

DNA barcode data accurately identify higher taxa

Jonathan A Coddington, Ingi Agnarsson, Ren-Chung Cheng, Klemen Čandek, Amy Driskell, Holger Frick, Matjaž Gregorič, Rok Kostanjšek, Christian Kropf, Matthew Kweskin, Tjaša Lokovšek, Miha Pipan, Nina Vidergar, Matjaž Kuntner

The use of unique DNA sequences as a method for taxonomic identification is no longer fundamentally controversial, even though debate continues on the best markers, methods, and technology to use. Although both existing databanks such as GenBank and BOLD, as well as reference taxonomies, are imperfect, in best case scenarios “barcodes” (whether single or multiple, organelle or nuclear, loci) clearly are an increasingly fast and inexpensive method of identification, especially as compared to manual identification of unknowns by increasingly rare expert taxonomists. Because most species on Earth are undescribed, a complete reference database at the species level is impractical in the near term. The question therefore arises whether unidentified species can, using DNA barcodes, be accurately assigned to more inclusive groups such as genera and families—taxonomic ranks of putatively monophyletic groups for which the global inventory is more complete and stable. We used a carefully chosen test library of CO1 sequences from 49 families, 313 genera, and 816 species of spiders to assess the accuracy of genus and family-level identifications. We used BLAST queries of each sequence against the entire library and got the top ten hits. The percent sequence identity was reported from these hits (PIdent, range 75-100%). Accurate identification (PIdent above which errors totaled less than 5%) occurred for genera at PIdent values > 95 and families at PIdent values ≥ 91 , suggesting these as heuristic thresholds for generic and familial identifications in spiders. Accuracy of identification increases with numbers of species/genus and genera/family in the library; above five genera per family and fifteen species per genus all identifications were correct. We propose that using percent sequence identity between conventional barcode sequences may be a feasible and reasonably accurate method to identify animals to family/genus. However, the quality of the underlying database impacts accuracy of results; many outliers in our dataset could be attributed to taxonomic and/or sequencing errors in BOLD and GenBank. It seems that an accurate and complete reference library of families and genera of life *could* provide accurate higher level taxonomic identifications cheaply and accessibly, within years rather than decades.

1 **DNA barcode data accurately identify higher taxa**

2

3 Jonathan A. Coddington ^{*1}, Ingi Agnarsson ^{1,5}, Ren-Chung Cheng ², Klemen Čandek ², Amy
4 Driskell ¹, Holger Frick ³, Matjaž Gregorič ², Rok Kostanjšek ⁴, Christian Kropf ³, Matthew
5 Kweskin ¹, Tjaša Lokovšek ², Miha Pipan ^{2,6}, Nina Vidergar ², Matjaž Kuntner ^{*1,2}

6

7 ¹ National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, USA

8 ² EZ Lab, Institute of Biology at Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and
9 Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia

10 ³ Department of Invertebrates, Natural History Museum Bern, Switzerland

11 ⁴ Department of Biology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

12 ⁵ Department of Biology, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT, USA

13 ⁶ Currently at: Department of Biochemistry, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, CB2 1GA,
14 United Kingdom

15

16 ***Authors for correspondence**

17 Jonathan A. Coddington, Department of Entomology, National Museum of Natural History,
18 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20013-7012, USA, coddington@si.edu

19 and

20 Matjaž Kuntner, Research Centre, Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Novi trg 2, P.O.
21 Box 306, SI-1001, Ljubljana, Slovenia, kuntner@gmail.com

22

23 **Funding**

24 This work was made possible by a Swiss Contribution to the enlarged EU grant to M. Kuntner
25 and C. Kropf and the Laboratories of Analytical Biology, National Museum of Natural History,
26 Smithsonian Institution.

27

28 **Keywords:** taxonomic impediment, genus, family, genome, Global Genome Initiative,
29 Smithsonian.

30

31 **Abstract**

32 The use of unique DNA sequences as a method for taxonomic identification is no longer
33 fundamentally controversial, even though debate continues on the best markers, methods, and
34 technology to use. Although both existing databanks such as GenBank and BOLD, as well as
35 reference taxonomies, are imperfect, in best case scenarios “barcodes” (whether single or
36 multiple, organelle or nuclear, loci) clearly are an increasingly fast and inexpensive method of
37 identification, especially as compared to manual identification of unknowns by increasingly rare
38 expert taxonomists. Because most species on Earth are undescribed, a complete reference
39 database at the species level is impractical in the near term. The question therefore arises whether
40 unidentified species can, using DNA barcodes, be accurately assigned to more inclusive groups
41 such as genera and families—taxonomic ranks of putatively monophyletic groups for which the
42 global inventory is more complete and stable. We used a carefully chosen test library of CO1
43 sequences from 49 families, 313 genera, and 816 species of spiders to assess the accuracy of
44 genus and family-level identifications. We used BLAST queries of each sequence against the
45 entire library and got the top ten hits. The percent sequence identity was reported from these hits
46 (PIdent, range 75-100%). Accurate identification (PIdent above which errors totaled less than
47 5%) occurred for genera at PIdent values > 95 and families at PIdent values \geq 91, suggesting
48 these as heuristic thresholds for generic and familial identifications in spiders. Accuracy of
49 identification increases with numbers of species/genus and genera/family in the library; above
50 five genera per family and fifteen species per genus all identifications were correct. We propose
51 that using percent sequence identity between conventional barcode sequences may be a feasible
52 and reasonably accurate method to identify animals to family/genus. However, the quality of the
53 underlying database impacts accuracy of results; many outliers in our dataset could be attributed
54 to taxonomic and/or sequencing errors in BOLD and GenBank. It seems that an accurate and
55 complete reference library of families and genera of life *could* provide accurate higher level
56 taxonomic identifications cheaply and accessibly, within years rather than decades.

