

Project Aims to "Barcode" All Life

DNA database could allow easy cross-referencing, identification of Earth's organisms

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A project has been announced to create a catalog of all life on Earth using DNA "barcodes."

The barcodes are short sequences of [DNA](#) that appear capable of characterizing every form of life.

In higher organisms, the sequences are located in a specific gene in [mitochondria](#), the cells' power plants, in which DNA changes rapidly as species evolve.

The [BBC](#) says that researchers aim to obtain barcode information from many species at a cost of about US\$1.80 a pop.

Initially, the work will focus on birds and fish.

Data gathered will be inserted into a database maintained by the [Consortium for the Barcode of Life](#) (CBOL).

The database could allow cross-referencing of all knowledge acquired on particular organisms.

While not all researchers think the approach will prove entirely adequate for taxonomy, it could allow such things as mobile computers that can accurately identify species in the field.

The project was launched in London at the [International Conference for the Barcoding of Life](#)