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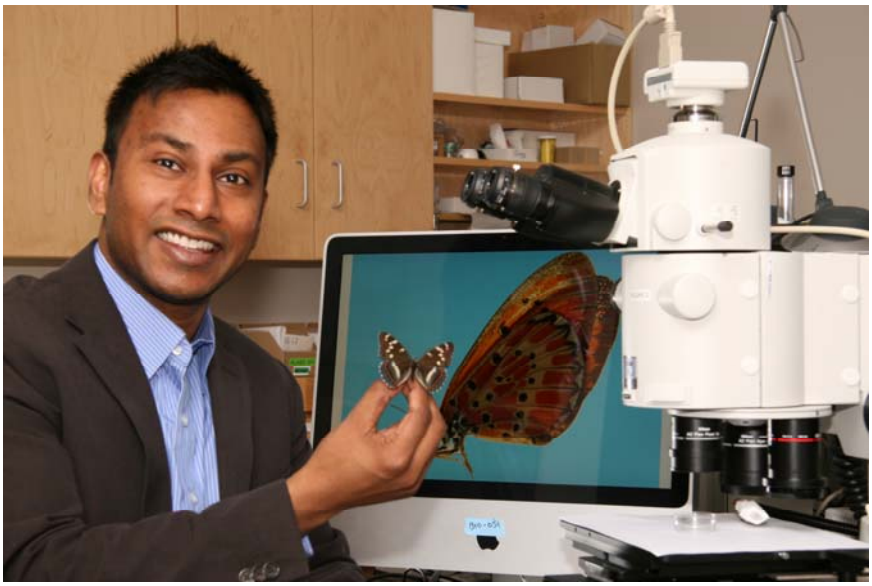
MEDIA RELEASE

Developer of DNA barcode database wins Ebbe Nielsen Prize



Guelph, Ontario, May 5, 2010

Sujeevan Ratnasingham, the bioinformatics expert who developed the Barcode of Life Data Systems (BOLD) platform for the global DNA barcoding community, has won this year's Ebbe Nielsen Prize from the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).

Ratnasingham is Informatics Director for the Biodiversity Institute of Ontario at the University of Guelph and informatics lead for International Barcode of Life (iBOL) project. He is the first Canadian winner of the €30,000 Ebbe Nielsen Prize, named for the late Danish entomologist who helped to create the Global Biodiversity Information Facility.

Ratnasingham's development of the BOLD system "is a major and innovative landmark in bringing genomic data on biodiversity to research and research applications for science and society," said Leonard Krishtalka, chair of the GBIF science committee. Established in 2001, the prize is given to a promising, early-career researcher using biosystematics and biodiversity informatics in novel ways.

"The prize acknowledges the value of genetic data to biodiversity science and recognizes the important work that Sujeevan and his colleagues have been doing," said iBOL Scientific Director Paul Hebert.

Ratnasingham has overseen the growth of BOLD into a system that combines barcode data with images and other information about species' genetic and morphological traits, geographical data and taxonomy. "The focus of my work is developing systems that allow many researchers to work together and share information on a global scale," said Ratnasingham.

Scientists use the system to enter, share and analyze information about hundreds of different barcoding projects around the world and to contribute to a barcode library that now contains hundreds of thousands of specimen barcodes from 70,000 species. "It's impossible to work with this volume and diversity of data without novel computing platforms," said Ratnasingham.

- 30 -

Barcode of Life Data Systems – www.boldsystems.org – is a resource for the DNA barcode community. It supports the organization and analysis of barcode data and provides a repository for barcode records, storing specimen data and images as well as sequences and trace files. BOLD also provides an identification engine based on the current barcode library and monitors the number of barcode sequence records and species coverage.

The International Barcode of Life is a research alliance spanning 26 countries and bringing together hundreds of leading scientists in the task of collecting specimens, obtaining their DNA barcode records and building an informatics platform to store and share this information for use in species identification and discovery. By 2015, iBOL participants will gather DNA barcode records for five million specimens representing 500,000 species, delivering a highly effective identification system for species commonly encountered by humanity and laying the foundation for subsequent progress towards a barcode reference library for all life.

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