

December 2023

Dear readers, the newsletter team will be taking a winter break before returning with the next edition in February 2024. In the meantime, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your readership.

This newsletter provides links to published news articles, preserving the original title and summary line. Views or opinions presented are those of the original author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Royal Society of Biology.

News

Top stories

[COP28: Landmark summit takes direct aim at fossil fuels](#)

Nations at the UN climate summit have for the first time taken explicit aim at the use of fossil fuels, reports BBC News.

RSB news

[Proposed changes to UK visa requirements pose a risk to UK science](#)

The RSB, together with other organisations representing researchers and research institutions, is seeking urgent engagement with the UK Government, to ensure that the UK remains as welcoming as possible to international scientists across the research workforce, and their families.

[Head outdoors to look for first signs of spring](#)

The Field Studies Council and the Royal Society of Biology have teamed up to create a new interactive project which will allow nature lovers across the country to chart the arrival of the new season.

Plant health and biosecurity

[UK bans giant rhubarb after study finds popular garden plant is invasive species](#)

The Guardian reports that the Government is going to enact a ban on giant rhubarb, meaning it cannot be sold or cultivated, and those who have it in their gardens must ensure it does not spread.

A new 'old' health threat to Scots pine

Forest Research reports that a previously rare fungus known as *Curreya pithyophila* is now infesting shoots and branches of Scots pine in an apparently symbiotic association with the native adelgid species, *Pineus pini*.

Invasive plant species threaten 66 percent of India's natural areas

The Global Plant Council highlights a study claiming that 66 percent of India's natural systems are threatened by invasive plant species.

Plant breeding

Assessing the environmental impact of wheat production under regenerative agriculture practices

A recently started project aims to assess the environmental impacts of new wheat lines developed at NIAB.

Agriculture

Environment Secretary announces further £45 million for farming innovation as he sets out commitment to champion British agriculture

The Environment Secretary has used his first major speech to set out his commitment to backing British farmers and being on the side of rural businesses, according to this Government press release.

Transformative new interdisciplinary programme to drive food system change

The John Innes Centre reports on the launch of the Co-Centre for Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems (SUREFOOD), which aims to bring together researchers from institutions across Ireland and the UK to tackle food system transformation.

Food security

Environment Secretary Steve Barclay: UK stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Ukraine to protect global food security

The Environment Secretary has set out a package of support for Ukraine while addressing the international community at the recent Kyiv International Summit: Grain from Ukraine, reports this Government press release.

£15.6 million boost for low-emission food production systems

UKRI reports that Innovate UK and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) are set to invest £15.6 million in 32 projects as part of the novel low-emission food production systems competition.

Biodiversity and conservation

Government pledges to boost Britain's access to nature ahead of COP28

The Government has announced a new package of measures including launching a search for a new National Park, 34 new landscape recovery projects, new forests and funding to help more children get outdoors and into the countryside, according to this Government press release.

Bees cannot taste even lethal levels of pesticides

The University of Oxford reports on a study showing that bumblebees cannot taste pesticides present in nectar, even at lethal concentrations.

Forestry

Forests fit for the future – government funding announced for new forest research

The Government has announced £16 million of funding for forest scientists to enable research into climate and pest resilient woodlands, according to this Government press release.

Supermarket essentials will no longer be linked to illegal deforestation

According to this Government press release, palm oil, cocoa, beef, leather and soy are to be included in new legislation aimed at helping ensure that products bought in the UK do not harm the world's forests.

Tropical forest loss from growing rubber trade is more substantial than previously thought – new research

Writing for the Conversation, Eleanor Warren-Thomas, Lecturer in Conservation and Forestry at Bangor University, and Antje Ahrends, Head of Genetics and Conservation at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, discuss the increasing global demand for rubber and how the likely pace of forest loss to accommodate this surpasses previous estimates.

Amazon protector: the Brazilian politician who turned the tide on deforestation

This article by Nature focuses on Brazil's environment minister, Marina Silva, who has helped reduce deforestation and rebuild institutions that were weakened by the previous Government.

Sustainability

Five major outcomes from the latest UN climate summit

Writing for the Conversation, Mark Maslin, Priti Parikh, and Simon Chin-Yee, Professor of Natural Sciences, Professor of Infrastructure Engineering and International Development, and Lecturer in International Development at UCL, respectively, discuss the major outcomes from the recent COP28 summit.

Potential of soils to sequester carbon being “seriously overestimated”

This article from Rothamsted Research reports on a discussion of some recent studies estimating the potential of farmland to store more carbon through innovative soil management. A group of leading researchers says that some estimates are presenting an overoptimistic picture of what can be achieved.

