

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

June 2022

Dear readers, this is a bumper edition covering May - June. The Plant Science Newsletter team will be taking a summer break and the next issue will be with you in Autumn 2022. In the meantime, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your readership.

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

[Plant health experts come together for 2022's Summer Conference](#)

The Plant Health Summer Conference 2022, hosted online, offered a day full of keynotes, flash talks and discussions from a range of experts, covering cutting-edge research and potential approaches to improve plant health worldwide.

[RSB appears before Parliament to discuss new genetic technologies bill](#)

Representatives for the Royal Society of Biology appeared before Parliament this week to discuss the future regulation of UK genetic technologies.

[Links Day returns to Portcullis House to discuss science and international collaboration](#)

Policymakers, politicians, scientists and sector leaders came together for the first in-person Parliamentary Links Day event since the start of the pandemic.

Plant health and biosecurity

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

Defra and the Forestry Commission launch new grant pilot to help landowners tackle the pest.

[Public urged to join collective action to protect plant health](#)

Government, industry and charities sign agreement committing to raising public awareness of plant health and biosecurity.

[South American weevils released in UK waterways to tackle invasive weed](#)

The Guardian reports that non-native bugs will be introduced in an attempt to control floating pennywort, after years of research.

[Boon for blooms as UK's dry spring keeps plant diseases at bay](#)

Disease-related queries to the Royal Horticultural Society down 45%, the Guardian reports.

[State-of-the-art tree health laboratory opens to help protect UK forests](#)

The government announces the opening of the new Holt Laboratory to study known and emerging threats from tree pests and diseases.

[The Wolfson Foundation supports a revolutionary new plant and microbial sciences hub](#)

The Wolfson Foundation is supporting The Sainsbury Laboratory and the John Innes Centre's vision Healthy Plants, Healthy People, Healthy Planet (HP3), by awarding £1.1 million to the project.

Plant breeding

[Government sends gene-edited food bill to Parliament](#)

BBC News reports on the first reading in Parliament of a bill paving the way for genetically edited plants and animals to be grown and raised for food in England.

[Research Briefing: Genetic Technology \(Precision Breeding\) Bill 2022-23](#)

A House of Commons Library briefing on the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill 2022-23

[Scotland and UK governments split over gene-edited food](#)

A government minister has said Scotland should not have food products "forced" on it because of the easing of regulations around gene editing, reports BBC News.

[Gene-edited tomatoes could provide new source of vitamin D](#)

Plants rich in a precursor to the vitamin could help to address deficiencies, Nature News reports.

[First sowing of genetically edited crop under new UK regulations](#)

Field trial of genetically edited crop at Rothamsted Research is the first to take advantage of newly eased regulations.

[Scientists turn on gene without creating a GMO](#)

Scientists at Rothamsted Research have found a way to switch on a dormant gene without inserting foreign DNA and creating a GMO.

Agriculture

[Plans to reform farming subsidies to enhance the environment may be under threat](#)

Scheme to pay farmers for nature stewardship is seen by some as one of the few positive Brexit dividends, but the Guardian reports on concerns these plans may be delayed or scrapped.

[European fruit with traces of most toxic pesticides 'up 53% in nine years'](#)

Analysis of nearly 100,000 samples found residues in a third of apples and half of blackberries, the Guardian reports.

[Farm machinery exacting heavy toll on soil](#)

Scientists say massive tractors could be damaging up to a fifth of global land used to grow crops, BBC News reports.

[World's first raspberry picking robot cracks the toughest nut: soft fruit](#)

Fruit harvested by what is believed to be the world's first raspberry-picking robot in commercial operation is now on sale in British supermarkets, the Guardian reports.

[Fertiliser use could be reduced with nature-based farming, shows major study](#)

According to Rothamsted Research, thirty long-running farm trials show that crop choice and manure addition can sustain high yields at low fertiliser rates.

[Five year, £13m research programme to look at net zero and more](#)

Rothamsted Research is a major partner in a new £13 million programme that will work with UK farmers to produce low carbon, environmentally friendly food.