57

58 Introduction

59

60 Accurate identification of biological specimens has always limited the application of biological
61 data to important societal problems. Obstacles are well-known and difficult: the vast majority of
62 species are undescribed scientifically (Erwin, 1982; May, 1992; Mora et al., 2011); some
63 unknown but large fraction of higher taxa are not monophyletic (Goloboff et al., 2009; Pyron &
64 Wiens, 2011); many species can only be identified if certain life stages are available, e.g. adults
65 (Coddington & Levi, 1991), classical data sources such as morphology imperfectly track species
66 identity; the discipline of taxonomy continues to dwindle; the classical process of taxonomic
67 identification is mostly manual and cannot scale to provide the amounts of data required for real-
68 time decisions such as environmental monitoring, invasive species, climate change, etc.

69 DNA sequence data potentially can eliminate most of these obstacles. DNA barcoding uses a
70 fragment of the mitochondrial gene cytochrome *c* oxidase subunit I (CO1) as a unique species
71 diagnosis/identification tool in the animal kingdom (Hebert et al., 2003), with analogous single
72 to several locus protocols applied for vascular plants, ferns, mosses, algae and fungi (Saunders,
73 2005; Kress & Erickson, 2007; Nitta, 2008; Chase & Fay, 2009; Liu et al., 2010;), protists
74 (Scicluna, Tawari & Clark, 2006), and prokaryotes (Barraclough et al., 2009). Due to relative
75 ease and inexpensive sequencing, DNA barcoding is a popular tool in species identification and
76 taxonomic applications (e.g. Doña et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2015), and the method is no longer
77 fundamentally controversial at the species level (Pentinsaari, Hebert & Mutanen, 2014; Lopardo
78 & Uhl, 2014; Čandek & Kuntner, 2015; Anslan & Tedersoo, 2015; Wang et al., 2015).

79 While most species remain undescribed, the situation is not so dire for larger monophyletic
80 groups such as clades accorded the Linnaean ranks of genus or family. In assessing the state of
81 knowledge about biodiversity, it is important to distinguish between the first scientific discovery
82 of an exemplar of a lineage, and phylogenetic understanding of that lineage. Phylogenetic
83 understanding—both tree topology and consequent taxonomic changes, are research programs
84 with no clear end in sight. Linnaean rank is partially arbitrary, and one expects that the number
85 of higher taxa will probably increase over time as understanding improves. Discovery, however,
86 can have an objective definition: the year of the earliest formal taxonomic description of a
87 member of the lineage or taxonomic group in which it is currently included. By this definition
88 the earliest possible discovery of an animal lineage is 1758 (Linnaeus, 1758), or in the case of
89 spiders, 1757 (Clerck, 1757).

90 More illuminating are the latest discoveries of lineages with the rank of family within larger
91 clades, because the data tell us something about progress towards broad scale knowledge of
92 biodiversity. The species representing the most recent discovery of a family of birds, for
93 example, is the Broad-billed Sapayoa, *Sapayoa aenigma* Hunt, 1903 (Sapayoidae). The species
94 representing the most recently discovered mammal family is Kitti's hog-nosed bat,
95 *Craseonycteris thonglongyai* Hill, 1974 (Craseonycteridae). For flowering plants, it is
96 *Gomortega keule* (Molina) Baill, 1972 (Gomertegaceae). For bees, it is *Stenotritus elegans*
97 Smith, 1853 (Stenotritidae). For spiders, a megadiverse and poorly known group, it is
98 *Trogloraptor marchingtoni* Griswold, Audisio & Ledford, 2012 (Trogloraptoridae), but the
99 second most recent discovery of an unambiguously new spider family was in 1955,
100 Gradungulidae (Forster, 1955). Figure 1 illustrates the tempo of first discovery of families for
101 these five well-known clades. At the family level, these curves are essentially asymptotic,
102 implying that science is close to completing the inventory of clades ranked as families for these

103 large lineages. On the other hand, for Bacteria and Archaea (Figure 1), as one would expect, the
104 curve is not asymptotic at all but sharply increasing; prokaryote discovery and understanding is
105 obviously just beginning.

106 In fact, although many new eukaryote families are named every year, the vast majority of these
107 new names result from advances in phylogenetic understanding, not biological discovery of
108 major new forms of life. The last ten years of Zoological Record suggests that roughly 5-10 truly
109 new families are discovered per year.

110 In the context of the above question—approximate taxonomic identification of organisms using
111 DNA sequences—these data suggest that our knowledge of major clades of life is approaching
112 completion. The Global Genome Initiative (GGI; [http:// http://ggi.si.edu/](http://ggi.si.edu/)) of the Smithsonian
113 Institution via the GGI Knowledge Portal (<http://ggi.eol.org/>) has tabulated a complete list of
114 families of life, which total 9,642—on the whole a surprisingly small number. 10,000 barcodes,
115 more or less, seems like a feasible goal. If we were able to assemble a complete database of
116 DNA sequences at the family level, would it suffice to identify any eukaryote on Earth to the
117 family level?

118 While the literature on species identification success of DNA barcodes comprises thousands of
119 studies, only a few have tested their effectiveness at the level of higher taxonomic units. In the
120 seminal paper on DNA barcodes Hebert et al. (2003) established that animal CO1 sequences can
121 roughly assign taxa to phyla (96% success) or orders (100% success). However, their test was
122 based on a neighbor joining tree-building approach, and it remained unknown if sequence data
123 itself, i.e. percent identity among taxa, can be used in this way. Similarly, Nagy et al. (2012)
124 showed that DNA barcoding in reptiles usually correctly assigned barcodes to species, genus and
125 family. Their approach was phylogenetic: they tested whether including a sequence in tree
126 building rendered the higher group non-monophyletic, which would imply failure. Finally,
127 Wilson et al. (2011) provided a similar tree based test in sphingid moths, and established
128 reliabilities of correct generic and subfamily taxonomic assignments between 74 and 90% using
129 a liberal, and only 66-84% using a strict, tree-based criterion. These authors argued that tree-
130 based methods perform better than sequence comparison methods, but that reliability, of course,
131 depends on the library completeness.

