. There are, however, also four major travel prizes which are awarded by jury. “Catch a Star!” was originally open to European countries and Chile, but from this year the competition was made truly international.

More than 130 teams from 24 countries worldwide took part. They chose an astronomical object, such as a nebula, star, planet, or moon, or a more general theme such as ‘black holes’ or ‘star formation’. They then wrote about this topic, researching and discussing how large telescopes such as those of ESO could be used to study it. Younger students were invited to take part in a separate picture competition, for which they created a large number of very impressive drawings and paintings.

Other prizes, of astronomy posters and CD-ROMs, were also given. Some were awarded by lottery, and some as ‘highly commended’ prizes by the jury. For the picture competition, all the children won “Catch a Star!” T-shirts, with other prizes awarded with the help of a public web-based vote.

Given the importance of gender issues in science, and especially physics, it is encouraging to note that girls did particu-

larly well in the competition. For example, 10 out of the 11 students who won travel prizes are girls. There was also, as we have consistently seen in ESO’s educational projects, a strong showing from central and eastern European nations. It would be interesting to analyse these results further, to investigate whether there are specific reasons for the girls’ success, and why certain countries are particularly well represented. Such an analysis could provide useful information for future educational projects.

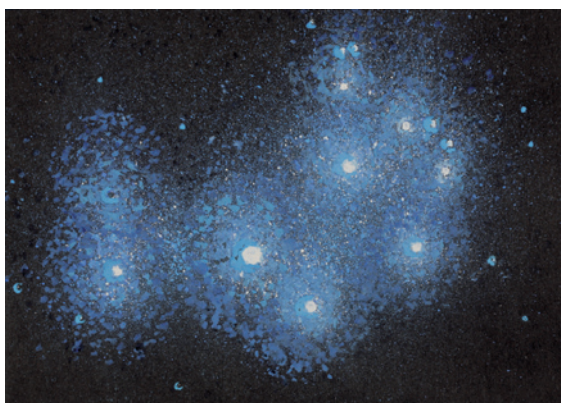
About the same number of countries took part as last year, with more than half of the entries coming from just three countries. Our aims for the future are to make the competition easier to enter, and to widen participation. We hope that even more students, from even more countries, will “Catch a Star!” next time.

Find out more about the competition at <http://www.eso.org/catchastar/>

| Prize | Project | Students | Teacher/Group leader | Country |
|--|--|---|----------------------------|----------|
| Trip to ESO at Paranal and Santiago (Chile) | Star clusters and the structure of the Milky Way | Edina Budai Andrea Szabo Judit Szulagyai | Akos Kereszturi | Hungary |
| Trip to Königsleiten Observatory (Austria) and ESO Headquarters | The Fireworks Galaxy – NGC 6946 | Alexandra Georgieva Rumen Stamatov | Petar Todorov | Bulgaria |
| Trip to Wendelstein Observatory (Germany) and ESO Headquarters | The Annular Solar Eclipse versus the Venus Transit | Aida Pallàs Ramos Violeta Porta Alonso Alicia Tiffon Calvet | Anicet Cosialls Manonelles | Spain |
| Trip to Hispano-German Astronomical Observatory at Calar Alto (Spain) ¹ | Sunspots | Denitsa Georgieva Tanya Nikolova Rositsa Zhekova | Dimitar Kokotanekov | Bulgaria |

Table of winners of the “Catch a Star!” travel prizes.

¹ This prize was kindly provided by Spain’s Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.



Two of the winners of the drawing competition section of “Catch a Star!”, by Karolis from Lithuania (left) and Yuriy from Belarus (right).