

Plant Science Newsletter – a monthly round-up of policy headlines and stories

April 2021

This newsletter provides links to published news articles from a range of sources. 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 and debate

An opportunity not to be missed

[Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships 2021](#)

Bioscience undergraduates can now apply for our paid summer research projects. Successful applicants will receive a stipend of £250 per week and gain great research experience working with leading plant health researchers on 8-10 week placements. Ten research projects are available, comprising a mix of remotely-managed and in-person projects. Details of the projects, eligibility and links to apply can be found on our studentships page:

www.rsb.org.uk/plant-studentships.

Closes: 13 May 2021

Plant health and biosecurity

[Greater protection for sweet chestnut trees in England](#)

Government approves release of a biological control agent to reduce the spread of Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp.

[Public urged to report sightings of tree pest oak processionary moth \(OPM\) caterpillars](#)

The Forestry Commission runs an annual programme with partners to monitor, treat and research OPM, in order to slow the spread and reduce the intensity of the pest.

[Ash dieback: 8,600 trees to be felled by Newport City Council](#)

A total of 8,600 trees affected by ash dieback disease will have to be felled in Newport, BBC News reports.

[Scottish growers must remain vigilant about stink bug threat](#)

Scottish growers must take adequate steps to monitor growing areas for the invasive brown marmorated stink bug, researchers say.

[€500,000 set aside to save Rome's pine trees from deadly parasite](#)

President of surrounding Lazio region says pine tortoise scale problem requires immediate action

Plant breeding

[Commission reopens gene editing's box amid sustainability claims](#)

A new study from the European Commission has concluded that the current legal framework governing new genomic techniques (NGTs) is insufficient and indicated that new policy instruments should be considered to reap the benefits of this technology, EURACTIV reports.

[Survey of consumers across EU member states finds majority want compulsory labelling on all genetically modified food](#)

EURACTIV reports on a recent Ipsos poll that finds a majority of European consumers want to see compulsory labelling on food products containing genetically modified crops, but industry players insist that this is impossible to implement.

Agriculture

[Climate change 'has dented global agricultural productivity'](#)

SciDev.Net covers a study identifying how global agricultural productivity has declined by about 21 per cent in the last 60 years as a result of climate change.

[Europe's heat and drought crop losses tripled in 50 years: study](#)

The severity of crop losses driven by heat waves and drought have tripled in the last fifty years in Europe, according to a study that highlights the vulnerability of food systems to climate change.

[Farming without disturbing soil could cut agriculture's climate impact by 30% – study finds](#)

A study of UK farms, reported in The Conversation, finds that a switch to no-till farming could slash greenhouse gas emissions from crop production by nearly a third and increase how much carbon soils can store.

[Climate change: Future-proofing coffee in a warming world](#)

Scientists say a "forgotten" coffee plant that can grow in warmer conditions could help future-proof the drink against climate change.

[Swapping cereals for legumes provides nutritious and effective food production with large environmental benefits, scientists have found](#)

Plant more bean-like crops in Europe and consider 'healthy diet transition' to beat climate crisis, say scientists.

Food security

['People are not starving, they're being starved': millions at risk of famine, NGOs warn](#)

Open letter backing UN call to action says Covid has exacerbated problems of conflict, climate crisis and inequality, The Guardian reports.

Biodiversity and conservation

[Noisy environments can have detrimental effect on plants, study finds](#)

Persistent noise from natural gas wells in New Mexico disrupted birds that feed on and distribute pinyon seeds.

[Improved management of farmed peatlands could cut 500m tonnes of CO2](#)

Substantial cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions could be achieved by raising water levels in agricultural peatlands, according to a new study.

[Thousands of bluebell bulbs dug up in Norfolk wood](#)

Some 8,000 bluebell bulbs were found dug up after police received a call about suspicious activity in a privately-owned wood, BBC News reports.

[Garden centres 'failing to stop peat sales'](#)

BBC News reports that leading garden retailers are still failing to stop the sale of peat in compost despite pressure from the government and campaigners.

Forestry

[UK woodlands 'at crisis point' amid wildlife decline](#)

A Woodland Trust review of the state of Britain's native woods and trees has found only 7% are in a good condition, BBC News reports.

[HS2: RSPB calls for probe into tree-felling for high-speed line](#)

The RSPB has called for the felling of trees in the path of the HS2 rail link to be investigated, reports The Guardian.

Sustainability

[UK land now stores 7% more carbon than 300 years ago – what that means for the environment](#)

Described in The Conversation, a study estimates how much carbon dioxide the UK has absorbed since the dawn of the industrial revolution.

Other news

['The damage is total': fire rips through historic South African library and plant collection](#)

University of Cape Town faces losing 'irreplaceable' historical material on anthropology, ecology and politics.

[A new guide for communicating plant science](#)

The Global Plant Council announces a new guide to help plant scientists communicate their work to the world.