132 Our project not only contributes original DNA barcode data for Central European spiders, but
133 also works in synergy with the GGI towards a permanent preservation of genomic biodiversity:
134 the formation of a collection of deeply frozen spider tissues and their DNA. We provide: 1) cryo-
135 preserved tissues of reliably identified species of Central European spiders, and their vouchers
136 photographed and deposited in public museums; 2) permanently frozen genomic DNA of these
137 species; 3) publicly accessible DNA barcodes for these species (genetic sequence of cytochrome
138 oxidase I – CO1) as public identification tool (Hebert et al., 2003) to facilitate organism
139 identification, taxonomy, ecology and conservation.

140 In addition, this project addresses to what extent higher level taxonomic units can be reliably
141 identified using barcodes of unknown spiders, and specifically asks what percent sequence
142 identity in BLAST results is necessary to correctly identify unknown taxa to the Linnaean genus
143 and/or family. Other methods for classification of higher-level taxonomies such as RDP (Wang
144 et al., 2007), UTX (Edgar, 2010) and MEGAN (Huson et al., 2007) have primarily been
145 developed for studies of microorganisms, using genetic markers for these groups, but less is

146 known about using the CO1 barcoding gene in metazoans. We examine empirical data from
147 Araneae barcode data to ask what is the percent sequence identity value above which 5% or less
148 of higher level (genus/family) taxonomic identifications are incorrect and the extent to which
149 frequency of correct identifications correlated with the number of taxa in this dataset, as would
150 be expected given the dependence of BLAST on the reference database.
151

152 **Materials & Methods**

153

154 *Specimen processing and imaging*

155 We used automated and manual sampling methods for collecting spiders in the field in numerous
156 localities in Slovenia and Switzerland. Faunistic and sampling details are published elsewhere
157 (Čandek et al., 2013; see also 2015 corrigendum). Collected spiders were fixed in absolute
158 ethanol immediately after being caught and the ethanol was replaced on the following day.
159 Spiders were frozen at -80°C, same day, or as soon as possible. In the laboratory they were
160 identified, labeled, photographed and processed for DNA extraction and sequencing (Čandek et
161 al., 2013; see also 2015 corrigendum). Voucher specimens (voucher codes starting with 0078)
162 are deposited at National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution (Washington D.C.,
163 USA), with duplicates (voucher codes starting with ARA) at Naturhistorisches Museum der
164 Burgergemeinde Bern (Switzerland) and EZ LAB, ZRC SAZU (Ljubljana, Slovenia).

165

166 Voucher images are published along with their barcodes (see Table 1) at [http://ezlab.zrc-](http://ezlab.zrc-sazu.si/dna)
167 [sazu.si/dna](http://ezlab.zrc-sazu.si/dna). All original sequences generated by this project have been submitted to BOLD
168 systems, and those that BOLD accepted were also submitted to GenBank (Table 1).

169

170 *Tissues*

171 After specimen identification and processing, up to four legs (or in the case of very small
172 individuals the whole prosoma) of a spider were removed and stored in fresh absolute ethanol in
173 cryovials. Part of the tissue was used for DNA isolation while the other part remains permanently
174 frozen at -80 °C at GGI facilities. The maintenance and use of these materials abides by the
175 international legal standards and conventions of the biological genetic heritage (The Access and
176 Benefit Sharing agreement as part of the 2010 Nagoya protocol).

177

178 *Molecular procedures*

179 At Laboratories of Analytical Biology (National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian
180 Institution, hereafter LAB), specimens were extracted using the AutoGenPrep phenol-chloroform
181 automated extractor (AutoGen). Samples were digested overnight in buffer containing
182 proteinase-k before extraction. At EZ Lab, specimens (codes starting with ARA) were extracted
183 using the Mag MAX™ Express magnetic particle processor Type 700 with DNA Multisample
184 kit (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA) following the manufacturer's protocols.

185

186 At EZ Lab PCR was carried out using mainly primers LCO1490 and HCO2198 (Folmer et al.,
187 1994). Standard reaction volume was 35 µL containing 2.3 mM MgCl₂ (Promega), 0.15 mM
188 each dNTP (Biotools), 0.4 µM of each primer, 0.2 µL 10 mg/mL BSA (Promega), 0.2 µL
189 GoTaqFlexi polymerase (Promega) and 2 µL DNA. PCR cycling conditions were as follows: an
190 initial denaturation step of 2 min at 94° C followed by 35 cycles of 40 sec at 94° C, 1 min at 48°-
191 52° C, 1 min at 72° C, with final extension at 72° C for 3 min. Additional primers were used for

192 PCR for a few problematic specimens: dgLCO1490 and dgHCO2198 (Meyer & Paulay, 2005)
193 and the reverse primer Chelicerate-R2 (Barrett & Hebert, 2005). Cycling parameters for difficult
194 specimens were: 20 cycles of usual cycling protocol (above) followed by 15 cycles of 1.5 min at
195 94° C, 1.5 min at 52° C and 2 min at 72° C version 5.6.6 (Kearse et al., 2012). EZ Lab PCR
196 products were sequenced at Macrogen Inc. (Amsterdam, Netherlands), and the sequences were
197 aligned, checked for sequencing errors and trimmed to match the barcode region in Geneious Pro
198 version 5.6.6 (Kearse et al., 2012).

199

200 At LAB, PCR was carried out using the primer pair LCO1490 (Folmer et al., 1994) and
201 Chelicerate-R2 (Barrett & Herbert, 2005). A 10 µL reaction mix contained 2.5 mM MgCl₂, 0.3
202 µM of each primer, 0.5 mM dNTPs, and 5 units of Biolase DNA polymerase (Bioline). PCR
203 cycling conditions were as follows: 35 cycles of 30 sec at 95° C, 30 sec at 48° C, 45 sec at 72° C.
204 PCR products were cleaned with ExoSAP-IT (Affymetrix), sequenced using Big Dyes (Life
205 Technologies) and run on a 3730xl DNA sequencer (Applied Biosystems). Sequences were
206 examined using Sequencher 5.01 (Gene Codes).

