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

January 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

RSB news

[COVID-19 Bulletin](#)

For further detail on COVID-19 research, news and updates, RSB produces a monthly bulletin collating some of the bioscience behind the outbreak and response. The latest edition, published on the 18th of January 2021, includes epidemiological updates and assessment of public health strategies; updates on testing, on new drugs, and on vaccine development, roll-out and communications; looking back on how science rose to the challenge through 2020 and into 2021; and a discussion on ways you can look after yourself and others in 2021. See [our webpages](#) to read previous editions and subscribe to the next.

[Natural capital priorities for coping with change](#)

Watch again or listen to the Natural Capital Initiative's lively panel discussion last week, in which the RSB's Dr Laura Bellingan talked to Professor Sir Ian Boyd from the University of St Andrews and Assistant Director Ben Combes from PwC about the science and solutions needed to build back better with more resilience.

Plant health and biosecurity

[Horticulture 'incredibly frustrated' by Irish Sea border](#)

BBC News reports on 'incredible frustration' for horticulture businesses at new Irish Sea border checks involving plant health regulations, following the end of the transition period.

Plant breeding

[Gene editing creates potential to protect the nation's environment, pollinators and wildlife](#)

Environment Secretary launches government consultation on future of gene editing.

[Environment department scientist calls for biotechnology debate](#)

Defra Chief Scientist, Gideon Henderson, believes the time is ripe for a new public debate on the science of manipulating genes in crops and animals, the Guardian reports.

[France backs non-GMO regulation for crop gene-editing in EU](#)

French agriculture minister opposes a European Union court decision classing crops developed using gene-editing techniques as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), Reuters reports.

Agriculture

[Legal threat over bee-harming pesticide use](#)

The Wildlife Trusts is to take legal action against the UK government over its decision to allow a pesticide that is almost entirely banned in the EU.

[Farmers in UK devolved nations face big drops in income post-Brexit](#)

The Guardian describes how Fergus Ewing, Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for the rural economy has warned that farmers in the UK's devolved administrations are facing substantial cuts to their income due to Brexit, which could imperil their ability to protect the countryside.

[Research reveals how crop roots penetrate hard soils](#)

According to UK Research and Innovation, scientists have discovered a signal that causes roots to stop growing in hard soils, which can be 'switched off' to allow them to punch through compacted soil.

Food security

[Is the UK ready for plant-based diets?](#)

A new report from the Global Food Security Programme asks whether the UK food system is ready to adapt to changing consumer demands.

[Growing food: Call to give vegetable growers public cash](#)

Three-quarters of the Welsh population's recommended daily intake of vegetables should be grown in Wales by 2030, food experts have urged.

Biodiversity and conservation

[Biodiversity: why foods grown in warm climates could be doing the most damage to wildlife](#)

Many of these species are threatened by farmland expanding into their habitats, and while there's a growing appetite to reform our broken relationship with nature, it's important to recognise that threats to biodiversity are not equally distributed.

[Building a green economy could stop 'nightmare' degradation of Amazon](#)

US scientist Thomas Lovejoy says the rainforest's rich biodiversity has been undervalued compared to economic activities such as farming and mining

['Droves' of Pampas grass pickers at South Shields beach](#)

A boom in the popularity of Pampas grass with interior decorators has led to "droves" of people picking the plant which grows wild near a beach, BBC News reports.

[Covid-19: Dartmoor lockdown crowds 'destroying' ancient woods](#)

An influx of lockdown visitors taking exercise on Dartmoor has raised concerns about an ancient woodland.

Forestry

[Scientists address myths over large-scale tree planting](#)

Scientists have proposed 10 golden rules for tree-planting, which they say must be a top priority for all nations this decade.

[Street trees close to the home may reduce the risk of depression](#)

Researchers find presence of urban trees linked with lower antidepressant prescriptions.

[Woodland creation](#)

Large-scale woodland creation is being promoted internationally to mitigate climate change. It can also supply other benefits, such as improving biodiversity, air and water quality. This POSTnote summarises key factors influencing how much carbon is taken up by woodland, the different objectives of woodland creation, constraints to increasing UK tree cover and different finance options.

[Forests go into growth 'overdrive' to recover from drought – new study](#)

The Conversation addresses how Scots pine has responded to past droughts and how resilient it is likely to be.

Sustainability

[Government postpones Environment Bill again](#)

The government has decided to postpone the Environment Bill after it is debated in the House of Commons on Tuesday.

Opinion

[Gene-edited crops are now a reality – but will the public be on board?](#)

With a review of gene editing rules underway, an article in The Conversation discusses earlier debates about biotechnology and notes that, there is an opportunity to gain public trust in these technologies through active and open dialogue.

[We have no choice – this has to be the year we reverse the decline of nature](#)

This opinion piece written for The Independent considers how the UK can emerge as a global leader in conserving and improving the natural world.

Opportunities

RSB Gopher Science Lab free online training for primary teachers

The Royal Society of Biology is offering 40 state-funded primary schools in the UK the opportunity for four teachers to have free access to RSB's Gopher Science Lab [online training course](#). With thanks to generous support from [The Worshipful Company of Horners](#) enabling RSB to offer this opportunity. Primary school teachers working in UK based, state-funded, primary schools can email [Amanda Hardy](#) to apply on behalf of their school to access the paid-for online training places on a first come first served basis.

RSB's Science at Home festival resources online

RSB and some of our science friends have worked together to run our first ever virtual science festival - [RSB's Science at Home](#) - with activities and resources available online, so you can now take part in the festival any time that suits you. With a range of videos, activities, games and more straight to your computer screen to entertain and engage you and your family. Take part today and tell your friends via [#RSBScienceAtHome](#).

Consultations

[Sustainable use of pesticides](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Devolved Administrations have produced a revised draft National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides. This consultation allows you to give your views on the plan that covers the next five years and aims to minimise the risks and impacts of pesticides to human health and the environment while ensuring pests and pesticide resistance are managed effectively.

Closes: 26 February 2021

[Greenhouse gas removals](#)

The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and HM Treasury are seeking evidence on greenhouse gas removal methods, and views on policy mechanisms that could incentivise and facilitate their development and deployment.

Closes: 26 February 2021

[Defra consultation on the regulation of genetic technologies](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is consulting on the regulation of gene edited (GE) organisms and gathering views on the wider regulatory framework governing genetically modified organisms (GMOs). 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: 17 March 2021

Events

[#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.

[Reforestation for Biodiversity, Carbon Capture and Livelihoods](#)

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) will jointly convene three days of online discussion and debate on best practice and policy in tree-planting, underpinned by scientific evidence, to go beyond the headlines and find ways of raising the standard of global reforestation.

Registration closes Friday 19 February, 12pm UK time (UTC) or when tickets fully booked Online, 24 – 26 February 2021

[Engaging with Parliament: Mark Logan MP](#)

24 February 2021

18:15 – 19:00 GMT

This online event will give members the chance to engage with Mark Logan MP, member of the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee and MP for Bolton North East. The event will focus on the role of the Science and Technology Select Committee and current open inquiries.

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...

[Green buildings can bring fresh air to design, but they can also bring pests](#)

While they can look beautiful, without proper care and maintenance, green buildings can also come with some unexpected problems.

[Growing the future – a report from the UK Plant Sciences Federation \(UKPSF\)](#)

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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