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

May 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

##### [Dame Ottoline Leyser appointed new CEO of UK Research And Innovation \(UKRI\)](#)

Business Secretary Alok Sharma has today appointed Professor Ottoline Leyser DBE FRS as the new CEO of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

*The Royal Society of Biology congratulates Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser FRSB on this appointment. RSB Chief Executive Dr Mark Downs FRSB said: “Professor Dame Leyser is a pioneering biologist and a leader in policy on research culture, ethics, diversity and inclusion and much more. We are delighted to welcome Professor Leyser to this post and look forward to continuing to work together with her and with UKRI to support UK bioscience.”*

#### RSB news

##### [Two Fellows elected to the Royal Society of Biology Council](#)

Two vacancies have been filled on the RSB Council after the April 2020 round of nominations.

##### [150 people from around the world tune in for the first ever virtual Policy Lates event](#)

More than 150 people joined a panel of experts online to discuss the challenges and potential solutions to antimicrobial resistance (AMR), as part of the RSB’s Policy Lates series.

### [RSB launches COVID-19 Impact Survey](#)

The Society has launched a survey to find out more about how the bioscience community has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. If you can, please do fill in this short survey to help inform how we support the research community now and in the future.

### [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](#) 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.

### [New Q&A series on bioscience's response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

The Biologist has launched a new COVID Q&A series exploring how life scientists around the world have sprung into action to help understand, track, and treat COVID-19.

### [Celebrate RSB membership and get three months' free throughout Membership May](#)

The RSB is launching its first ever #MembershipMay campaign across social media, as part of the 10 year anniversary celebrations.

## **Plant health and biosecurity**

### [Some landscapes show resistance to ash dieback](#)

### [Forests 'can take cover to resist alien invaders'](#)

### [River Tweed helps lead invasive species battle](#)

### [New bugs, found in Kenya, can help to control major maize pests](#)

## **Plant breeding**

### [MPs call for Ag Bill to boost precision breeding post-Brexit](#)

A cross-party group of MPs and Lords have called for the government to boost the British farming industry by ditching EU rules which block the access to precision breeding tools.

### [European Patent Office endorses EU's stance on conventionally-bred plants](#)

The longstanding legal saga on patentability for plants obtained by conventional biological processes has been seemingly put to an end after the Enlarged Body of the European Patent Office (EPO) published an opinion upholding the EU's standpoint.

## Agriculture

### [Commission upholds highly ambitious targets to transform EU food system](#)

After several delays, the EU's new flagship food policy was finally released on Wednesday (20 May), confirming the aspiration of the EU executive to transform the European way of producing, distributing and consuming food.

### [Young climate activists call for EU to radically reform farming sector](#)

Fridays for Future to publish letter urging reform of common agricultural policy ahead of European commission meeting

### [COVID-19 crisis could 'kick off digital revolution in agriculture'](#)

Digital farming is set to boom in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, given its capacity to help the EU farming sector improve its sustainability and recover from the outbreak's impact. But there are also considerable concerns raised about the pace of this change and whether farmers are adequately prepared for it.

## Food security

### [Malnutrition leading cause of death and ill health worldwide – report](#)

Coronavirus highlights weakness of food and health systems, as Global Nutrition Report finds one in nine of world's population is hungry

### [Covid-19 pandemic risks worst global food crisis in decades](#)

The covid-19 pandemic's impact on hunger around the world could be worse than when food prices spiked calamitously in 2007 and 2008, a leading food security expert warns.

### [Kenya's pastoralists face hunger and conflict as locust plague continues](#)

As herds are devastated and crops destroyed across east Africa, there are fears of violence as competition for grazing increases

### ['Many will starve': locusts devour crops and livelihoods in Pakistan](#)

Farmers faced with worst plague in recent history say they have been left to fend for themselves

### [Unintended consequences of cash crop production in Eastern Uganda demonstrate the need for holistic thinking and multi-pronged action](#)

## Biodiversity and conservation

### [EU pledges to raise €20bn a year to boost biodiversity](#)

New strategy to protect nature includes far-reaching habitat protections, and restrictions on pesticide use – but campaigners warn enforcement is key

### [EU plan for 3bn trees in 10 years to tackle biodiversity crisis](#)

Concern that new strategy, which also includes protecting primeval forests, 'lacks tools'