207

208 *Barcode library*

209

210 While we targeted 649 bp long DNA barcodes we also submitted (Table 1) 18 shorter fragments
211 (>570 bp) that still satisfy the requirements of The Barcode of Life Data System BOLD systems
212 (Ratnasingham & Hebert 2007). We combined the 297 species barcodes from this study with
213 publically available Araneae sequences from BOLD retrieved 4 December 2013, for a total of
214 816 species sequences, which formed the test library for this study. Sequences from BOLD were
215 initially included if the sequence length was at least 600 bases and identification was to species.
216 We further filtered and curated the data to exclude sequences whose identification was
217 anonymous or by non-arachnologists, diverged dramatically from all other spider sequences, or
218 for other reasons the sequences were not deemed to be reliable. After having discarded the
219 above, we did not assess the accuracy of every remaining sequence, as it is well known that both
220 BOLD and GenBank contain errors of various kinds, and we wanted our test library to reflect
221 real world conditions. A single sequence was chosen per species from BOLD using these criteria
222 and added to the original sequences from this project, resulting in 816 species representing 313
223 genera and 49 families (Table 1 and Supplemental Table 2). Eighteen sequences were singletons
224 at the family level; the maximum number of species per family was 224. 157 sequences were
225 singletons at the genus level; the maximum number of species per genus was 34.

226 The standalone BLAST+ suite 2.2.28 (Altschul et al., 1990; Zhang et al., 2000) was used to
227 create a custom BLAST database from these sequences. Each sequence was then queried against
228 the full set using blastn (MegaBLAST task, minimum e value of 1e-10, maximum of top ten hits
229 other than the hit of the query to itself). For each hit the percent of identical nucleotides in the
230 aligned region (PIdent) was calculated by BLAST. An advantage of using BLAST is the local
231 nature of the alignment hits returned. This will account for differences in sequence lengths in the
232 dataset, which may otherwise affect pairwise identity calculations of complete alignments.
233 Custom Python scripts (GitHub <https://github.com/mkweskin/spider-blast>) were used to parse the
234 results, removing the match of the query to itself and to score whether hits matched the genus
235 and family of the query sequence or not. Obviously, if the generic identification matched, the
236 family identification also matched; families therefore always match more often than genera.

237 On the other hand, singleton generic sequences cannot match correctly at the genus level, and,
238 likewise, singleton family sequences cannot match correctly at the family level. We included
239 singletons as targets in order to model more realistically BLAST searches against the BOLD
240 database (many sequences in BOLD are higher level singletons), and also to test more strongly
241 the ability of sequences with two or more species per either genus or family to match correctly.
242 Including 18 singleton family sequences and 157 singleton genus sequences, therefore, increases
243 the probability of misidentification at either ranks and more strongly tests the usefulness of
244 barcodes as supraspecific identification tools.

245 However, because the 18 unique family sequences must fail at both the family and genus levels,
246 and the 157 unique genus level sequences must fail at the genus level, these necessary failures
247 were not included in the overall assessments of the ability of barcode sequences to provide
248 accurate identifications at supraspecific levels.

249

250 Results

251 The 816 query sequences returned 8159 total hits with one query only returning nine hits and all
252 others ten (Supplemental Table 1). PIdent scores ranged from 75% to 100%. We also examined
253 the length of the sequence matched compared to the entire sequence length. 8114 hits (>99%)
254 matched to 90% or more of the query sequence length indicating that these results represent
255 matches to large portions of the query validating the use of Percent Sequence Identity in the
256 BLAST hits rather than computing the value for a global alignment between sequences. Figure 2
257 shows the frequency distributions of PIdent values of correct and incorrect identifications at the
258 genus and family rank.

- 259 1. 95% of incorrect genus identifications were below PIdent = 95 when all hits for all
260 queries are included, which suggests the latter value as a heuristic threshold to delimit
261 incorrect from correct identifications (for these data). For only the highest rank hits
262 whose PIdent \geq 95, 98% of genus identifications were correct.
- 263 2. 95% of incorrect family identifications were below PIdent = 91 when all hits for all
264 queries are included, which suggests the latter value as a heuristic threshold to delimit
265 incorrect from correct identifications (for these data). For only the highest rank hits
266 whose PIdent \geq 91, 97% of family identifications were correct.
- 267 3. Library accuracy is crucial, but sequencing, labelling, and identification errors are
268 difficult to detect *a priori*. The highest ranked incorrect family identification was
269 *Steatoda grossa* (Theridiidae) to *Meta menardi* (Tetragnathidae), at PIdent = 96. Further
270 study of the *M. menardi* sequence shows that the BOLD record is probably a mislabeled
271 *Steatoda*. The first true incorrect family identification occurs at a PIdent value of 88; the
272 best hit for *Octonoba* (Uloboridae) is *Amaurobius* (Amaurobiidae).
- 273 4. For the 136 genera with at least two species in the library, 76% (n=103) best matched
274 congeners. Thirty-three failed, perhaps because sequences were incorrectly identified
275 taxonomically, or the sequence itself may be erroneous, or perhaps due to non-
276 monophyly of genera.
- 277 5. The distributions of PIdents for correct family and genus identifications differ
278 significantly from the distributions of incorrect identifications (Figure 2).
- 279 6. Plotted against increasing numbers of species/genus, and genera/family, the proportion of
280 top ten PIdent values that exceed the above suggested threshold values increases.

281 Roughly speaking, 15 species per genus, and 5 genera per family, are sufficient to ensure
282 that best hits represent correct identifications (Figure 3).

283

284 Discussion

285

286 We show that standard DNA barcodes can accurately identify unknown specimens to genus and
287 family level given sufficient sequence identity and sufficient taxonomic representation in the
288 database. Accurate identification (PIdent above which less than 5% of identifications were
289 incorrect) occurred for genera at PIdent values > 95 and families at PIdent values ≥ 91 ,
290 suggesting these as heuristic thresholds for generic and familial identifications in spiders (shaded
291 in Figure 2). Accuracy of identification increases with numbers of species/genus and
292 genera/family; above five genera per family and 15 species per genus all identifications were
293 correct (Figure 3).

