OPINION

Looking back on 2011

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There have been times in autism research when it has felt like there are more questions than answers, and progress is frustratingly slow and stilted.

Not this year.

When the team at SFARI.org gathered to round up the **best of 2011**, we generated long lists of interesting, well-executed research that appeared over the year. In fact, we struggled to pick just **ten of the notable papers**, and the most intriguing and useful **tools and techniques**, that appeared this year

Closer to home, too, this was a banner year. As you may have noticed, SFARI.org underwent a major overhaul this year.

Late last year, we debuted a section called **Toolbox**, with one short piece each week describing a new technique or resource that may be relevant to autism researchers. Many of the items in our top tools and techniques list were first described in this section.

In March, we began featuring opinion pieces — which we call **Viewpoints** — on provocative and timely topics, written by some of the most respected researchers in the field.

For example, among the first was an article by Francesca Happé explaining why the American Psychiatric Association is recommending that **Asperger syndrome be folded** into autism spectrum disorder. Others argued for the need to **include girls and women** and **diverse and**

unusual populations in autism studies, **advocated** for their pet **animal models**, **shared insights** from their work on **other disorders**, or **described** their **perspective** after **decades** in **the field**.

Overall, our volume has grown to eight or nine pieces published each week. To select papers for our coverage, the SFARI.org team combs through about ten times as many papers, and consults with experts, both in-house and in the broader community of scientists. More than once, we've been taken aback by what you, our readers, **liked on the site**.

With all this new content, in February we began sending out a **weekly newsletter** listing the previous week's articles. We've heard from many of you that you not only like the newsletter, but look forward to seeing it every Tuesday. Thank you — any feedback is welcome, but comments that are so supportive are particularly gratifying.

Finally, in August, we relaunched SFARI.org to showcase all of this content better. We debuted a new, more interactive and user-friendly layout, a cleaner design, and sharp, new colors.

Among the new features of the website are a scientist-driven **wiki** to which we hope you will contribute, a members-only forum where you can debate the latest research or share reagents, and **Papers of the Week**, a curated list of PubMed papers on autism that is updated each Tuesday.

As the year winds to a close, we hope that you, like us, feel a sense of accomplishment and optimism — and of excitement in **looking forward to 2012**.