### ['In crisis' Natural England granted £15m additional funding](#)

One-off rise not enough to counteract harm caused by budget cuts of £180m since 2009, say critics

### [Plantwatch: vital peat needs protection from compost sales](#)

Damaged peatlands account for 5% of all annual manmade greenhouse gas emissions

### [Coronavirus: Roadside wildflowers bloom under lockdown](#)

## Forestry

### [Planting trees is no panacea for climate change](#)

Campaigns to plant 1 trillion trees must be undertaken with care and a commitment to long-term management

### [We found 2°C of warming will push most tropical rainforests above their safe 'heat threshold'](#)

### [How urban planners' preference for male trees has made your hay fever worse](#)

Horticulturists urge better sex mix of city trees to mitigate rising asthma and CO2 pollution levels

## Business and industry

### [Garden centres reopen in England](#)

All garden centres reopening should put in place social distancing and safety measures.

### [UK garden centres prepare for sales surge to end lockdown disaster](#)

Welsh plan to reopen stores offers hope for UK-wide industry closed in prime sales season

### [Gardens bloom under lockdown with record demand for seeds](#)

Seed firms report huge rise in sales with people worldwide turning to gardening as hobby

### [Grenfell fears prevent timber building boom](#)

## Sustainability

### [Commission re-opens controversial advanced biofuel list in transport](#)

The European Commission has launched a stakeholder consultation to expand the list of the so-called advanced or second-generation biofuels of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II), EURACTIV.com has learned.

## Other news

### [Antarctic algal blooms: 'Green snow' mapped from space](#)

### [Cyber-spinach turns sunlight into sugar](#)

Combination of biological membrane and artificial chemistry could power future synthetic organisms.

### ['Not just weeds': how rebel botanists are using graffiti to name forgotten flora](#)

Pavement chalking to draw attention to wild flowers and plants in urban areas has gone viral across Europe – but UK chalkers could face legal action

### [Chelsea flower show opens online amid lockdown gardening boom](#)

Event comes as experts say green spaces are important for health and mental wellbeing

### [National Botanic Gardens of Wales is blooming at 20](#)

### [Hardly an overnight success: 100 years to discover plant species](#)

## People

### [Marian Spain appointed new Natural England chief executive](#)

Marian Spain has been appointed as the new chief executive of Natural England, taking the post on a permanent basis.

## Opinion

### [Include the true value of nature when rebuilding economies after coronavirus](#)

The pandemic is devastating economies. As countries look to revive growth, recovery must go with — not against — the grain of nature.

### [“Conservation is no longer enough.” One view of why the UK needs to double its space for nature](#)

The new head of the Wildlife Trusts thinks the country needs an abundance of nature in its plan to halt climate change and encourage a biodiversity boom. Here's how he sees it happening.

## Opportunities

### [How you can help with COVID-19](#)

An RSB webpage collating routes through which individuals and businesses can offer their help to support the national effort to respond to the spread of COVID-19.

### [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).

**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**

# 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: 30 June 2020**

## [The science of COVID-19](#)

The Science and Technology Committee (Lords) is investigating the scientific and technological aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the nature of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, its transmission and spread, the development of vaccines and treatments, and how digital technologies can be used for tracking and modelling. The inquiry aims to help Government and society learn from the pandemic and better prepare for future epidemics.

**Closes: 30 June 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. If you plan to submit evidence, please let us know by emailing [consultation@rsb.org.uk](mailto:consultation@rsb.org.uk).

**Closes: 31 July 2020**

## [Plastic Packaging Tax: policy design](#)

This consultation seeks views on areas of the Plastic Packaging Tax which have been further refined as we move closer to the implementation date of April 2022.

**Closes: 20 August 2020**

## [River basin planning: Challenges and Choices](#)

The Environment Agency is holding a consultation to gather views on the challenges our waters face and the choices we all need to make to help tackle those challenges.

**Closes: 24 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

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...

[Nature: Bumblebees' 'clever trick' fools plants into flowering](#)

[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](#).

**UK Plant Sciences Federation**  
**Royal Society of Biology**  
Science Policy Team  
1 Naoroji Street  
London  
WC1X 0GB  
[policy@rsb.org.uk](mailto:policy@rsb.org.uk)

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