

Science Policy Newsletter – a weekly round-up of policy headlines and stories

9 July 2021

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

Top stories

[Bold new life sciences vision sets path for UK to build on pandemic response and deliver life-changing innovations to patients](#)

Government press release announcing the UK Life Sciences Vision which sets 10-year strategy for sector to solve some of the biggest healthcare problems of our generation, including cancer and dementia.

[Expert reaction to the government's new UK Life Sciences Vision](#)

Reactions collated by the Science Media Centre (SMC), including from Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive, Royal Society of Biology (RSB).

Health and biomedicine

[Whole genome sequencing of all UK newborns 'would have public support'](#)

A consultation shows positivity towards a screening programme to spot those at heightened risk of certain health conditions, reports the Guardian.

[Landmark CRISPR trial shows promise against deadly disease](#)

Administering gene-editing treatment directly into the body could be a safe and effective way to treat a rare, life-threatening condition, says Nature News.

[£24 million investment into adolescent mental health](#)

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has announced a major £24 million investment into improving the mental health and wellbeing of adolescents in the UK.

[New services launched to help people achieve a healthier weight and improve wellbeing](#)

Government press release describing how the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme – backed by £12 million of Government funding – will offer free online support via GP and primary care teams referrals for adults living with obesity, who also have a diagnosis of either diabetes, high blood pressure or both.

[Vaccine made of live malaria parasites shows early success](#)

The strategy uses a combination of parasites and medicines to generate immunity while avoiding symptoms, reports Nature News.

Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

[What benefits do trees offer to livestock systems?](#)

Farmers Weekly explores the benefit that trees offer animals, according to Lindsay Whistance, senior livestock researcher, Organic Research Centre.

[Government publishes update to Agricultural Transition Plan](#)

Government press release describing how farmers will be able to earn up to £70 per hectare for actions to improve the health of their soil.

[Bugs to the rescue: using insects as animal feed could cut deforestation – report](#)

A study by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has shown that adopting insect protein in pig and poultry feed could reduce UK soya imports by a fifth by 2050, says the Guardian.

Forestry

[Climate change: Planting extra trees will boost rainfall across Europe](#)

A new study has found that converting agricultural land to forest could boost summer rains by 7.6% on average, reports BBC News.

[Forestry Commission acts on bark beetle tree pest](#)

The Government has stated that two new breeding populations of the tree pest eight-toothed spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) have been discovered in Kent.

Environment and ecology

[Is it time to begin rewilding the seas?](#)

From giant clams to zebra shark, marine biologists want to replace lost and vanishing species at sea but face unique obstacles – not least rampant overfishing, reports the Guardian.

[High-resolution 3D scanning will help scientists understand insect evolution](#)

Understanding the extraordinary diversity and differences between insects can help us figure out how these species evolved and where, exactly, they fit into a rapidly changing environment, says the Natural History Museum.

[Red squirrels and pine martens could lose protection in UK review, say experts](#)

Legal protections for wildlife and plants in the UK are set for a review that could result in some important species losing their entitlement to special status, ecology experts have told the Guardian.

Water and air

[New water saving measures to safeguard supplies](#)

The Government has stated that the proposals – announced in response to a public consultation on personal water usage – will balance the growing demand on national supplies with the ambitions in the 25 Year Environment Plan to achieve clean and plentiful water.

[Marine algae turned Scotland's water bright blue](#)

Marine Scotland researchers at Aberdeen University photographed the tiny coccolithophore. The spherical cells are covered in chalk plates that reflect the sunlight just below the surface of the water, reports BBC News.

Climate and energy

[Opinion: Four ways to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises simultaneously](#)

Writing for The Conversation, researchers explain why a landmark report by the world's most senior climate and biodiversity scientists argue that the world will have to tackle the climate crisis and the species extinction crisis simultaneously, or not at all.

[End to coal power brought forward to October 2024](#)

The Government has stated the deadline to phase out coal from Great Britain's energy system has been brought forward by a whole year, highlighting the UK's leadership to go further in driving down emissions and tackling climate change.

[Horizon Europe seeks high impact projects to enable the green transition](#)

The UK will associate to Horizon Europe so UK organisations can apply for funding on the same terms as organisations from Member States. The UK will contribute £2 billion per year to the overall Horizon Europe budget, according to a blog by Innovate UK.

