



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

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Seven New Curators Join Scientific Research Faculty at The New York Botanical Garden

Seven new curators have joined the science faculty at The New York Botanical Garden in 16 months. Four joined this fall, and a fifth will arrive shortly. They join two other recent hires in late 2007. The additions are part of a strategic drive to refresh and deepen the strength of the Botanical Garden's science programs. The New York Botanical Garden is already among the top three freestanding botanical gardens in the world where plant research is conducted.

James S. Miller, Ph.D., Dean and Vice President for Science at The New York Botanical Garden, comments, "I'm thrilled to welcome our new colleagues to the Garden. These talented scientists, each with a very different field of expertise, will help us achieve our ambitious goals to address the crucial societal questions in plant science and apply this information to protect and improve the quality of human life. They will strengthen our longstanding research tradition in the field and the laboratory and expand our involvement in new areas such as molecular studies."

Barbara Ambrose, Ph.D., joined the Botanical Garden in August as Cullman Curator and Assistant Curator of Plant Genomics. She completed her Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego, was a postdoctoral researcher in the Instituto de Ecología at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and, from 2003 to 2008, was on the faculty of Massey University, in the Institute of Molecular BioSciences in New Zealand. Dr. Ambrose brings extensive experience in molecular biology with interests in the genomics of floral development.

Benjamin Torke, Ph.D., joined the Botanical Garden in August as an Assistant Curator in the Institute of Systematic Botany. He completed his Ph.D. in 2006 at the University of Missouri, St. Louis and worked for two years as a postdoctoral researcher at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. He brings a strong interest in floristics of Amazonia and expertise in the study of legumes. The New York Botanical Garden has been active in research in the Amazon since the late 19th century; this vast region continues to be one of the Garden's key geographic areas of research due its size, wealth of biodiversity, and tremendous influence on the climate of South America.

Robert Naczi, Ph.D., joined the Garden's faculty in September as the Curator of North American Botany, a newly created position. He completed his Ph.D. in 1992 at the University of Michigan and was Curator of the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University from 2001 to 2008. He has extensive experience studying the flora of the northeastern United States, particularly Cyperaceae (sedges) and Sarraceniaceae (pitcher plants). The Botanical Garden is building on a long tradition of research and scholarship in North America. Among other projects, Dr. Naczi is revising and updating the iconic *Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada* by Henry A. Gleason and Arthur Cronquist. Providing up-to-date accounts of the flora of the region will inform conservation and scientific efforts.

Paola Pedraza, Ph.D., joined the Botanical Garden in October as Assistant Curator in the Institute of Systematic Botany. She received her doctoral degree earlier this year from Lehman College, City University of New York and worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the American Museum of Natural

History. She earned her undergraduate degree in botany from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia at Bogotá. An expert on tropical Ericaceae (the blueberry family, a prominent component of montane flora) and Neotropical floristics in general, Dr. Pedraza will continue developing the Botanical Garden's strong track record of expertise in Ericaceae and Neotropical floristics. Her research contributes to both the conservation and botanical knowledge of the tropical Andes, a region with one of the highest levels of biodiversity and endemism, but also facing accelerated habitat loss.

Gregory Plunkett, Ph.D., will join the Botanical Garden in January 2009 as Curator and Director of the Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Program for Molecular Systematics. He completed his Ph.D. studies at Washington State University in 1994 and has been a professor of biology at Virginia Commonwealth University from 1996 to 2008. Dr. Plunkett studies the evolutionary and biogeographic histories of flowering plants, especially Araliaceae (the ginseng family) and Apiaceae (the carrot family), on a global basis. His research combines extensive fieldwork with molecular studies in the laboratory.

These five current new hires join two 2007 additions to The New York Botanical Garden's science faculty, Drs. Kenneth Karol and Damon Little.

In September 2007, **Kenneth G. Karol, Ph.D.**, was named Assistant Curator in the Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Program for Molecular Systematics. His scientific research focuses on evolutionary studies among freshwater green algae (specifically the "charophytes" or "stoneworts"), which are thought to be the closest living relatives of all land plants. Dr. Karol came to the Botanical Garden from the University of Washington in Seattle, where he was a postdoctoral fellow. He received his Ph.D. in plant biology from the University of Maryland in 2004.

In November 2007, **Damon P. Little, Ph.D.**, was appointed Assistant Curator of Bioinformatics, in the Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Program for Molecular Systematics. Dr. Little studies the systematics and character evolution of gymnosperms; the theory and practice of phylogenetic analysis; and the application of information technology to morphological, anatomical, DNA barcoding, and molecular systematic studies (bioinformatics). He is also the central coordinator of the TreeBOL (Tree Barcode of Life) project, a major international collaboration of scientists generating DNA barcodes for the trees of the world. Dr. Little earned his doctorate from Cornell University in 2005 and served as a research associate with the Botanical Garden's Cullman Program from 2004 to 2007.

About Scientific Research at The New York Botanical Garden

The New York Botanical Garden is an advocate for the plant kingdom. Its scientific research aims to discover, understand, and preserve biodiversity in a world that is increasingly under environmental pressure, and whose future depends on momentous decisions based on rigorous scientific research.

The Botanical Garden is one of the world's preeminent free-standing plant research organizations. The Botanical Garden's outstanding staff and unparalleled resources position the Garden at the forefront of worldwide botanical research. Garden scientists have been conducting international research since the late 19th century; the relationships and partnerships they developed have established the Garden as a leading international plant science center.

The Garden conducts basic research in plant biology and studies all species of plants and fungi around the globe. Its scientists use sophisticated, 21st-century techniques such as molecular systematics, genomics research, and digital imaging. The William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, collected by scientist explorers over more than a century, is among the four largest in the world and the largest in the Western Hemisphere; the C.V. Starr Virtual Herbarium adds 45,000 new records each year; the LuEsther T. Mertz Library is the world's most important botanical and horticultural resource of its kind; the internationally renowned scientific staff work in a new state-of-the-art plant research laboratory and a pioneering center

for molecular systematics, while running the largest botanical sciences graduate studies program at any botanical garden in the world.

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The New York Botanical Garden is an advocate for the plant kingdom. The Garden pursues its mission through its role as a museum of living plant collections arranged in gardens and landscapes across its National Historic Landmark site; through its comprehensive education programs in horticulture and plant science; and through the wide-ranging research programs of the International Plant Science Center. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org.

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by the New York City Council and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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