[New Centre for Excellence in Agriculture and Food Integrity launched](#)

The Government has stated that the Centre will develop innovative scientific-measurement solutions and digital technologies to help make supply chains more sustainable, reliable, safe, and productive.

Food security

[India bans all wheat exports over food security risk](#)

The Guardian reports on India's export ban imposed in an attempt to control prices after heatwave damages crops.

[Ukraine's wheat harvest may fall by 35%, raising fears of global shortage](#)

Satellite imagery 'illustrates spectre of rising food prices and hunger' due to invasion of world's sixth-largest wheat exporter, the Guardian reports.

[US to proceed with production of biofuels despite global food crisis](#)

Campaigners call to prioritise grain for human consumption over its use as a fuel, the Guardian reports.

[Cyber security: Global food supply chain at risk from malicious hackers](#)

Modern 'smart' farm machinery is vulnerable to malicious hackers, leaving global supply chains exposed to risk, BBC News reports.

[Future foods: What you could be eating by 2050](#)

Scientists at RBG Kew have drawn up a list of little-known plants that could be on the menu by 2050, BBC News reports.

[New report reveals next steps for the alternative protein industry](#)

UK Research and Innovation's transforming food production challenge has published its latest forward strategy report, Alternative proteins: identifying UK priorities.

[Food plan for England condemned by its own lead adviser](#)

Henry Dimbleby says government's response to his review of food system shows no vision and 'is not a strategy', the Guardian reports.

[Inaugural report on UK food standards cautions of challenges ahead](#)

The Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland have launched Our Food: An annual review of food standards across the UK.

Biodiversity and conservation

[UK takes lead to seek global action on nature at COP15 biodiversity conference](#)

The Government has stated that the UK welcomes confirmation that COP15 will go ahead this year, following a two-year delay.

[Cop15: lack of political leadership leaves crucial nature summit 'in peril', warn NGOs](#)

The Guardian Reports: Nairobi biodiversity talks end in stalemate, prompting open letter to world leaders calling for action before Montreal conference.

[Spate of orchid thefts in England puts rare species at risk](#)

Experts believe plants in Sussex and Kent were 'stolen to order', the Guardian reports.

[Plymouth seagrass project switch after low yield](#)

BBC News reports on a new approach to reintroducing seagrass after a trial recorded a low germination rate.

[Work begins to turn 99,000 hectares in England into 'nature recovery' projects](#)

The Guardian describes projects to tackle wildlife loss and improve access to nature, with funding from Defra and Natural England.

[New map of ancient trees an opportunity for conservation](#)

BBC reports on a new map that shows there could be around two million trees with exceptional environmental and cultural value previously unrecorded in England.

Forestry

[Woodland projects across England to receive funding for jobs, training and increasing tree cover](#)

The government announces funding to expand woodland cover and increase access to nature.

[New grant to boost domestic tree production opens](#)

A government announcement describes investment allowing tree and seed suppliers of all sizes to expand and modernise.

[Tree planting 'must triple to hit environment aims'](#)

BBC News reports on calls to increase tree planting in Northern Ireland by a UK forestry industry body.

[New fund opens to accelerate tree planting](#)

According to this Government press release, almost £8 million has been allocated for local authorities to train and employ new staff - building local capacity to plan and deliver new woodlands.

[UK to miss tree planting target, trade body warns](#)

According to the UK's forestry trade body, the Government has 'zero chance' of reaching its tree planting targets, reports BBC News.

[Trees are dying much faster in northern Australia — climate change is probably to blame](#)

The rate of trees dying has doubled in Queensland's old-growth forests over the past 35 years, Nature News reports.

Other news

[Cambridge University plant collection awarded Designated status](#)

A collection of dried plants at the University of Cambridge has been awarded Designated status by Arts Council England, BBC News reports.

People

[Dr Sandra Knapp, President of the Linnean Society, elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society](#)

The Linnean Society celebrates the news that its president, Dr Sandra (Sandy) Knapp, has been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society.

