NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Shelley Dawicki
508-495-2378
Shelley.Dawicki@noaa.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 8, 2009

Students and General Public Can Help Name New Jellyfish Species

Few people have seen it, and fewer have studied it, but now the public can help give the Bonaire Banded Box Jellyfish a scientific name. NOAA scientists who identify species around the world are providing their expertise to help contest participants learn about the animal and what is required to give an organism a species name.

Until June 14, the public can learn about the Bonaire Banded Box Jellyfish and the scientific process of naming species, then submit a potential species name for it at www.yearofscience2009.org/themes_ocean_water/general/jellyfish.html.

A scientific team will pick their top 5 favorites from those submitted, which will then be up for vote by the public June 19 through 21. The winning name will be announced after June 23. It will become the official scientific name for the Bonaire Banded Box Jellyfish and appear in several scientific publications, including *Zootaxa* and the Encyclopedia of Life.

This scientific adventure began in 2001 when Vicki Carr, a visitor to the Caribbean island of Bonaire, saw a Bonaire Banded Box Jellyfish while swimming and captured the colorful animal on video. She shared her images with Bud Gillan, a Florida science teacher interested in jellyfish, and soon a team of people, including Allen Collins of NOAA Fisheries Service's National Systematics Laboratory, began to investigate if this jellyfish was a new species.

Eight years later, their efforts have led to the collection of a Bonaire Banded Box Jellyfish specimen preserved and archived at the Smithsonian Institution for further study. Collins, a zoologist at the National Systematics Lab located at the Smithsonian and curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, helped obtain the permit to collect the specimen and has led the efforts to observe and document the animal's morphology, or anatomy, and genetics.

Team members searched for clues to determine if the animal was really a new species or was a member of an already identified species. They searched the scientific literature about related species, examined specimens in natural history collections, and extracted DNA to determine the relationship between the Bonaire Banded Box Jellyfish and other box jellyfish.

They know the Bonaire Banded Box Jellyfish is a member of the genus *Tamoya*, given its characteristic long bell-shaped body and large stomach. The new species is a

strong swimming jellyfish with unusual coloration, and has a sting which is both painful and dangerous.

"It is surprising how much time it takes to document a species," Collins said of the project. "The process was relatively straightforward, but still involved a lot of work and was a team effort. My wife, who is a science educator, actually suggested and coordinated the naming contest, so that makes it more unusual and fun."

The naming contest is part of the Year of Science 2009 celebration for June's Ocean and Water theme and is a project of the Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS), NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, the American Institute of Biological Sciences, and the Cnidarian Tree of Life project. Additional participants are from the University of Kansas and the Palm Beach County School District in Florida.

The National Systematics Laboratory of NOAA Fisheries Service is one of six labs of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, headquartered in Woods Hole, Mass., but serves as the taxonomic research arm of NOAA Fisheries as a whole. The Laboratory describes and names new species, and revises existing descriptions and names based on new information, of fishes, squids, crustaceans, and corals of economic or ecological importance to the United States. Because some important species are highly migratory and many exotic species are introduced into U.S. waters or markets, the Laboratory's research is worldwide. Major products of this research are worldwide and regional taxonomic publications and identification guides.

# # #

Related links:
National Systematics Laboratory: http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/systematics/
COPUS: http://www.copusproject.org/
Year of Science 2009: http://www.yearofscience2009.org/home