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

March 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

Top story

[COP26 Postponed](#)

The COP26 UN climate change conference set to take place in Glasgow in November has been postponed due to COVID-19.

RSB news

COVID-19 Bulletin

For further detail on COVID-19 research, news and updates, RSB has developed a periodic bulletin collating some of the bioscience behind the outbreak and response, see [our webpages](#) for further information.

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

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the RSB is working to adapt and ensure our services are still delivered to the greatest extent possible whilst also taking into account Public Health England and Government advice. Please keep checking our new [webpage](#) for frequent updates on how the RSB is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Education during COVID-19

Our education policy team is working with government, awarding bodies and policy partners to provide advice and support to teachers, parents and students. Our new [education during Covid-19 pages](#) will be regularly updated over the coming weeks and months.

Advice for students and parents during COVID-19 pandemic

Students should first take advice from their school on what to complete while at home. We have [published further advice](#) for students age 5 -19 that want to do more and parents looking for science activities to carry out at home, along with links to resources and how to access our online Gopher Science Lab training now free for parents to access for six months.

UK government and awarding bodies announcements

In the last two weeks there have been many announcements about school closures, exams and development of processes for awarding grades. We are regularly engaging with partners and policymakers and will update this [education announcements during COVID-19 pandemic](#) page to keep teachers, schools and Universities fully informed.

Plant health and biosecurity

[Top 10 garden pests and diseases revealed](#)

[Why gigantic locust swarms are challenging governments and researchers](#)

Scientists are championing biopesticides and better monitoring — but heavy rains, war and a lack of funding have been hampering efforts to control the biggest outbreak in more than a quarter of a century.

[The Animal and Plant Health Agency receives £1.4 billion budget boost for world-leading Weybridge Laboratory](#)

World-leading scientific and veterinary capability will be strengthened

[Scientists plant 'sentinel trees' to warn of devastating pests](#)

[Plant Healthy training modules now available](#)

Training modules based on the Plant Health Management Standard have now been published on the Plant Healthy website.

Agriculture

[Huge knowledge gap over health of soil](#)

[Three crop rule relaxed and £6 million fund for farmers](#)

New measures to help farmers get back on their feet and move on from floods following extreme weather and flooding across England

[£1 million to support transition to future farming system](#)

New projects funded to provide farmers with tailored on-farm advice to help them prepare for transition away from Common Agricultural Policy

[Revealed: Monsanto's secret funding for weedkiller studies](#)

The research, used to help avoid a ban, claimed 'severe impacts' on farming if glyphosate was outlawed

[The small Dutch town that wants to shape the future of your food](#)

If an innovative solution to feeding the world's growing population is to be found, it is likely to come from Wageningen, a quiet corner of Europe that is the nexus of global food science. But at what cost to the environment?

Food Security

[Coronavirus measures could cause global food shortage, UN warns](#)

Protectionist policies and shortage of workers could see problems start within weeks

[Government Chemist and IGFS \(QUB\) collaborate on coconut water authenticity](#)

The GC team and the Institute for Global Food Security at Queens University Belfast have collaborated on a review of methods and issues related to determining the authenticity of coconut water

Biodiversity and conservation

[Global rescue plan for nature 'overlooks genetic diversity'](#)

[Climate change: Carbon-reducing seagrass planted off Welsh coast](#)

[Fire-hit Llantysilio mountain could be re-seeded by helicopter](#)

[UK's first 'super' national nature reserve created in Dorset](#)

Seven landowners join forces to create largest lowland heathland nature reserve in UK

[Plant blindness and conservation implications](#)

Wildlife includes plants too.

[Orchids are woven through Chinese culture. What happens if they vanish?](#)

'Orchids grow where others cannot,' said Confucius, but as wild plants disappear, botanical institutions are helping to preserve both the flowers and the cultural significance attached to them.

[UK wildlife enjoys humans' lockdown but concerns raised over conservation](#)

Animals are getting some peace and people are reconnecting with nature, but wildlife crimes may be going unnoticed

[Ten biodiversity-related publications to look out for in 2020](#)

Forestry

[Tropical forests losing their ability to absorb carbon, study finds](#)

Amazon could turn into source of CO₂ in atmosphere by next decade, research suggests

[Trees on commercial UK plantations 'not helping climate crisis'](#)

Carbon from most harvested wood soon ends up back in atmosphere, says study

['UK's first tiny forest' in Witney helps urban environment](#)

[More funds needed for new trees in England, say campaigners](#)

Government failing on pledge to plant 30,000 hectares by 2024, says Friends of the Earth

[Forest planting: Plan for trees across 'length of Wales'](#)

[Climate change: Will planting millions of trees really save the planet?](#)

[Fewer oaks, more conifers: Britain's forests must change to meet climate targets](#)

Indigenous species do not grow fast enough, so imports will have to be planted in their millions to offset emissions, expert warns

Sustainability

[Stopping the rot: the fight to save fresh food](#)

An American firm has developed an organic coating that extends the shelf-life of fruit and vegetables. Might it save the world?

People

[Nicholas Saphir appointed as new Chair for the AHDB](#)

New Chair of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) to take over from April 2020

Opportunities

[RSB Outreach and Engagement Award 2020](#)

Are you a bioscience researcher involved in science communication? If you work in any sector of UK biosciences, apply for the Royal Society of Biology Outreach and Engagement Award 2020 and win up to £1500. Closes: 26 June 2020

[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). Submit your images by 24th 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

Consultations

[UKRI Open Access Review Consultation](#)

UKRI is reviewing its open access policies for peer-reviewed research articles and academic books that result from research supported by UKRI. UKRI will review and develop its open access policies to ensure policy is joined up across UKRI constituent bodies, encourage the development of new models of open access publishing and support the adoption of open access through collaboration and alignment with national and international partners. 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 April 2020

[UK Science, Research and Technology Capability and Influence in Global Disease Outbreaks](#)

The Science and Technology Committee will inquire formally into the place of UK research, science and technology in the national and global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and what lessons should be learned for the future. 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.

Events

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.

And finally...

[Space-grown lettuce to give astronauts a more varied diet](#)

Nasa's Veggie system will enable astronauts to safely grow nutritious fresh food

[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](#).

[The Biologist](#)

The April issue looks at the amazing work of [Michael Levin](#), the Tufts University professor who makes 'living robots' from cultured cells. We also look at how to improve [biodiversity in your garden](#) and how to write the perfect [lab handbook](#); explore the global problem of '[vaccine hesitancy](#)'; and explain what is known so far about the virus at the heart of the global coronavirus crisis, [SARS-CoV-2](#).

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