Taxonomy: avoid extra bureaucracy

We agree with Stephen Garnett and Les Christidis that standardization and rigour in the delimitation of species and their interaction with society is beneficial (*Nature* **546,** 25–27; 2017). In our view, however, their proposal would create unnecessary bureaucracy, be difficult and resource-intensive to apply across all taxonomic groups, and stifle scientific progress in the provision of data on species diversity and distribution.

The current lack of a universally accepted concept of what constitutes a species reflects biological and social reality. Complex processes underlie the genetic discontinuities that taxonomists recognize as species. The relative importance of factors driving diversification varies between clades, geographical regions and ecological backgrounds. And where standardized approaches are making huge progress in species discovery — as in high-throughput DNA barcoding of insects (P. D. N. Hebert *et al. Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* **371,** 20150333; 2016) — it is not helpful to introduce another layer of intervention, given the global shortage of taxonomists.

Continued integration of conservation assessments with taxonomic accounts is a straightforward mechanism for peer review. In high-profile cases, taxonomists can work with conservation biologists, agencies and industry to resolve disputes (see, for example, R. M. Pringle *Nature* **546,** 91–99; 2017).

Some 80% of species still await description. Let's not hamper these efforts by adding unnecessary administrative hurdles, lawyers' fees and protocols on the basis of the challenges facing conservation programmes for just a few lineages.

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**On behalf of 6 correspondents (see go.nature.com/2syhcrz for full list).*

Supplementary information to: Taxonomy: avoid extra bureaucracy

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