

Researchers catalogue more than 1m species

AP, Washington

A worldwide scientific effort to catalogue every living species has topped the 1 million milestone.

Six years into the programme the total has reached 1,009,000, researchers report. They hope to complete the listing by 2011, reaching an expected total of about 1.75 million species.

Thomas M Orrell, a biologist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, said the finished catalogue will include all known living organisms, from plants and animals to fungi and microorganisms such as bacteria, protozoa and viruses.

"Many are surprised that, despite over two centuries of work by biologists and the current worldwide interest in biodiversity, there is presently no comprehensive catalogue of all known species of organisms on Earth," Orrell said.

Progress on possible ME prisoner swap

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians inched closer towards ending a long-running crisis over a soldier captured by Gaza militants after Israel confirmed yesterday it had received a list of detainees the Palestinians want freed in exchange.

"We have moved another step forward, but there is still a lot of time before we see Shalit," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to talk to the media.

Olmert will convene later this week the powerful security cabinet, which will decide on Israel's criteria for the release of prisoners, Welfare Minister Isaac Herzog said.

Israel refers to prisoners with "blood on their hands" as anyone who has carried out or helped plan

the killing of Israeli soldiers or citizens, and has in the past said it would not release such detainees.

Shalit was captured on June 25 by Palestinian militants, including members of the armed wing of the ruling Islamist Hamas movement, who raided an army outpost on the border with the Gaza Strip.

The father of the captured soldier, Noam Shalit, was not ready to comment on the apparent progress, but said: "We are waiting patiently for the release of Gilad."

Palestinian information minister Mustafa al-Barghuti had announced on Friday that list of prisoners had been transmitted to Israel by Egypt.

"Everything that has been demanded on the Palestinian side has been transmitted; the ball is now in the Israeli camp," he said.

A source close to the Palestinian government told AFP the list contained the names of 450 prisoners.



'Taliban kill Afghan journalist'

AFP, Kandahar

Taliban militants killed yesterday an Afghan reporter kidnapped last month with an Italian journalist, after the government refused to negotiate his release, a militant spokesman said.

"We killed Ajmal (Naqshbandi) today at 1505 (1135 GMT) because the government did not respond to our demands," said Shoaabuddin Atal, spokesman for top Taliban military commander Mullah Dadullah.

"They (the government) did not contact us," he told AFP.

His claims could be verified independently.

The Taliban are waging a deadly insurgency that includes suicide attacks and kidnappings of foreign journalists and aid workers, and their local colleagues, after being ousted from power five years ago by US-led troops.