Waste

[Turkey's plastics ban: Where does the UK send its waste now?](#)

Last year, the UK sent more plastic packaging waste to Turkey than to any other country: more than 200,000 tonnes, or 30% of all such exports, according to the Environment Agency's national waste packaging database. This means 30 shipping containers a day full of plastic waste now need a new home, reports BBC News.

[Could plastic-eating microbes take a bite out of the recycling problem?](#)

Researchers across the globe are looking for plastic-munching microbes in searing hot springs in Yellowstone National Park, remote island beaches in the Pacific Ocean, and a plastic recycling factory in Japan, among other places, according to AAAS Science.

[Opinion: The UK wastes millions of tonnes of food every year: here's how we can change that](#)

Writing for The Conversation, researchers explain how food waste is a huge problem for the environment, and how making and getting rid of excess food accounts for around 8-10% of greenhouse gas emissions.

Animal research

[Study suggests bacteria in cow's stomach can break down plastic](#)

Scientists find micro-organisms from the bovine stomach have the ability to degrade polyesters in a lab setting, says the Guardian.

[Research shows genes could offer resistance to Campylobacter](#)

Poultry World explores the research that has identified genes in chickens that could offer resistance to harmful bacterial commonly found in poultry, and could inform ways to limit the risk of associated food poisoning in people.

Government and Parliament

[Graduate route for best and brightest launches](#)

This Government news story covers how a new immigration route has opened, allowing international graduates to kick-start their careers in the UK after they have finished their studies at a UK university.

Exiting the EU

[Brexit: EU postpones ban on British meat sales in NI](#)

The European Union (EU) has agreed to a three-month delay to a ban on some meat products from Great Britain being sold in Northern Ireland, says BBC News.

Research funding and higher education policy

[UKRI to unlock research impact with new funding model](#)

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has announced a new revitalised funding model for universities and institutions to help increase the impact of their research.

[Treat postgraduate researchers as staff, union tells universities](#)

Times Higher Education covers a new manifesto setting out why postgraduate researchers studying for a doctorate should be given the same rights as university staff in the UK.

[Opinion: Freedom won't fix the problems that Covid exacerbated](#)

Writing for Wonkhe, Meg Price, President at Worcester SU, reports back from a Student Futures Commission evidence session where it looked like the lifting of restrictions was the least of what will be needed to bring students back.

Schools education policy

[Opinion: Why early-years education must be prioritised in pandemic recovery plans](#)

Writing for The Conversation, researchers at the University of Leeds, talk about the Government's COVID recovery plan for schools in England, including its £153 million for professional development for early-years practitioners, and if it will be enough?

[Proposals to drive up training standards for teachers](#)

The Government has launched a consultation setting out proposed changes to improve training to develop world class teachers.

Diversity and inclusion

[Let's talk about the elephant in the room: invisible disabilities](#)

Andreea Vlad, NHS Business Service Authority, covers an experiment conducted to see how people perceive invisible disabilities in this Accessibility in Government blog for the Civil Service.

Digital technologies

[The codes helping visually-impaired people shop](#)

A new, colourful kind of barcode technology, developed by a Spanish firm, is being adopted for the first time in food packaging in the UK. It aims to help blind and partially-sighted people identify products in shops, and access health and safety information about food, according to BBC News.

[Using applications to help us collect data on wild animals](#)

In this blog, Graham Smith, Lead Scientist for Wildlife, describes how the Animal and Plant Health Agency has been involved in developing new technology to help experts and the general public monitor mammal populations across Europe, and how you could get involved to build the database of wildlife records.

International news

[Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) Situation Dashboard](#)

The World Health Organisation summarises the reported number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths.

Opinion: Is Australia really doing enough for the Great Barrier Reef? Why criticisms of UNESCO's 'in danger' recommendation don't stack up

The World Heritage Centre of UNESCO revealed its draft decision to list the Great Barrier Reef as 'in danger' - a decision that appeared to shock the Australian government. This opinion piece, written for The Conversation, looks at Australia's reaction so far.

Record-breaking 'pressure-cooker' heatwave hits Canada, US northwest

A 'pressure-cooker' heatwave that's broken temperature records twice in 48 hours in the US northwest and western Canada is being mirrored across large parts of the northern hemisphere, reports UN News.