Other news

Buried ancient Fenland yew trees offer climate change insight

The buried remains of vast forests of ancient yew trees that once covered the Fens could shed light on the history of climate change, reports BBC News.

Opportunities

[Plant Health Professional Register](#)

Those working in plant health are encouraged to apply for the RSB's [Plant Health Professionals Register](#), which was created in partnership with Defra to recognise individuals with skills and experience that align with the current [Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain](#). You are also invited to join our [Plant Health Professionals LinkedIn network](#) where you can explore and share job opportunities, events and more.

[Teaching Policy Advisory Group Chair recruitment](#)

The new RSB Teaching Policy Advisory Group (TPAG) is seeking applications to appoint a chair. TPAG will provide input from those with teaching, initial training and CPD expertise, to inform RSB policy positions, and develop a programme of work to address the current issues in school-level teaching across all four UK nations. The Chair of the TPAG offers a key opportunity to lead the group in contributing to, advising and influencing the policy, strategy and outputs of the RSB.

For further information and the full job posting, please visit [mySociety](#).

Applications close on **Wednesday 10 January 2024, 23:59 BST**

[RSB School Biology Teacher of the Year Award](#)

Do you know an amazing school biology teacher? Teachers, school staff or students, their parents and guardians can now [suggest a teacher](#) for the Royal Society of Biology's School Biology Teacher of the Year Award. Visit the Society's [website](#) for further information.

Teachers working in the UK can now also contact Dr Amanda Hardy to discuss ideas and to [suggest a teacher](#) to nominate themselves or a colleague **by 24th January 2024**. If you know a school biology teacher who deserves recognition for their passion and ideas, please encourage them to submit an application this year.

[BioArtAttack 3D 2023](#)

In the lead up to Christmas or for some festive holiday science and art craft activities. Get creative and submit an entry for the Royal Society of Biology's [BioArtAttack 3D 2023](#) competition! Your entry could be any type of 3D artwork from models to sculptures, even massive BioArtAttack 3D designs taking inspiration from the smallest or the largest parts of the living world. [Submit a photograph](#) of your 3D BioArtAttack online and [visit our website](#) for further information. **The deadline for entries is 16th January 2024.**

[Royal Society of Biology travel grants](#)

AMRSB and early-career MRSB members of the Royal Society of Biology can now apply for a [travel grant](#) of up to £1,000 to support future travel in connection with biological study, teaching or research. Learn new lab and field techniques, gain professional development skills, and network with academics with the support of a travel grant. [Visit the website](#) for further information and to read reports from [previous grant recipients](#). The deadline for applications is **Friday 26th January 2024**.

Consultations

[Consultation on proposals for a new framework in England for the regulation of precision bred organisms used for food and animal feed](#)

This consultation seeks stakeholders' views on proposals for establishing a new framework in England under the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 for the regulation of food and animal feed ('feed') produced from Precision Bred Organisms (PBOs) ('PBOs for food/feed').

Closes: 8 January 2024

[Towards Responsible Publishing](#)

cOAlition S are seeking input from the research community to establish a community-based scholarly communication system. The consultation process will run from November 2023 **until April 2024**.

[RSB Policy Resource Library online](#)

The RSB has created a searchable, digital library of more than 800 statements, responses, briefings and other policy resources produced by the RSB and our Member Organisations across the biosciences. This collection is freely and openly accessible to everyone, including members and non-members, through the [mySociety portal](#) (no registration necessary).

Events

[Plant Health Series: How to communicate science, win friends and influence people](#)

2 February 2024

14:00 - 15:00

Online (Zoom)

Renowned author, plant enthusiast and media professional Professor Jonathan Drori will provide the ground rules for effective science communication. He will address how to define, understand and engage with different audiences and how to widen your influence beyond your usual networks. Guided by Jon's personal experience, attendees will also learn of common misconceptions in plant biology and the fallacy of 'the general public'. The talk will be followed by an opportunity for an audience Q&A and discussion, chaired by Dr Mimi Tanimoto, communications and engagement consultant.

[Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning](#)

14 February 2024

9:00 - 17:00

Online

This course offers a practical point of access to the techniques of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Computational Biology, as well as a discussion of their strengths and limitations. No prior knowledge of these subjects will be required. The course will take place online, from 9:00 – 17:00 (GMT) on **14th February 2024**.

And finally...

[Plant fossils turn out to be turtles in 'unusual misidentification'](#)

The Guardian reports that two small, oval fossils thought to be prehistoric plants are actually the remains of baby marine turtles.



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