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PlantSci Newsletter – a monthly round-up of plant science policy headlines and stories

December 2019

News and debate

Top story

[BBC One announces brand new series on plants, The Green Planet](#)

BBC One is delighted to announce that Sir David Attenborough is to present The Green Planet, a brand new five part landmark series from BBC Studios Natural History Unit.

Plant health and biosecurity

[A New Year Takes Root](#)

Next year is set to be the first International Year of Plant Health. Find out about the activities and events aiming to raise awareness of the threats to trees and crops in 2020.

[International Year of Plant Health 2020](#)

['Forgotten' elm tree set to make a comeback](#)

[New animal and plant health safety rules coming into force in December](#)

New regulations aimed at modernising protections against animal diseases and plant pests and improving food safety come into force.

Plant breeding

[EU study to clarify gene editing court ruling further muddies waters](#)

After the controversial European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling in 2018 that organisms obtained by new plant breeding techniques (NBTs) should, in principle, fall under the GMO Directive, the Council of the EU has requested a study from the Commission to clarify the situation. But what this means in practice remains unclear, stakeholders have told EURACTIV.

[GM potato trials point to blight resistant crops of the future](#)

A genetically modified potato with improved tuber quality and resistance to the devastating disease late blight has progressed successfully through the latest stage of trials.

Agriculture

[MEPs call for a reduction in pesticides to protect bees](#)

Further reducing use of pesticides, more funds for research and better monitoring are urgently needed to save the EU's bees, says the Environment Committee.

[EU to ban two 'brain-damaging' pesticides](#)

Representatives from member states in the EU Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCOPAFF) voted to ban the controversial pesticides chlorpyrifos and chlorpyrifos-methyl from the EU market on Friday (6 December).

Food security

[Wild seed collectors turn Indiana Jones in the search for resilient crops](#)

[Climate change is hurting farmers – even seeds are under threat](#)

Climate change is already affecting the amount of food that farmers can produce.

[Can kitchen gardens combat climate change?](#)

Biodiversity and conservation

[Superglue plant and 'miracle berry' among 2019's new finds](#)

Other species identified by Kew experts include a snowdrop and cancer-fighting fungus

[Tropical forests lose vital nutrients from continued logging and re-growth](#)

NERC-funded research shows that continual logging and re-growing of tropical forests is reducing the levels of vital nutrients in the soil – limiting future forest growth and jeopardising the long-term sustainability of logging in the tropics.

[Almost a quarter of eucalypt trees found to be threatened with extinction](#)

Some 134 species of eucalypts had drops in numbers of at least 30% and the endangered Rose Mallee declined by more than half

[Close Scottish grouse moors to help climate, report urges](#)

Intensively managed estates have created treeless landscapes with few animals and plants

[Non native plants provide habitats for variety of British insects](#)

Non-native plants are providing new habitats for British insects affected by human-driven environmental changes, a new study has found.

[Biodiversity: The best plants for attracting insects to gardens](#)

Sustainability

[Converting coal plants to biomass could fuel climate crisis, scientists warn](#)

Experts horrified at large-scale forest removal to meet wood pellet demand

[Avocados with edible coating to go on sale in Europe for first time](#)

US technology allows fruits to stay ripe for twice as long and reduces plastic packaging

Other news

[Fascination of Plants Day 2019 Success Stories Report published](#)

People

[David Bellamy: farewell to the man who could have stolen Attenborough's crown](#)

While overshadowed by the other David – and out of step on both the EU and climate change – the naturalist and presenter will be remembered for his unbridled enthusiasm for botany

Opinion

[How gardeners are reclaiming agriculture from industry, one seed at a time](#)

[How to design a forest fit to heal the planet](#)

[I've seen mass tree-planting projects go awry around the world – UK politicians should take note](#)

From the Amazon to the Australian outback, the world's forests are on fire. But just as all these trees disappear, politicians are sprouting promises to plant more of them like the dawning of a global spring.