Critically endangered antelope saiga makes comeback

The population of a rare type of antelope has more than doubled since 2019, in a remarkable turn around in fortunes, says BBC News.

People

Opinion: 'Our society desperately needs objective, truth-based knowledge'

Professor Leptin, a developmental biologist and immunologist, and currently director of the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), has been appointed president of the EU's frontier research funding body, the European Research Council (ERC). Leptin will take up her role on 1st October 2021, following the start of Europe's new research and innovation funding programme, Horizon Europe. In a written interview for Horizon, she talks about her vision for frontier research and what she intends to bring to the new job.

RSPB's Emily Williamson: The woman who saved a million birds

BBC News covers how Emily Williamson started the Society for the Protection of Birds, later known as the RSPB, after an all-male organisation ignored her letters.

Opportunities

RSB Senior Publications Officer

The Senior Publications Officer will support the Society's publication portfolio including the [Journal of Biological Education](#), [Emerging Topics in Life Sciences](#) and [Oxford Biology Primers](#), along with its magazine [The Biologist](#). This new post will be dedicated to ensuring RSB delivery in support of its publication contracts and objectives, able to build successfully on current strengths and support the work of the publication boards and editors. The role requires a range of experience and interest across editorial, publisher liaison, committee support, advertising and internal reporting. This is a part-time post (0.4 FTE) available as flexible hours or as a contract/consultancy. To apply visit <https://my.rsb.org.uk/services.php?section=jobs>

Closes: 13 July 2021

Apprentice of the Year Award 2021

The Royal Society of Biology's Apprentice of the Year Award is open for entries. The Award, now in its 2nd year, has been set up to celebrate apprentices working in the bioscience sector and recognise their contribution to their teams and the wider bioscience community. Further details about the award including how to apply, key dates and application forms can be found on the RSB [website](#).

Closes: 16 July 2021

RSB ambassadors - open for applications

Are you an enthusiastic, active and engaged member of the RSB who would like to act as a key contact for the RSB at your workplace, while encouraging others to get involved? [Apply now](#) to become an [RSB ambassador](#). N.B. At this stage, we are only accepting applications from UK-based members at the AMRSB, MRSB and FRSB grade.

Closes: 31 July 2021

Flying Ant Survey

Each year in the UK, we witness flying ant day. Over several days each summer, ants, like the black garden ant (*Lasius niger*), take to the air to mate and disperse. The [BioDAR](#) project is using this event to see if this massive increase in aerial insect activity is detectable by their weather radars. If you have seen flying ants this year, please report your sightings using this quick and simple web form. The form can be found here: <https://forms.gle/P3Tof3os6idBCYMA6> and takes about a minute to fill in.

Consultations

Veterinary Vaccinology Landscape Survey

UKRI-BBSRC, on behalf of the veterinary vaccinology research funders and programme owners, are consulting the research and innovation community on the current knowledge, research gaps and barriers within the veterinary vaccinology field. In addition to identifying future research and innovation priorities to inform a five-year Veterinary Vaccinology Strategy 2021-2026.

Closes: 19 July 2021

Use of AI in breast cancer screening: rapid review and evidence map

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) is inviting comments on the draft report on the use of artificial intelligence for image analysis in the NHS Breast Screening Programme.

Closes: 13 August 2021

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

Proof for Life - Where next for the evidence linking nature and health?

15 July 2021

12:30 – 14:00 BST

Planning to deliver and record human health and environmental health outcomes is complex and needs collaborative working across different disciplines and priorities. This is a multidisciplinary challenge and bringing together different sectors and stakeholders is a key part of it. At this online discussion from the Natural Capital Initiative, our expert panellists will deliver short talks, followed by a chaired panel discussion with questions from the audience.

Re-imagining the first-year student experience

16 July 2021

10:00 – 16:00 BST

The University of Warwick School of Life Sciences will host a [Heads of University Biosciences](#) sponsored meeting to develop ideas and strategies to inform our understanding of what makes for the best possible undergraduate bioscience first year.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all 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...

Why are some fish warm-blooded? New study suggests it gives predatory sharks and fish a crucial speed advantage

The British Ecological Society covers how a new paper published in Functional Ecology explores why some fish have warm blood, and what advantages this equips them with.

Royal Society of Biology

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