[Tributes paid to LEAF Chief Caroline Drummond MBE](#)

An article from Harper Adams University pays tribute to the late Caroline Drummond MBE, a champion of sustainable farming.

Opinion

[How to make Africa's 'Great Green Wall' a success](#)

A Nature editorial on one of the world's most ambitious plans to restore degraded land calls for a more meaningful way for the project to measure its achievements.

[Protecting the ocean requires better progress metrics](#)

Sixteen world leaders have now promised to protect the ocean. Researchers need to work with them to create and improve measurable indicators, says this Nature Editorial.

Opportunities

[The Nancy Rothwell Award 2022](#)

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2022 specimen drawing competition for 7 – 18 year olds is now open for submissions. Prizes include art materials for students and their school can also win £100. Visit the Royal Society of Biology [website](#) for more information.

Closes: 29 July 2022

[Biochemical Journal collection on 'Plants and climate change: The role of plants in achieving net zero'](#)

This topical collection in the Biochemical Journal (Portland Press) is guest edited by Professor Christine H. Foyer (University of Birmingham) and Professor Ilse Kranner (University of Innsbruck). The collection focuses on biochemical plasticity and adaptations of plants and plant-soil microbial interactions to climate change, featuring advances in knowledge of the underpinning plant and microbiome biochemistry and molecular mechanisms, and highlighting our ability to understand and predict impacts that arise from climate-driven shifts in plant productivity and plant-soil interactions. The collection is welcoming submissions until 30 September 2022.

Consultations

[Mental health and wellbeing plan](#)

The Department of Health and Social Care is seeking views on what we can do to improve everyone's mental health and wellbeing.

Closes: 7 July 2022

[Legislation for plants produced by certain new genomic techniques](#)

This European Commission consultation seeks to receive citizens' and stakeholders' views (both inside and outside the EU) on the functioning of the current GMO legislation for plants obtained by targeted mutagenesis and cisgenesis and their food and feed products, i.e. under the current GMO legislation, and on potential options for a new framework.

Closes: 22 July 2022

[Consultation on the principles of marine net gain](#)

This consultation seeks views from all interested parties on the proposed principles of marine net gain. Defra are particularly keen to hear from marine industries, recreational marine users, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and conservationists, academics, and coastal communities.

Closes: 30 August 2022

[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

[SEB Annual Conference Montpellier 2022](#)

**5-8 July 2022,
Montpellier, France**

SEB's Annual Conference is celebrated for creating the perfect composition of research, new discoveries and collaborative connections. Be creative and innovative by exchanging ideas and knowledge with masters of biology from all over the world.

[The 6th Black Minority and Ethnic Early Career Researcher Hybrid conference](#)

**7 July 2022
08:30 – 18:00 BST**

University of West London, Ealing, London

This event is free to attend, and both online and in-person admission is available. By attending the conference, you will have the opportunity to hear how Black and Minority Ethnic academics have navigated their journey, network, get a mentor and empower yourself through the workshops. The Royal Society of Biology is supporting this event.

[Policy Lates: Can One Health prevent pandemics](#)

19 July 2022

18:30 – 20:00 BST

Online via Zoom

The Royal Society of Biology's upcoming Policy Lates panel discussion will explore how a One Health approach can be integrated into research and policy, for prevention of and response to future pandemics. Chaired by Professor Louise Cosby FRSB, Queen's University Belfast, the panel of expert speakers will discuss the challenges and possible solutions facing One Health researchers, alongside those facing policymakers, in integrating One Health evidence and expertise into policymaking processes. Register to attend this free event at www.rsb.org.uk/PLOneHealth and direct queries to Harriet McAra at events@rsb.org.uk or on 020 3925 3445.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic most 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...

[World's biggest plant discovered off Australian coast](#)

BBC News reports that the largest known plant on Earth - a seagrass roughly three times the size of Manhattan - has been discovered off the coast of Australia.

[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](#).

RSB Plant Science Group

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