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Why Every Organism Needs One Name

1. The problem with local names

Local names change from place to place. One fruit is **aam** (Hindi), **mango** (English), **maamidi** (Telugu), **aamba** (Marathi) and **maavu** (Kannada). The reverse also happens: the word **robin** means two different birds in Europe and in America.

2. The scale of the problem

About **1.7 to 1.8 million species** have been known and described so far: plants, animals, fungi and more. Without a standard, scientists could not be sure they are talking about the same organism.

3. What is needed

A **scientific name** that is (a) the **same all over the world** and (b) **unique**: one organism, one name. Giving such names is called **nomenclature**.



Common name	Scientific name
Mango	*Mangifera indica*
Human	*Homo sapiens*
European robin	*Erithacus rubecula*
American robin	*Turdus migratorius*

Solved example

Q. Two researchers, in Japan and in Brazil, both study *Mangifera indica*. Why is there no confusion, even though their local names differ?
A. A scientific name is the same everywhere and belongs to only one organism, so both know they are studying the same species.

Practice questions

1. (MCQ) About how many species have been described? (a) 1.7–1.8 thousand (b) 1.7–1.8 million (c) 17–18 million (d) 170–180 million
2. (Very short) What is the scientific name of mango?
3. (Short) Give two reasons why local names are not good enough for science.

4. (True/False) One organism can have two valid scientific names used in different countries.
5. (Very short) What is the process of giving standard names called?
6. (Short) How does the word "robin" show a problem with common names?

Answer key

1. (b).
2. *Mangifera indica*.
3. They change from place to place, and one name can mean different organisms.
4. False: one organism has one scientific name worldwide.
5. Nomenclature.
6. The same word names two different species in Europe and America.

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