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

September 2020

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

Top story

[RSB and partner organisations launch Plant Health Summit](#)

Marking the International Year of Plant Health, early career professionals involved in any aspect of plant health are encouraged to apply to participate in a national conversation.

Plant health and biosecurity

[Citizen science taps into public's love of trees](#)

BBC News explores the successes and challenges of the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) tree health survey.

[Outdoor use of metaldehyde to be banned to protect wildlife](#)

Government announces ban of pesticide used to control slugs.

[Scientists launch key principles to preserve Scots plant health](#)

Scotland's Plant Health Centre has launched a set of five Key Principles to raise awareness of plant health and protect Scotland's plant resources.

Agriculture

[Green plans diluted as government protects farmers](#)

A plan to use all of England's farm grants to protect the environment is being diluted, the BBC has learned.

[Farming Minister visits innovative Yorkshire agri-environment schemes](#)

Victoria Prentis visited Richmond in Yorkshire to see first-hand how local environmental land management projects are delivering for nature.

[Toxic pesticides banned for EU use exported from UK](#)

An investigation by Greenpeace finds that trade loopholes allow banned pesticides to be sent to developing countries as well as the US, Japan and Australia.

Biodiversity and conservation

[40% of world's plant species at risk of extinction](#)

Race against time to save plants and fungi that underpin life on Earth, global data shows

[Boris Johnson promises to protect 30% of UK's land by 2030](#)

An extra 400,000 hectares of English countryside will be protected to support the recovery of nature under plans to be announced by Boris Johnson.

['Apocalyptic' fires are ravaging the world's largest tropical wetland](#)

Infernos in South America's Pantanal region have burnt twice the area of California's fires this year. Researchers fear the rare ecosystem will never recover.

[Humans exploiting and destroying nature on unprecedented scale – report](#)

Animal populations have plunged an average of 68% since 1970, as humanity pushes the planet's life support systems to the edge.

['Lost decade for nature' as UK fails on 17 of 20 UN biodiversity targets](#)

UK government said it failed on two-thirds of targets, but RSPB analysis is bleaker – and suggests UK is moving backwards in some areas.

[World fails to meet a single target to stop destruction of nature – UN report](#)

'Humanity at a crossroads' after a decade in which all of the 2010 Aichi goals to protect wildlife and ecosystems have been missed

[Coronavirus pandemic fuelling plant poaching in Philippines](#)

Gardening craze has led to endangered species being dug up from mountains and forests.

[Africa's Great Green Wall just 4% complete halfway through schedule](#)

Report calls for more support if plan to plant 100m hectares of vegetation is to be realised

Forestry

[Tree planting project cuts giant sign into bracken](#)

A group of volunteers has taken the plan to plant one million native trees in mid Wales a step forward by clearing bracken on the Black Mountains.

[Support UK farmers to meet climate targets, ministers told](#)

Green campaigners urge government to support and clarify plans for tree-planting subsidy system

[Maple trees offer most protection from harmful UV](#)

A species of maple tree offers the best protection from damaging ultraviolet rays of sunlight, a study has suggested.

[Leaving forests to regrow naturally 'could be better option than replanting'](#)

Study says potential for natural regrowth to absorb carbon has been substantially underestimated

[Shorter lifespan of faster-growing trees will add to climate crisis, study finds](#)

Rise in carbon capture as global warming speeds growth of forests would be negated by earlier deaths, say scientists.

[Microscopy illuminates charcoal's sketchy origins](#)

A large volume of charcoal sold in Europe comes from tropical forests and is often incorrectly labelled, raising questions about whether it was logged illegally.

Other news

[Microplastic pollution devastating soil species, study finds](#)

Researchers in China saw big reductions in organisms that play a crucial role in recycling carbon and nitrogen.

[Plants might be able to tell us about the location of dead bodies, helping families find missing people](#)

The notion of plants talking to us about dead people sounds like a bad horror movie. But that's the theme of a recent scientific paper, described in The Conversation.