Opportunities

[PULSE: Programme for Up and coming Life Sciences Entrepreneurs](#)

Closes: 31 December 2019

[2019 call for expressions of interest to join core membership of BBSRC Strategy Advisory Panels](#)

Strategy Advisory Panels play a key role in delivering UKRI-BBSRC's mission by providing expert input and advice that helps shape and develop strategy and ensures that investment decisions are supported by expert knowledge and insight from members of the scientific research and innovation community, including those with broad experience between and across disciplines

Closes: 14 January 2020

British Biology Olympiad 2020

The [British Biology Olympiad 2020](#) (31 January - 7 February) for post-16 students is now open for registration. The competition challenges and motivates students with an

interest in biology, providing them with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. High scoring students will receive certificates and be invited to an awards ceremony in London. Please contact [Raghav Selvam](#) with any enquiries.
Closes: 24 January 2020

[Speak Up for Food Security 2020: Apply now!](#)

The Global Food Security programme (GFS) is calling on all UKRI council-funded early-career researchers (ECRs) to take part in its annual research storytelling competition 'Speak Up for Food Security'. 12 successful applicants will attend an immersive, 2-day research storytelling masterclass in central London (26-27 February 2020), where they will receive communication training tailored to creating food system change.

Closes: 26 January 2020

[Call for nominations for the Queen's New Year Honours 2021](#)

Do you know someone working within the environmental sciences sector who deserves to be recognised for their outstanding contribution, their achievements in public life or their commitment to serving and helping Britain? If you do, create an opportunity for them to receive national recognition for all their hard work by nominating them for a UK honour.

Closes: 6 February 2020

Biology Challenge 2020

The [Biology Challenge 2020](#) (10 - 31 March) for students aged 13 - 15 is now open for registration. The competition stimulates students' curiosity for the natural world and encourages them to take an interest in biology outside of school. High scoring students will receive certificates and be invited to an awards ceremony in London.

Please contact [Raghav Selvam](#) with any enquiries

Closes: 28 February 2020

[RSB Big Biology Day grant scheme 2020](#)

Are you interested in hosting a one-day science outreach festival to share your passion for biology and the natural world? Apply for the Royal Society of Biology's Big Biology Day grant scheme 2020 and get up to £500 to host your own Big Biology Day.

Closes: 28 February 2020

[£500 student & early-career member travel grants](#)

Student and early-career members of the Royal Society of Biology can now apply for a travel grant of £500 to support future overseas travel in connection with biological study, teaching or research.

Closes: 1 March 2020

Events

[Genetics Society Arabidopsis Meeting](#)

After a 10 year hiatus, the Genetics Society Arabidopsis Meeting is back with a two-day meeting in Durham on the 21st and 22nd of April, 2020 at the department of Biosciences. Scientific sessions will cover: Development, Abiotic Interactions, Teaching Plant Biology, Natural Variation, Biotic Interactions, Computational Biology. 21-22 April 2020, Durham

45th New Phytologist Symposium: Ecological and evolutionary consequences of plant–fungal invasions

The 45th New Phytologist Symposium will explore how human activities increasingly alter plant and soil fungal communities and the consequences of these changes. Eighteen leading scientists will share insights into the biogeographic patterns, ecological/evolutionary dynamics, and ecosystem/biogeochemical consequences of plant-fungal co-invasions.

20–23 June 2020, Campinas, Brazil

Arboricultural Association Amenity Conference 2020

Conference 2020 is to be on the main theme of Trees & Society. This is a wide subject area which incorporates many questions of interest and relevance to everyone who works in arboriculture and urban forestry, as well as other professions.

6–9th September 2020, University of Exeter

46th New Phytologist Symposium: Stomata 2020

There have been dramatic developments in our understanding of stomata in recent years. This symposium will provide a forum for stomatal scientists to hear the latest developments in stomatal research and to discuss and decide on a road map for the future. It will also place stomatal research in the overarching context of global environmental change.

11–14 September 2020, Kaifeng, China

For the full events list, please see the [UKPSF website](#).

And finally...

Recordings reveal that plants make ultrasonic squeals when stressed

Growing the future – a report from the UK Plant Sciences Federation (UKPSF)

Launched in January 2019, *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](#).

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