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## San Francisco Chronicle

### New S.F. Botanical Garden director named

Ron Sullivan, Joe Eaton

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

The San Francisco Botanical Garden and the Conservatory of Flowers have named a new joint director: John Peterson, who most recently headed the new Turtle Bay Exploration Park in Redding. Before that, he had stints as a professor at Ohio State University and as head of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

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The Redding complex includes gardens, an arboretum, natural and cultural history, forestry, art and conservation; it's clustered around the handsome and whimsical Sundial Bridge over the Sacramento River. The San Francisco garden has been combining things as disparate as medicine, butterflies and decor in interesting shows. Given the new director's background, we can hope for more of that.

Peterson has a strong background in tropical plants. At press time, he was in Shanghai to oversee Redding's entry in this year's Mosaiculture Exposition. Mosaiculture involves building, growing and maintaining three-dimensional plant sculptures on a grand scale: The Rose Parade meets topiary meets exploded parterres. Perhaps we can expect some local examples of that, too.

Scientists keep learning new things about the age-old partnership between plants and their pollinators. How old? A bee found in 100 million-year-old fossil amber from northern Burma has pollen grains on the hairs of its head, body and legs. Bryan Danforth of Cornell University says it's the earliest known bee pollinator, 40 million years older than any previously discovered. No larger than a mosquito, it was the right size for the tiny flowers of the dinosaur era.

Bees and other insects, later joined by birds and bats, have helped shape the forms and colors of flowers. Flowers can be either radially symmetrical (flower parts in a circle), like lilies, or bilaterally symmetrical (mirror-image left and right halves), like orchids. Radial flowers seem to have evolved first, with bilateral flowers developing in several plant families. Working with a Spanish wallflower that has both flower types, Jose Gomez of the University of Granada found that pollinating beetles paid more visits to the ones that were bilaterally symmetrical. He suggests pollinator preference has driven the evolution of flower shape.

Closer to home, Matthew Streisfeld and Joshua Kohn of UC San Diego have found that pollinators are influencing flower color in bush monkeyflowers. The local species has red blossoms near the coast that are pollinated by hummingbirds, and yellow ones inland, serviced by hawkmoths. As the hummer population is boosted by gardens and feeders, the red monkeyflower variety is expected to spread inland.

How important are pollinators? Claire Kremen of UC Berkeley reports that they affect 35 percent of the world's crop production:

"You can thank a pollinator for one out of three bites of food you eat."

Of 115 crops her group studied, 87 depended on animal pollination. Honeybees do a lot of the work, but they're not alone. And UC Davis postdoc Sarah Greenleaf says they're more productive in the presence of wild bees, at least in Yolo County sunflower fields. The wild bees harass the honeybees, forcing them to move faster from flower to flower.

Remember the nesting cycle of our year-round resident Anna's hummingbirds, Calypte anna: Males are already performing their courtship flights, and females will be building their nests by January.



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Winter-blooming garden flowers provide a food source for bees and others pollinators when warm spells wake them up. Careful with those pesticides, too; biologically, things don't get locked up so tight in winter here as they do in, say, New England and such places, where so many of the general garden books focus.

#### Events of note

Sunday: A cultural tasting of chocolate with John Scharffenberger and book signing featuring his brand-new "The Essence of Chocolate." Workshop on orchid identification and culture, with a backstage tour of the orchid collection. Divisions of rare and unusual orchids will be available for purchase. 9 a.m. to noon, UC Botanical Garden, Berkeley. (510) 643-2755.

Nov. 18: Ernesto Sandoval on the plants of Baja California, land of the boojum and the cardon. 10:30 a.m. Regional Parks Botanic Garden, Berkeley. (510) 841-8732.

Nov. 20: Michael Loik, UC Santa Cruz, discusses the effect of global climate change on California horticulture. 7 p.m. San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum. (800) 884-0009.

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Page HO - 2

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