People

[Professor Dame Georgina Mace – 1953-2020](#)

NERC pays tribute to Professor Dame Georgina Mace.

[Getting to the Root: A Conversation with Prof. Malcolm Bennett, FRS](#)

On his election to the Royal Society, Plantae interviews Professor Malcolm Bennett.

Opinion

[Biodiversity, Forestry and Wood: Reflecting on the Evidence](#)

Now, more than ever, it is critically important that appropriate species selection and evidence-based decisions inform woodland expansion and management, Dr Alan Jones and Tom Ovenden write for the British Ecological Society.

[The fourth agricultural revolution is coming – but who will really benefit?](#)

Technological revolution must work for everyone, researchers David Rose and Charlotte-Anne Chivers argue, warning that potential negative consequences must be considered alongside benefits to create society-wide vision for future of farming.

[Time to get serious about food waste in fight against global heating](#)

It is responsible for 8% of emissions, yet food waste is not mentioned in any country's Paris climate action plan, Dave Lewis, outgoing CEO of Tesco writes in the Guardian

[Britain needs to grow more trees – are sheep farms the answer?](#)

Connie O'Neill and Colin Osborne explore the potential for planting trees on some of the UK's sheep farms in The Conversation

Opportunities

RSB outreach activities at online science festivals

Families will now be able to take part in some RSB simple hands-on science activities after watching short films of our activities as part of the [GSF 2020: Science on the Sofa](#), online from 9th September - 9th November 2020. The online science festival has a digital programme of hands-on activities, talks, shows and more, to entertain and inspire. At [Sidmouth Science Festival](#), online 9th - 18th October 2020. The online science festival with a digital programme of [RSB's hands-on activities at home](#), in addition to talks, shows and more.

Our hands-on science videos will also be available at [Swansea Science Festival](#) online over the weekend of 24th - 25th October 2020. The online science festival has a digital programme of presentations, talks, interactive workshops and demonstrations, there will be something for everybody to enjoy.

On 21st - 22nd November 2020 RSB will host its own inaugural Online Science Festival with a digital programme of hands-on activities and more. The latest festival updates and details will be posted [online](#) soon.

The Irene Manton Prize

£1000 and a piece of fine art for the best doctoral thesis in botany (algae, fungi or plants). Awarded for the best thesis in botany examined for a doctorate of philosophy, this prize is open to candidates whose research has been carried out whilst registered at any UK institution. Theses on the full range of plant sciences are eligible. Nominations are received from the Head of Department, or the supervisor of the candidate. Nominations should be submitted by 30 November.

Consultations

[Due diligence on forest risk commodities](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is launching this consultation to seek your view on whether the UK Government should introduce a new law designed to prevent forests and other important natural areas from being converted illegally into agricultural land.

Closes: 5 October 2020

[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

Plant Microbe Interactions (links for each date below)

This two-part webinar series will take a comprehensive view of the multi-disciplinary field of plant-microbe interactions, to demonstrate how it offers solutions to fundamental questions in biology and provides potential applications in agriculture, biotechnology, and conservation. It will be of interest to microbiologists and plant-scientists addressing questions relating to the plant microbiome, co-evolution, or the improvement of plant traits through microbial-mediated means, in either an academic or industrial setting.

Online, [7 October](#) and [14 October](#) 2020

[State of the World's Plants and Fungi Virtual Symposium](#)

In conjunction with the publication of a ground-breaking report, scientists, policymakers, businesses, NGOs, the public and media will come together online for the first international State of the World's symposium combining both plants and fungi.

Online, 13–15 October 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all in person RSB events due to take place in 2020 have been cancelled, postponed or moved to an online format. Updated information will be made available on the [RSB events pages](#). Postponed events will hopefully run in late 2021. We recommend also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

And finally...

[Indoor plant with four leaves sells for \\$8,000 in New Zealand](#)

A buyer was willing to part with huge sum to secure the variegated minima amid a houseplant boom fuelled by the pandemic.

[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

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1 Naoroji Street, London WC1X 0GB