

«Investigator Award» from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation for two ETH researchers



Sea creatures reveal a variety of cooperative life forms that question the concept of the individual organism. The image shows a yellow sponge that lives in symbiosis with microorganisms.

© iStock / Lukas Kastner 13 March 2020

Two researchers from ETH Zurich, Jörn Piel and Roman Stocker, were awarded with the “Investigator Award” by the Californian Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. They will each receive USD 1.5 million to explore the diverse symbiotic relationships between bacteria and other aquatic organisms.

Understanding microbes as partners of life

Life is symbiosis – this is becoming increasingly clear. Whether bacteria, plant, animal or human, all organisms are colonised by microbes. Within these organisms, microbes form fascinating, mutually beneficial communities. An example is coral, which house microalgae that live within their tissue and give the coral reefs their bright colours. Scientists are increasingly recognising that such symbioses are crucial to the function of ecosystems and evolution. However, the majority of these partnerships have barely been researched.

From computer chips to research funding

Intel co-founder Gordon Moore and his wife Betty established the Californian foundation. Moore became internationally famous as the creator of Moore’s law on the development of computer chips. The couple established the foundation in 2000 with USD 5 billion in initial capital. Since then, they have supported projects in fundamental research, environmental protection and health.

Further information in the ETH news

https://ethz-foundation.ch/en/spotlight/international_investigator_award/

PDF exported on 01/21/2026 16:08

© 2026 ETH Zurich Foundation