



News Blog

Higher-education news from around the Web

May 11, 2007

Canadian University Begins Project to Catalogue All of Life With 'DNA Barcoding'

A Canadian university has started an ambitious project to [catalogue all life forms](#) using a shorthand genetic analysis called DNA barcoding, which was invented at the university just four years ago. The [Biodiversity Institute of Ontario](#), which the University of Guelph opened this week, is home to four major efforts designed to sort unidentified or ambiguous life forms into species, and to understand the relationships among them. Researchers will start with the plants, insects, and birds of Ontario, the province with the most diverse — and threatened — ecosystems in Canada.

The institute is also home to Canada's [Barcode of Life](#) consortium, which has created a collaborative database of DNA barcodes that has already begun gathering the genetic signatures of life as disparate as fungi and polar bears.

“We may see comprehensive barcoding projects within five years,” Paul D.N. Hebert, a professor at the university who helped invent the technique, told the journal *Nature* in 2003, “and it’s feasible to imagine a database of all animal life on the planet in 20 years.” Quicker than he thought. —*Susan Brown*

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