

New genome sequencing targets announced

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The U.S. National Human Genome Research Institute has announced several new sequencing targets, including the northern white-cheeked gibbon.

That, scientists said, will bring them one step closer to sequencing the genome of at least one non-human primate from each of the major positions along the evolutionary primate tree.

Comparing the genomes of other species to humans is an exceptionally powerful tool to help researchers understand the working parts of the human genome in both health and illness, the NHGRI said.

The institute and its international partners have already sequenced -- or have been approved to sequence -- the genomes of several non-human primates, including the chimpanzee, rhesus macaque, orangutan, marmoset and the gorilla.

"The gibbon genome sequence will provide researchers with crucial information when comparing it to the human genome sequence and other primate genomes, shedding light on molecular mechanisms implicated in human health and disease -- from infectious diseases and neurological disorders to mental illness and cancer," said Dr. Francis Collins, NHGRI director.

The researchers said the gibbon genome is unique because it carries an extraordinary high number of chromosome rearrangements, even when compared with other primates.

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