DNA BARCODING PAKISTAN'S BIODIVERSITY: SCIENTISTS LAUNCH PAKBOL

PRESS RELEASE

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Pakistan's DNA barcoding community launched the Pakistan Barcode of Life (PakBOL) Network on April 25th in Islamabad at the 3rd International Conference on "Empowering Nation through Sciences", organized by the Women University Mardan

With its launch, Pakistan's DNA barcode research community joins the International Barcode of Life Consortium (iBOL), a long-established international network of organizations working to better understand biodiversity on Earth.

"It's really thrilling that Pakistan will now officially join the consortium," said Margaux McDonald, Canada's Senior Trade Commissioner in Pakistan, who spoke at the conference.

"It's a really impressive initiative to DNA barcode Pakistan's biodiversity. I know we will all be anxiously watching as the project progresses," said McDonald.

While Pakistan has informally participated in iBOL activities since 2010, PakBOL will formalize the nation's partnership with the consortium. It will also encourage scientific collaboration and promote new research.

"PakBOL will offer a platform to the barcoding community in Pakistan for working together to document and understand the country's biodiversity," said Dr. Muhammad Ashfaq, who gave a keynote speech at the conference and has been involved in DNA barcoding in Pakistan since 2010.

A research scientist at the Centre for Biodiversity Genomics at the University of Guelph where iBOL's secretariat is located, Dr. Ashfaq has offered training to many scientists interested in working with DNA barcoding.

To date, Pakistan's research community has generated around 50,000 barcode records from animals and 1,600 from plants. The country has also been actively participating in iBOL's Global Malaise Program – with sampling at nine sites already completed and at 11 ongoing.

Leading PakBOL's efforts in Pakistan is Dr. Nazeer Ahmed, Professor and Dean for graduate studies at Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences in Quetta. Dr. Ahmed, a member of iBOL's Scientific Steering Committee, has been actively using DNA barcoding for years, focusing his research on developing DNA-based biodiversity inventories of the different ecosystems in Pakistan's largest province, Balochistan.

"With the launch of PakBOL, we aim to barcode every species in the country," said Dr. Ahmed.

Adopting this new technology will improve and accelerate our ability to understand agricultural pests and disease vectors, he added.

"We are optimistic that this seemingly small step today will set the foundation for a giant leap toward future scientific endeavours in the areas of climatic change, public health, our understanding of ecosystem functions, biodiversity studies, and beyond," said Dr. Ahmed.

PAKISTAN BARCODE OF LIFE

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> **Dr. Nazeer Ahmed**
> iBOL Scientific Steering Committee, Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences, Pakistan

> *"With the launch of PakBOL, we are looking forward to seeking help to better understand biodiversity in Pakistan, especially pest and disease complexities."*
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> **Dr. Ghazala Yasmeen**
> Vice Chancellor, Women University Mardan, Pakistan