Opportunities

[Appointment to the Nuffield Council on Bioethics](#)

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics (NCOB) is an independent body that informs policy and public debate about the ethical questions raised by biological and medical research. NCOB is seeking applications from a broad range of disciplines and would particularly welcome applicants with medical/biological science, biomedicine, and healthcare experience.

Closes: 7 May 2021

Water Industry Film Shorts contest

RSB is supporting the Water Industry TV's new video competition, which aims to build awareness about the challenges facing the world's water systems ahead of COP26 and show how the research community is driving towards solutions. The competition is open to all and you can enter by submitting a short video of your water based project and the challenges you are trying to address. Find out more at waterindustrytv.com or on [YouTube](#).

Closes: 15 May 2021

RSB ambassadors - open for applications

Are you an enthusiastic, active and engaged member of the RSB who would like to act as a key contact for the RSB at your workplace, while encouraging others to get involved? [Apply now](#) to become an [RSB ambassador](#). N.B. At this stage, we are only accepting applications from UK-based members at the AMRSB, MRSB and FRSB grade.

Closes: 31 July 2021

Consultations

[Draft update to the UK National Implementation Plan for the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants \(POPs\)](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Devolved Administrations, is consulting on a draft update to the National Implementation Plan for POPs. The update covers 'new POPs' and also sets out the information available for these substances and plans to monitor and eliminate them in the future.

Closes: 14 May 2021

[Draft policy statement on environmental principles](#)

The Government is consulting on the draft policy statement on environmental principles which sets out how five internationally recognised environmental principles should be interpreted and proportionately applied. The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. Please contact consultation@rsb.org.uk for more information and if you would like to contribute.

Closes: 2 June 2021

[R&D Tax Reliefs](#)

The Government launched a review of R&D tax reliefs at Budget 2021. This wide ranging consultation seeks views from stakeholders on the current R&D tax relief schemes.

Closes: 2 June 2021

[Role of biomass in achieving net zero](#)

This call for evidence aims to strengthen the Government's evidence base around biomass and will contribute to a review of the potential for biomass to support the UK's net zero target.

Closes: 15 June 2021

[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

[BSPP Plant Health Club 2021](#)

A new monthly meeting series aims to facilitate open discussions and networking opportunities. Meetings are primarily targeted at PhD students and early career researchers, but all are welcome. Dates and times of meetings will vary to enable as many people as possible to attend, and each meeting will take a theme.

[Policy Lates: Translating potential into progress – COVID-19 vaccines](#)

25 May 2021

18:30 – 20:30 BST

This free online event, chaired by Professor Sheila Graham FRSB, will see a panel discuss successes and lessons learned in the development of COVID-19 vaccines. They will reflect on the translational research potential and wider impact for the biosciences in improving global health.

[#UKPlantSciPresents webinar series](#)

The series returns for its spring season. View the full range of presentations and register for free [here](#). Recordings of all past webinars are available to view, and further webinar titles will be announced as the year progresses. Thanks to support for this series from the Monogram Small Grains Network, Bristol Centre for Agricultural Innovation, NovogeneUK and Arabidopsis Events UK.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all RSB events will continue to take place online and updated information will be made available on the [RSB events pages](#). We recommend also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

And finally...

[Scientists stunned to discover plants beneath mile-deep Greenland ice](#)

In 2019, University of Vermont scientist Andrew Christ looked at it through his microscope—and couldn't believe what he was seeing: twigs and leaves instead of just sand and rock.

[Growing the future report](#)

Growing the future highlights to policymakers and others the excellence of plant science in the UK, and its importance to the biosciences, the economy, and society both at home and around the world. The report is available to download [here](#).

In the latest Biologist

In our latest COVID Q&A, Professor Sir David Stuart explains how automated and remotely operated experimentation is [here to stay post-pandemic](#). Sir David is director of life sciences at Diamond Light Source, a synchrotron that has remained operational throughout the pandemic with researchers operating the facility remotely.

The theme of the latest print issue of The Biologist is 'listening in': We look at [eavesdropping animals](#), the [best biology podcasts](#), and how bacteria can [signal the presence of antibiotic to help others](#). And ahead of this year's key COP15 and COP26 meetings, we explore why frameworks and targets to tackle biological diversity and climate change [must be better integrated](#).

Oxford Biology Primers: New titles and discounts for RSB members

The latest titles in the RSB's Oxford Biology Primers series to be published are Microbial Biotechnology and Power Analysis, with Cell Signalling, Protein Science and Evolution now available to pre-order ahead of publication later in the year. The series of primers introduces prospective and current students of undergraduate-level bioscience to a broad range of topics, with earlier titles in the series exploring Human Infectious Disease & Public Health, Genomics, Hormones, Mammalian Synthetic Biology and Plant Disease & Biosecurity. All RSB members can claim 25% off books. Contact tom.ireland@rsb.org.uk for more information.

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