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

**June 2020**

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 and debate**

#### **RSB news**

##### **[Royal Society of Biology's Higher Education Bioscience Teacher of the Year 2020 announced](#)**

The Royal Society of Biology Heads of University Biosciences (HUBS) have named Dr Sue Jones, associate head of school: biosciences at York St. John University, as winner of the HE Bioscience Teacher of the Year Award 2020.

##### **[RSB and ITN Productions partner for 2020 programme on Biology for the Future](#)** **[09 June 2020](#)**

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) and ITN Productions are again partnering to deliver a new documentary, highlighting the importance and breadth of the biosciences.

##### **[RSB's impact on science and education policy](#)**

Since 2009, the RSB has published over 200 policy outputs, covering a variety of topics. Find out more about the process of presenting our members' expertise to policy-makers, and view a range of case studies showing the direct impact of our science and education policy work at [www.rsb.org.uk/policy-work](http://www.rsb.org.uk/policy-work).

##### **[COVID-19 Bulletin](#)**

For further detail on COVID-19 research, news and updates, RSB has developed a fortnightly bulletin collating some of the bioscience behind the outbreak and response, see [our webpages](#) to read previous editions and subscribe to the next.

### [Main RSB webpage on COVID-19](#)

The RSB is working to adapt and ensure our services are delivered to the greatest extent possible whilst also taking into account Public Health England and Government advice during the pandemic. We regularly update this [webpage](#) with relevant information about our activities, initiatives and community support.

### [Education during COVID-19](#)

An RSB webpage listing advice, resources and announcements for schools, students and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic (last updated 22 June 2020).

## **Plant health and biosecurity**

### [Public urged to report sightings of tree pest Oak Processionary Moth](#)

As Oak Processionary Moth season begins, the Forestry Commission reminds people to be aware of the pest and report sightings.

### [Update on National Measures for \*Xylella\* and Plane Canker](#)

A statement from Defra following the European Commission review of regulations introduced by Defra, including requirements on *Xylella* and plane canker.

## **Plant breeding**

### [Lords seek to allow gene-editing in UK 'to produce healthy, hardier crops'](#)

Changes could introduce gluten-free wheat and disease-resistant fruit and vegetables, say peers.

### [German Green faction pushes for gene editing, overhaul of regulation](#)

In an unprecedented move, a group of German Green MPs, including one EU lawmaker, have backed the use of gene editing technologies in a new paper, diverging from the party's general position and saying genetic engineering could play a key role in improving sustainability.

## **Agriculture**

### [Farmers call for green trade policy to help tackle climate change](#)

Farmers want trade deals that reflect the sector's pledge to be at net zero emissions by 2040 following the coronavirus outbreak.

### [Edible horticulture - it's a skill](#)

AHDB describes the results of a survey about labour shortages and skills gaps in the edible horticulture sector.

### [Bayer to pay \\$10.9bn to settle weedkiller cancer claims](#)

Chemical firm Bayer is to pay up to \$10.9bn (£8.8bn) to settle cancer claims linked to its Roundup weedkiller.

### [Creating a sustainable food system: the EU's strategy](#)

The EU's food sustainability strategy aims to protect the environment and ensure healthy food for everyone, whilst ensuring farmers' livelihoods.

### ['Life attracts life': the Irish farmers filling their fields with bees and butterflies](#)

The Guardian describes positive environmental impacts of changes to farming practices in an area of west Ireland.

## **Food security**

### [World faces worst food crisis for at least 50 years, UN warns](#)

The Guardian covers how Governments are urged to act to avoid disaster from recession caused by coronavirus.

### [The race is on to grow crops in seawater and feed millions](#)

With the quality of arable land declining and seawater encroaching on fertile cropland, researchers are trying to find a way to make crops grow in seawater.

### ['Rolling emergency' of locust swarms decimating Africa, Asia and Middle East](#)

Unseasonal rains have allowed desert pests to breed rapidly and spread across vast distances leaving devastation in their wake.

## **Biodiversity and conservation**

### ['National nature service' needed for green recovery in England, groups say](#)

Guardian Exclusive: government must 'seize the day' to create jobs and tackle wildlife and climate crises.

### [How one teaspoon of Amazon soil teems with fungal life](#)

A teaspoon of soil from the Amazon contains as many as 1,800 microscopic life forms, of which 400 are fungi.

### [Texas's cactus cops battle to save rare desert beauty from smuggling gangs](#)

Agents on US-Mexico border seize thousands of plants illegally pulled out of the ground by criminals.

### [Pollution: Using nature to keep the Faughan waters clean](#)

A dairy farmer is working with conservationists on an innovative approach to prevent pollution of a protected river.

### [How forest loss has changed biodiversity across the globe over the last 150 years](#)

The Conversation addresses how changes in biodiversity worldwide are linked to changes in the world's forests.

## Forestry

### [Public asked to help shape England's tree planting strategy](#)

BBC News describes how the public are being asked how and where they would like millions of new trees to be planted across England.

### [Climate change: Planting new forests 'can do more harm than good'](#)

Rather than benefiting the environment, large-scale tree planting may do the opposite, two new studies have found.

