THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF THE "MINERAL/FOSSIL OF THE YEAR" PROGRAMME IN HUNGARY – JOINT FORCES IN MUSEUM SCIENCE EDUCATION

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Why Mineral/Fossil of the Year?

The geological education, in general, is very limited in the public education in Hungary. Mineralogy is a stepchild due to the 1948 termination of the subject **natural history** in public education. Zoology and botany, two of the three main fields of the earlier natural history survived and are taught in details within the subject of biology. Mineralogical issues were partly arranged to physical geography, as well as to chemistry and physics, but none of these teachers, during their training, are properly prepared to deal with this task. Hence, mineralogical knowledge of the Hungarian population is very incomplete: the importance of natural resources and the environmental impact of solid technological materials are not recognised. That situation is a good substrate even for orienting to esotericism.

Museums, but later also universities and academic research institutions had been active through separate actions in the last decades in filling up the gap, raising interest in the public for geology. The Hungarian Geological Society (HGS) found a way in 2016 to unite these individual forces by starting the popular science education programme **Mineral of the Year** and **Fossil of the Year**. The aim of the country-wide programme is to mobilize a critical mass of experts, teachers, collectors, etc. for working together, to bring people closer to geological ideas and applications by using the two best known "faces" of geology: minerals and fossils.

Tools of the programme

The last five years have been regarded as a success story, and the programme became a well-defined brand by now (Fig. 1). The preparation of the coming programme year starts in May–June, when a professional board nominates three-three candidates. End of August–mid October is the public voting period, when, based on 6–7000 votes, the winner mineral and fossil are selected by the broadest public. Voting is both online and onsite, the latter realized at outreach programmes in museums, schools, mineral fairs, but even among teacher candidates in universities. The winner of the (next) year is publicized at the largest outreach programme of the HGS, the **Fair of Earth Sciences** in November. The winners so far: garnet (2016), quartz (2017), fluorite (2018), galena (2019), tourmaline (2020); resp. *Nummulites* (2016), cave bear (2017), *Ammonites* (2018), *Komlosaurus* (2019), megalodon (2020).

Throughout the actual calendar year, from January till November multiple tools are used to reach the goal. **Popular articles** are published in magazines and small posts are put on the online platforms (homepage, Facebook…) to introduce the winners. **Outreach programmes** present the winners via touch-on experiences using real pieces of the minerals and fossils, interesting and interactive games, tests, etc. These programmes are effective for reaching different age-groups (children, parents, grandparents) simultaneously, as they often have the same, minimum level background.

Every year, the 3–14 age group is invited to participate in a **drawing competition**. The best drawings, accompanied by a topic-related **photo exhibition** migrate cross the country and are on show in museums.

Talks and **presentations** in different settings, mainly in open programmes of museums and universities, and **demonstrations in schools** are also important tools of the programme. Museums join in growing numbers these activities and often present **small exhibitions** of the winner according to their capacity.

Fig. 1. Posters of the first 5 years of the Mineral of the Year and Fossil of the Year programmes