294 The accurate identification of specimens remains a critical challenge for megadiverse groups
295 such as arthropods, most other invertebrates, plants, fungi, protists etc. Morphological
296 identification to species, or even more inclusive taxonomic ranks like genera and families, in
297 many cases requires extensive training, and for most groups taxonomic expertise is limited and
298 dwindling—the so called ‘taxonomic impediment’ (Rodman & Cody, 2003). DNA barcodes
299 have been proposed as convenient tools to overcome this impediment by making identification a
300 purely technical procedure available to any interested researcher or even ‘citizen scientists’.
301 However, the accuracy of such a tool strongly depends on the scope and quality of the barcode
302 library (Smit, Reijnen & Stokvis, 2013). Currently available data on databanks like BOLD and
303 GenBank are extensive for some groups, yet the vast majority of species on earth have not yet
304 been barcoded, much less discovered and described taxonomically—each of these tasks is
305 enormous. Even for existing barcoding data, numerous sequences lack taxonomic identification,
306 limiting their utility (e.g. only 58% of Araneae in BOLD are identified to species, and of those
307 many are not correctly identified, as shown in our results; see also Shen, Chen & Murphy, 2013;
308 Blagoev et al., 2016). Therefore, the identification of unknown specimens through blasting
309 against BOLD or GenBank will be inaccurate if the databases lack close hits or contain errors.
310 While the ideal database would allow species-level identification by containing barcodes from
311 expertly identified and vouchered specimens of all species, we hypothesized that rapid surveys of
312 well-known biotas can help quickly to build valuable tools allowing identification of larger
313 clades such as genera and families.

314 Although we were careful to screen available barcode sequences from BOLD to produce a test
315 library with as few errors as possible, it is certainly possible that errors remained, either due to
316 mistakes in the lab or taxonomic identifications of vouchers. For example, *Meta menardi*
317 (Tetragnathidae) blasted to *Steatoda grossa* (Theridiidae) at PIdent = 96, and BLAST searches
318 on GenBank suggest this *Meta* sequence is actually a *Steatoda*. Likewise, the linyphiids *Agyneta*
319 *orites* and *Incestophantes frigidus* sequences were identical; one of these records is probably
320 wrong. These sorts of errors bias identifications and limit utility of barcodes. Other examples of
321 identical barcode sequences were all congeners, and therefore are less likely to involve errors but
322 could indicate faults in taxonomy: *Arctosa maculata* and *A. fulvolineata*, *Bolyphantes luteolus*
323 and *B. alticeps*, *Pardosa alacris* and *P. trifrons*, and *Pityohyphantes tacoma* and *P. cristatus*.
324 Likewise, the genus *Neriene* (Linyphiidae) seems non-monophyletic and identifications were
325 thus not accurate.

326

327 **Conclusions**

328

329 These results suggest that accurate identification of unknown taxa to the genus and family level
330 is feasible through DNA barcoding. Database quality is crucial. Numbers of potential matches at
331 generic and familial ranks also affect the probability that an unknown sequence will blast best to
332 the correct family or genus. Unlike the inventory of species, biological discovery of family-level
333 clades of life also seems far advanced—few eukaryotic families, apparently, remain to be
334 discovered. Taken together, these results suggest that barcode-targeted sequencing of exemplars
335 from all families of life (and most genera, if possible) should be an important scientific priority.
336 It would enable approximate taxonomic identification of any organism anywhere on Earth by
337 rapid, cheap, purely technical procedures requiring no specialist knowledge—certainly an
338 important milestone in the on-going attempt to discover, classify, and understand the Earth's
339 biota.

340

341 **Acknowledgements**

342 Portions of the laboratory and/or computer work were conducted in and with the support of the
343 L.A.B. facilities of the National Museum of Natural History.

344

345 **References**

346

- 347 Altschul SF, Gish W, Miller W, Myers EW, Lipman DJ. 1990. Basic local alignment search tool.
348 *Journal of Molecular Biology* 215:403-410.
- 349 Anslan S, Tedersoo L. 2015. Performance of cytochrome c oxidase subunit I (COI), ribosomal
350 DNA Large Subunit (LSU) and Internal Transcribed Spacer 2 (ITS2) in DNA barcoding
351 of Collembola. *European Journal of Soil Biology* 69:1-7. DOI:
352 10.1016/j.ejsobi.2015.04.001.
- 353 Barraclough TG, Hughes M, Ashford-Hodges N, Fujisawa T. 2009. Inferring evolutionarily
354 significant units of bacterial diversity from broad environmental surveys of single-locus
355 data. *Biology Letters* 5:425-428. DOI: 10.1098/rsbl.2009.0091.
- 356 Barrett RDH, Hebert PDN. 2005. Identifying spiders through DNA barcodes. *Canadian Journal*
357 *of Zoology-Revue Canadienne De Zoologie* 83:481-491. DOI: 10.1139/z05-024.
- 358 Blagoev GA, Dewaard JR, Ratnasingham S, Dewaard SL, Lu L, Robertson J, Telfer AC, Hebert
359 PDN. 2016. Untangling taxonomy: A DNA barcode reference library for Canadian
360 spiders. *Molecular Ecology Resources* 16:325-341. DOI: 10.1111/1755-0998.12444.
- 361 Čandek K, Gregorič M, Kostanjšek R, Frick H, Kropf C, Kuntner M. 2013. Targeting a portion
362 of central European spider diversity for permanent preservation. *Biodiversity Data*
363 *Journal* 1:e980. DOI: 10.3897/BDJ.1.e980.
- 364 Čandek K, Gregorič M, Kostanjšek R, Frick H, Kropf C, Kuntner M. 2015. Corrigendum:
365 Targeting a portion of central European spider diversity for permanent preservation.
366 *Biodiversity Data Journal* 3:e4301. DOI: 10.3897/BDJ.3.e4301.

