Kids Invited to Name a New Species

Contest gives youth an opportunity to name a new species.

(PRWEB) November 11, 2005 -- Now more than any other time in history, scientists around the world are identifying new species. This fall, kids across Canada and the U.S will have the opportunity to name a newly identified species and leave their own personal mark on science. Currently, 1.7 million species have been identified on Earth but scientists estimate the total number of species at 5 million to 10 million.

The “Name A New Species Contest” is held in conjunction with the release of the groundbreaking new children's book, Strange New Species: Astonishing Discoveries of Life on Earth (ISBN 1-897066-31-7, $24.95 cl; ISBN 1-897066-32-5, $16.95 pb), by Dr. Elin Kelsey. The deadline for contest entries is March 31, 2006, and a winner will be named on Earth Day - April 22, 2006. The winner's contest entry will be chosen as the common name for a new species of extremophile, and 10 lucky finalists will receive a copy of Strange New Species signed by the author.

Every day new species are being discovered and identified and the public's interest is keen. In fact, the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York recently held a fundraising auction to name a new species of monkey discovered in Bolivia. The winning bid was $650,000. The “Name A New Species Contest” invites thousands of children to become involved in the excitement of a real scientific event. Maple Tree Press, publisher of Strange New Species, and the scientists involved, are excited to be able to host this unique competition, which will no doubt spark a life-long interest in science and nature among many of the entrants.

The new species to be named was found in the Great Salt Lake in Utah. This microbe is part of a group of organisms called extremophiles, so named because of their ability to survive in extreme environmental conditions that would kill humans in seconds flat. More specifically, this organism is classified as a halophile or salt-loving microorganism because it thrives in water ten times saltier than the sea.

The new species was identified in 2004 by 21 year-old college student Ashlee Allred, part of a team of scientists-led by American biochemist Dr. Bonnie Baxter-who are doing research on life in extreme environments, on Earth and other planets.

This orangy-red rod-shaped new species is only 1.5 microns long (you could fit 100 of them on the head of a pin)! It is part of the Halorubrum genus (meaning, salt-red), which contain such an abundance of carotenoid pigments that it is completely resistant to the UV rays that are so harmful to humans. Dr. Baxter hopes that these tiny microbes could lead to breakthroughs in understanding how to prevent UV damage to humans in our increasingly sun-blasted world.

Although very little is known about this extraordinary new species needs a name. Kids ages seven to fifteen will be able to submit their entry to the Name A New Species Contest by visiting the Maple Tree Press website, at www.mapletreepress.com.

The “Name A New Species” Contest will be judged by Ashlee Allred, the student who identified the new species, Dr. Aharon Oren, a microbiologist who sits on the halophile taxonomy committee, biochemist Dr. Bonnie Baxter, Dr. Kathleen Londry, a Canadian astrobiologist, and Dr. Elin Kelsey, author of Strange New Species. For official contest rules and entry forms, please visit the Maple Tree Press website.
"Scientists are discovering more new species today - thousands each year - than at any other time in history. Each discovery of a new life form challenges science to look at familiar species in new ways. Believe it or not, most of the world's species have not yet been identified. Could you uncover a brand new species? With millions yet to be discovered, there's a real chance you might."
~ Elin Kelsey, Strange New Species: Astonishing Discoveries of Life on Earth

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