### [Fast-growing mini-forests spring up in Europe to aid climate](#)

The Guardian covers how tiny, dense forests are springing up around Europe as part of a public movement aimed at restoring biodiversity and fighting the climate crisis.

### [Selecting tree seeds for current and future climates in order to maintain productivity](#)

Government guidance on how the 'climate matching tool' helps you consider which tree seeds to plant in light of the changing climate.

### [Climate change: Wales lags behind on planting new trees](#)

Wales is falling behind the rest of the UK in planting trees to tackle climate change, official statistics show.

### [Tree mapping app blossoms as city-dwellers seek out nature in lockdown](#)

Record traffic for TreeTalk sparks global interest as users reconnect with the species that line their streets.

## Other news

### [Healthy Plants – Healthy People – Healthy Planet](#)

Healthy Plants, Healthy People, Healthy Planet is an ambitious vision to secure a safer, healthier and more sustainable future through the power of plant and microbial science, unveiled by the John Innes Centre and The Sainsbury Laboratory

### [Hay fever: Grass pollen DNA study could help sufferers](#)

The lives of hay fever sufferers could be changed thanks to research to identify which grass pollen causes the most common allergic reactions.

## Opinion

### [Director of science at Kew: it's time to decolonise botanical collections](#)

Written for The Conversation by Alexandre Antonelli, Professor of Biodiversity, Director of Science, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

### [Weeding out horticulture's race problem](#)

Even in the garden, there's bigotry to be found. Written for The Guardian by James Wong, a botanist, science writer and broadcaster based in London.

### [British farmers need all the help science can offer. Time to allow gene editing](#)

Writing for the Guardian, plant scientist Sir David Baulcombe argues we must adapt the way we produce food to meet future agricultural challenges.

### [Wildflower seed sowing: pros and cons](#)

An opinion piece by Kevin Walker, Head of Science for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI)

## Opportunities

### **RSB COVID-19 Survey**

The RSB will soon be closing its [short survey](#) on how the research community has been affected by the pandemic. If you haven't already, please do fill in the 5-10 minute survey to help inform how we support the research community now and in the period afterwards.

### [Royal Society of Biology Photography Competition 2020](#)

'Our changing world' is the theme of this year's Royal Society of Biology [Photography Competition](#). Life on Earth is dynamic and we invite you to capture these transformations. The competition has two age categories each with a cash prize: 18 and over (£1000) and under 18s (£500).

**Closes: 24 July 2020**

### [The Nancy Rothwell Award 2020](#)

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2020 specimen drawing competition for 7 – 18 year olds is now open for submissions. Prizes include an experience day at the Royal Veterinary College for students, and their school can also win £100. Visit the Royal Society of Biology [website](#) for more information.

**Closes: 31 July 2020**

### [Call for nominations for the Queen's Birthday 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?

## Consultations

### [A new UK research funding agency](#)

The Government has declared it intends to create a new agency to be "broadly modelled" on the US ARPA, which will provide long term funding to support visionary high-risk, high-pay off scientific, engineering, and technology ideas. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee will inquire formally into the nature and purpose of this new UK research funding agency and invites written submissions. The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. Please contact [consultation@rsb.org.uk](mailto:consultation@rsb.org.uk) for more information and if you would like to contribute.

**Closes: 31 July 2020**

### [England Tree Strategy](#)

This Defra consultation will inform a new England Tree Strategy. It will focus on expanding, protecting and improving our woodlands, and how trees and woodlands can connect people to nature, support the economy, combat climate change and recover biodiversity.

**Closes: 11 September 2020**

### [RSB Policy Resource Library now 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

### [RSB outreach activities at online Virtual Lambeth Country Show](#)

Families will now be able to take part in some RSB simple hands-on science activities as part of the 2020 Virtual [Lambeth Country Show](#). The show will take place online on 18th-19th July 2020, instead of being in London and will now be an online event for everyone. The [virtual show](#) will feature some of our hands-on science activities in addition to the usual music, workshops, competitions and more, all from the comfort of your own home.

18-19 July 2020

### [Plant Genomes in a Changing Environment \(Virtual Conference\)](#)

The meeting will bring together plant scientists working on the model plant *Arabidopsis thaliana*, on populations in their natural environment as well as crop species. This year's meeting will focus on approaches on how to improve plants for tolerance of abiotic stresses and biotic interaction. It will also discuss strategies for sustaining yield and mechanisms of domestication and adaptation in a changing environment.

12-14 October 2020

The RSB has postponed all in person events due to take place before 1st September 2020. We will aim to reschedule, or hold virtually, all cancelled events where possible, and updated information will be made available on the [RSB events pages](#). These events will hopefully run later in year or in 2021.

We are aware that a number of events previously advertised in the Plant Science Newsletter have been cancelled owing to the novel coronavirus Covid-19. We recommend also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

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

## And finally...

### [Barcelona opera house reopens with performance to 2,292 plants](#)

An article for CNN Style describes how musicians played to an unusual audience to mark Spain's lifting of lockdown -- as thousands of plants filled its seats.

### [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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