- 367 Čandek K, Kuntner M. 2015. DNA barcoding gap: Reliable species identification over
368 morphological and geographical scales. *Molecular Ecology Resources* 15:268–277. DOI:
369 10.1111/1755-0998.12304.
- 370 Chase MW, Fay MF. 2009. Barcoding of plants and fungi. *Science* 325:682-683. DOI:
371 10.1126/science.1176906.
- 372 Clerck C. 1757. *Aranei Suecici, descriptionibus et figuris oeneis illustrati, ad genera subalterna*
373 *redacti speciebus ultra LX determinati. Svenska Spindlar, uti sina hufvud-slagter undelte*
374 *samt..* Stockholmiae: [Publ. not given].
- 375 Coddington JA, Levi HW. 1991. Systematics and evolution of spiders (Araneae). *Annual Review*
376 *of Ecology and Systematics* 22:565-592. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.es.22.110191.003025.
- 377 Doña J, Diaz-Real J, Mironov S, Bazaga P, Serrano D, Jovani R. 2015. DNA barcoding and
378 minibarcoding as a powerful tool for feather mite studies. *Molecular Ecology Resources*
379 15:1216–1225. DOI: 10.1111/1755-0998.12384.
- 380 Edgar RC. 2010. Search and clustering orders of magnitude faster than BLAST. *Bioinformatics*
381 26:2460-2461. DOI: 10.1093/bioinformatics/btq461.
- 382 Erwin TL. 1982. Tropical forests: Their richness in Coleoptera and other arthropod species. *The*
383 *Coleopterists Bull* 36(1):74-75.
- 384 Folmer O, Black M, Hoeh W, Lutz R, Vrijenhoek R. 1994. DNA primers for amplification of
385 mitochondrial cytochrome c oxidase subunit I from diverse metazoan invertebrates.
386 *Molecular Marine Biology and Biotechnology* 3:294-299.
- 387 Forster RR. 1955. A new family of spiders of the sub-order Hypochilomorphae. *Pacific Science*
388 9:277-285.
- 389 Goloboff PA, Catalano SA, Mirande JM, Szumik CA, Arias JS, Kallersjo M, Farris JS. 2009.
390 Phylogenetic analysis of 73 060 taxa corroborates major eukaryotic groups. *Cladistics*
391 25:211-230. DOI: 10.1111/j.1096-0031.2009.00255.x.
- 392 Hebert PDN, Cywinska A, Ball SL, DeWaard JR. 2003. Biological identifications through DNA
393 barcodes. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London Series B-Biological Sciences*
394 270:313-321. DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2002.2218.
- 395 Huson DH, Auch AF, Qi J, Schuster SC. 2007. MEGAN analysis of metagenomic data. *Genome*
396 *Research* 17:377-386. DOI: 10.1101/gr.5969107.
- 397 Kearse M, Moir R, Wilson A, Stones-Havas S, Cheung M, Sturrock S, Buxton S, Cooper A,
398 Markowitz S, Duran C, Thierer T, Ashton B, Mentjies P, Drummond A. 2012. Geneious
399 Basic: An integrated and extendable desktop software platform for the organization and
400 analysis of sequence data. *Bioinformatics*, 28, 1647-1649. DOI:
401 10.1093/bioinformatics/bts199.
- 402 Kress WJ, Erickson DL. 2007. A two-locus global DNA barcode for land plants: the coding rbcL
403 gene complements the non-coding trnH-psbA spacer region. *PLoS ONE* 2(6):e508. DOI:
404 10.1371/journal.pone.0000508.
- 405 Linnaeus C. 1758. *Systema Naturae per regna tria naturae, secundum classes, ordines, genera,*
406 *species cum characteribus differentiis, synonymis, locis. Editio decima, reformata.*
407 *Holmiae, tomus 1:1-821: [Publ. not given].*
- 408 Liu Y, Yan HF, Cao T, Ge XJ. 2010. Evaluation of 10 plant barcodes in Bryophyta (Mosses).
409 *Journal of Systematics and Evolution* 48:36-46. DOI: 10.1111/j.1759-6831.2009.00063.x.
- 410 Lopardo L, Uhl G. 2014. Testing mitochondrial marker efficacy for DNA barcoding in spiders: a
411 test case using the dwarf spider genus *Oedothorax* (Araneae: Linyphiidae: Erigoninae).
412 *Invertebrate Systematics* 28:501-521. DOI: 10.1071/IS14017.

- 413 May RM. 1992. How many species inhabit the earth. *Scientific American* 1992:42-48.
- 414 Meyer CP, Paulay G. 2005. DNA barcoding: Error rates based on comprehensive sampling.
415 *PLoS Biology* 3(12):e422. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pbio.0030422.
- 416 Mora C, Tittensor DP, Adl S, Simpson AG, and Worm B. 2011. How many species are there on
417 Earth and in the ocean? *PLoS Biology* 9(8):e1001127. DOI:
418 10.1371/journal.pbio.1001127.
- 419 Nagy ZT, Sonet G, Glaw F, and Vences M. 2012. First large-scale DNA barcoding assessment of
420 reptiles in the biodiversity hotspot of Madagascar, based on newly designed COI primers.
421 *PLoS ONE* 7(3):e34506. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0034506.
- 422 Nitta JH. 2008. Exploring the utility of three plastid loci for biocoding the filmy ferns
423 (Hymenophyllaceae) of Moorea. *Taxon* 57:725-736.
- 424 Pentinsaari M, Hebert PDN, Mutanen M. 2014. Barcoding beetles: A regional survey of 1872
425 species reveals high identification success and unusually deep interspecific divergences.
426 *PLoS ONE* 9(9):e108651. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0108651.
- 427 Pyron RA, Wiens JJ. 2011. A large-scale phylogeny of Amphibia including over 2800 species,
428 and a revised classification of extant frogs, salamanders, and caecilians. *Molecular*
429 *Phylogenetics and Evolution* 61:543-583. DOI: 10.1016/j.ympev.2011.06.012.
- 430 Ratnasingham S, Hebert PDN. 2007. BOLD: The Barcode of Life Data System
431 (www.barcodinglife.org). *Molecular Ecology Notes* 7:355-364. DOI: 10.1111/j.1471-
432 8286.2007.01678.x.
- 433 Rodman JE, Cody JH. 2003. The taxonomic impediment overcome: NSF's partnerships for
434 enhancing expertise in taxonomy (PEET) as a model. *Systematic Biology* 52:428-435.
435 DOI: 10.1080/10635150390197055.
- 436 Saunders GW. 2005. Applying DNA barcoding to red macroalgae: A preliminary appraisal holds
437 promise for future applications. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B-*
438 *Biological Sciences* 360:1879-1888. DOI: 10.1098/rstb.2005.1719.
- 439 Scicluna SM, Tawari B, Clark CG. 2006. DNA barcoding of Blastocystis. *Protist* 157:77-85.
440 DOI: 10.1016/j.protis.2005.12.001.
- 441 Shen YY, Chen X, Murphy RW. 2013. Assessing DNA barcoding as a tool for species
442 identification and data quality control. *PLoS ONE* 8(2):e57125. DOI:
443 10.1371/journal.pone.0057125.
- 444 Smit J, Reijnen B, Stokvis F. 2013. Half of the European fruit fly species barcoded (Diptera,
445 Tephritidae); a feasibility test for molecular identification. *ZooKeys* 365:279-305. DOI:
446 10.3897/zookeys.365.5819.
- 447 Wang Q, Garrity GM, Tiedje JM, Cole JR. 2007. Naïve bayesian classifier for rapid assignment
448 of rRNA sequences into the new bacterial taxonomy. *Applied and Environmental*
449 *Microbiology* 73:5261-5267. DOI: 10.1128/AEM.00062-07.
- 450 Wang XB, Deng J, Zhang JT, Zhou QS, Zhang YZ, Wu SA. 2015. DNA barcoding of common
451 soft scales (Hemiptera: Coccoidea: Coccidae) in China. *Bulletin of Entomological*
452 *Research* 105(5):545-554. DOI: 10.1017/S0007485315000413.
- 453 Wilson JJ, Rougerie R, Schonfeld J, Janzen DH, Hallwachs W, Hajibabaei M, Kitching IJ,
454 Haxaire J, Hebert PDN. 2011. When species matches are unavailable are DNA barcodes
455 correctly assigned to higher taxa? An assessment using sphingid moths. *Bmc Ecology*
456 11:18. DOI: 10.1186/1472-6785-11-18.
- 457 Xu X, Liu F, Chen J, Li D, Kuntner M. 2015. Integrative taxonomy of the primitively segmented
458 spider genus *Ganthela* (Araneae: Mesothelae: Liphistiidae): DNA barcoding gap agrees

459 with morphology. *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* 175:288–306. DOI:
460 10.1111/zoj.12280.
461 Zhang Z, Schwartz S, Wagner L, Miller W. 2000. A greedy algorithm for aligning DNA
462 sequences. *Journal of Computational Biology* 7:203-214. DOI:
463 10.1089/10665270050081478.
464

465 FIGURES

466

467 Figure 1. Accumulation curve of dates of first discovery (year of first description of a contained
468 species) of families for six major clades of life, 1758-2010.

469

470 Figure 2. Frequency distributions of correct and incorrect identifications by percent sequence
471 identity (PI_{ident}) for the top ten hits (all ranks) and for best hits only (top rank) at the genus and
472 family level. Shaded areas include hits where no more than 5% of identifications were incorrect.

473

474 Figure 3. Relation between proportion of best sequence identity and numbers of species per
475 genus, and genera per family (heuristic thresholds to delimit incorrect from correct
476 identifications were 95 and 91 for genus and family, respectively).

477

478

479 TABLES

480

481 Table 1. Original sequences this project submitted to BOLD and GenBank (only those on
482 GenBank are also publically available on BOLD, for all others, see <http://ezlab.zrc-sazu.si/dna/>).

483 Legend: MNH, SI = National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution; EZ LAB =

484 Evolutionary Zoology Lab, ZRC SAZU; NMBE = Naturhistorisches Museum der

485 Burgergemeinde Bern; SVN = Slovenia; CHE = Switzerland; MYS = Malaysia.

486

487 See separate Excel file.

488

489 SUPPLEMENTS (AVAILABLE ONLINE)

490

491 Supplemental Table 1. The results of the barcode matching test.

492

493 Supplemental Table 2. The downloaded sequences used in the species comparison.

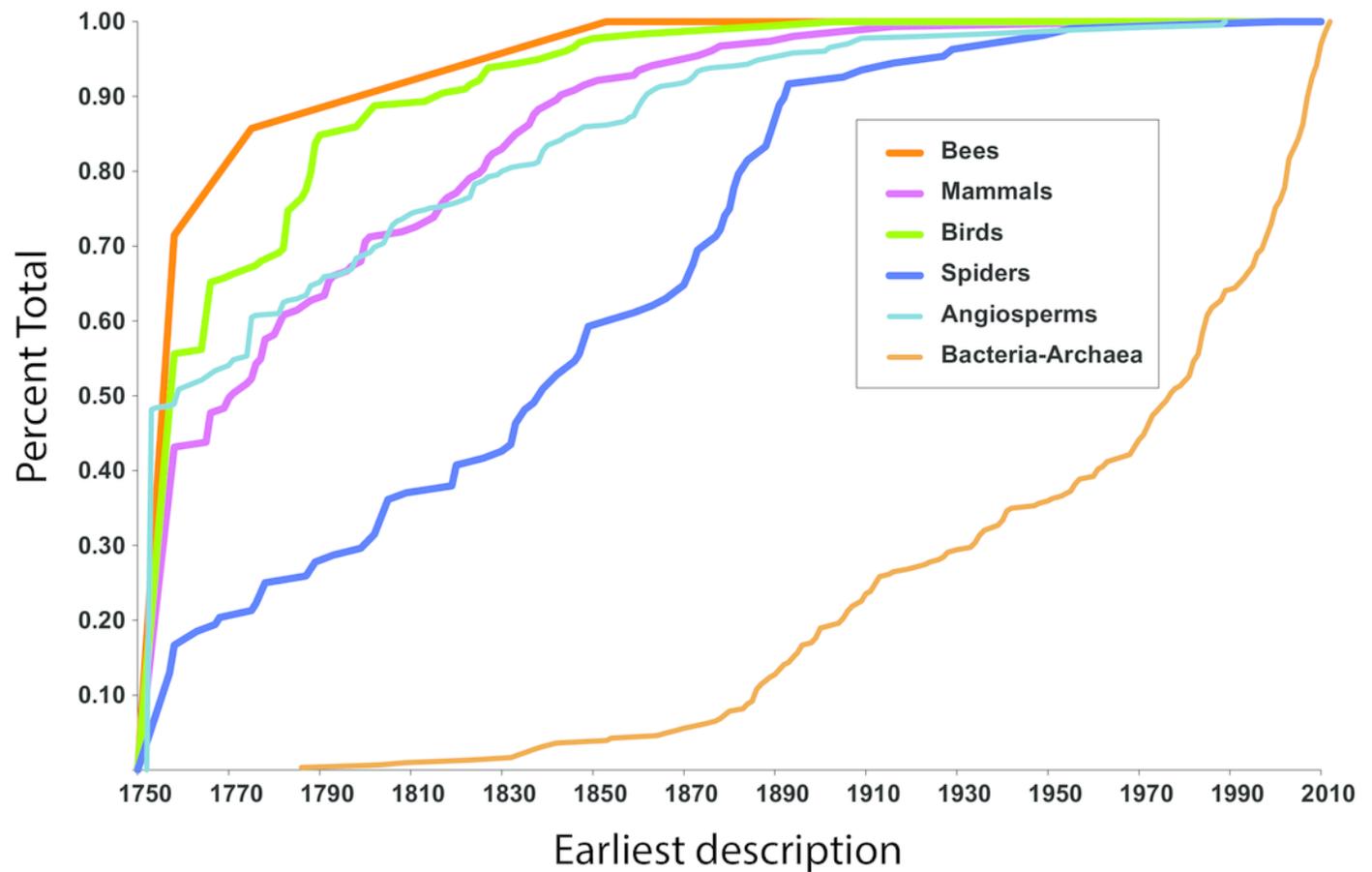
494

495

1

First discovery of major clades of life.

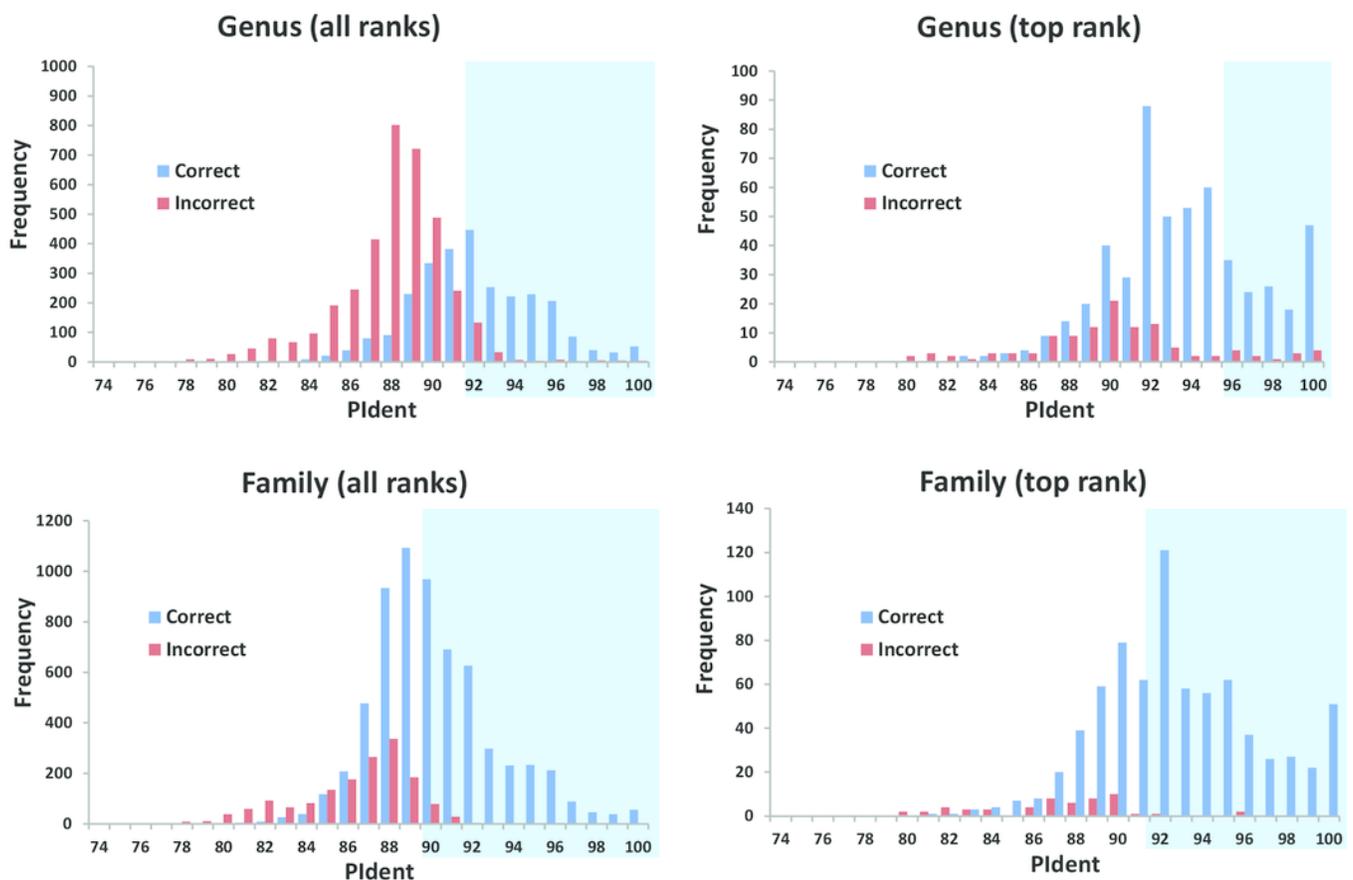
Figure 1. Accumulation curve of dates of first discovery (year of first description of a contained species) of families for six major clades of life, 1758-2010.



2

Results from the barcode matching test.

Figure 2. Frequency distributions of correct and incorrect identifications by percent sequence identity (Pident) for the top ten and/or best hits at the genus and family level. Shaded areas include hits where no more than 5% of identifications were incorrect.



3

Importance of library representation.

Figure 3. Relation between proportion of best sequence identity and numbers of species per genus, and genera per family (thresholds 95 and 91 respectively).

