

February 2024

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News

RSB news

[Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships](#)

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) invites applications from researchers wishing to host undergraduate studentships in plant health over the summer of 2024. Twelve awards are available. Funding for the programme is provided by [Defra](#), [BSPP](#), [AAB](#), [SCI Horticulture Group](#) and [The Colegrave Seabrook Foundation](#) (in partnership with the the Crispa (Richard Cahn) Charitable Trust). Full details are available at: www.rsb.org.uk/plant-studentships
Closes: 4 March 2024

[The voice of the biosciences: RSB's science policy impact in 2023](#)

The annual summary review of the impact of the science policy activities of the Royal Society of Biology. Find out more about the impact of our work on our [policy impact webpages](#).

[RSB sends letter to FSA regarding new framework in England for the regulation of precision bred organisms used for food and animal feed](#)

The Royal Society of Biology recently submitted a [letter](#) to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) regarding the [proposals](#) for a new framework in England for the regulation of precision bred organisms used for food and animal feed. The letter calls for proportionate and adaptive regulations based on clear scientific criteria. The letter also recommends that a multi-tier regulatory system does not lead to major time and cost expenses for breeders, and emphasises the importance of dialogue with consumers and relevant stakeholders as part of the process in building trust with these groups.

[RSB biosecurity concerns raised in House of Lords debate](#)

The Society was pleased to hear its recommendations as part of its upcoming biosecurity campaign raised as part of a House of Lords debate on the 18th January, regarding infectious disease threats to UK biosecurity, including human, animal and plant health.

2023 Science Teaching Survey unveils key challenges in UK science education

In a collaborative effort with the Institute of Physics (IOP) and the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC), the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) conducted the 2023 Science Teaching Survey, delving into the landscape of science education in the UK.

Plant health and biosecurity

Government takes major step in improving biosecurity and preventing diseases

According to this Government press release, new border controls will come into effect for animals, plants and plant products imported to Great Britain from the EU. Products which present a 'medium risk' to biosecurity and health will now require export health certificates and phytosanitary certificates, where currently they enter the UK without them.

Companion plants reduce cabbage stem flea beetle damage on oilseed rape

Rothamsted Research reports on a study showing that the presence of cereal volunteers in oilseed rape (OSR) fields and direct drilling could lead to a marked reduction in damage caused by cabbage stem flea beetle (CSFB).

New free database of weeds lets scientists peer into the past, and future, of global agriculture

The Global Plant Council reports on the publishing of a new database of weeds, which can help scientists understand how traditional agricultural systems were managed throughout history and how global trends like the climate crisis could affect the resilience of our modern day food systems.

Climate change: Fungal disease endangers wheat production

The Global Plant Council highlights a study showing that further spread of the fungal disease wheat blast could reduce global wheat production by 13% until 2050.

Plant breeding

New £100m fund will unlock the potential of engineering biology

Funding for six new UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Engineering Biology Mission Hubs and 22 Mission Award projects has been announced.

Improved access to plant genetic resources to drive crop innovation

The genetic resources behind some of the most important plant traits driving agricultural crop production are being made easier to access by researchers with the development of open-source genomic tools, reports NIAB.

Domesticating plants impacts their microbiome

New research led by the University of Oxford indicates that human domestication of crops can alter the communities of microorganisms that are associated with plants.

From crop to cup – a new genetic map could make your morning coffee more climate resilient

Writing for the Conversation, Denis J Murphy, Emeritus Professor of Biotechnology at the University of South Wales, discusses how a new genetic map of the arabica coffee plant, *coffea arabica*, could help breeders develop more climate-proof brews.

Agriculture

Thousands of applications made for Sustainable Farming Incentive

According to this Government press release, more than 10,000 farmers across England have now applied for the improved Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), which pays farmers for taking actions that support food production, farm productivity and resilience, whilst protecting and enhancing the environment.

Agricultural fertilisers contribute substantially to microplastic concentrations in UK soils

Rothamsted Research reports on a study showing that application of organic and inorganic fertilisers are significant contributors to microplastic concentrations in agricultural soils increasing over time.

Opinion: Pesticides urgently need reform – the UK’s overdue action plan must make these drastic changes

Writing for the Conversation, Dave Goulson, Professor of Biology (Evolution, Behaviour and Environment) at the University of Sussex, discusses current concerns regarding pesticide legislation and regulation in the UK.

Gloucestershire vertical farm is one of UK's 'most advanced'

An indoor farm claiming to be one of the most technically advanced in the UK has opened in Gloucestershire, reports BBC News.

Biodiversity and conservation

New housing developments to deliver nature boost in landmark move

According to this Government press release, all major housing developments are now required to deliver at least a 10% benefit for nature with England becoming the first country in the world to make Biodiversity Net Gain a legal requirement.

RHS calls on public to spot bumblebees on blooms

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) is launching a nationwide initiative to monitor ‘Bumbles on Blooms’, in a bid to identify which plants are most visited by bumblebees in spring and help these vital pollinators to thrive.

Forestry

New Forest for the Nation competition launched

A new major multi-million-pound grant funding competition for the new Forest of the Nation has been launched, reports this Government press release.

Amazon rainforest could reach ‘tipping point’ by 2050, scientists warn

The Guardian highlights a study showing that up to half of the Amazon rainforest could hit a tipping point by 2050 as a result of water stress, land clearance and climate disruption.

Ill-judged tree planting in Africa threatens ecosystems, scientists warn

The Guardian highlights research suggesting misguided tree-planting projects are threatening crucial ecosystems across Africa.

[Rewilding offers a carbon capture alternative to tree plantations with a wealth of biodiversity benefits](#)

This article from the University of Oxford discusses the role rewilded areas can play in both carbon capture and improving biodiversity.

Sustainability

[Major investment transforms land use to boost UK's net zero drive](#)

UKRI reports on the development of a new hub called Land Use for Net Zero (LUNZ), which aims to provide guidance to develop policies that will drive the UK land transformation required to achieve its net zero ambitions.

Opportunities

[Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships](#)

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[Signs of Spring Survey](#)

The Royal Society of Biology is working in partnership with the Field Studies Council to invite everyone to look out for ten [Signs of Spring](#) across the UK - bluebells, bumblebees, butterflies, daffodils, damselflies and dragonflies, frog spawn, hazel catkins, ladybirds, snowdrops and the first cut of the lawn and to [add your sightings to our survey](#).

[RSB Technical Skills courses 2024](#)

Learn new skills and refine your laboratory techniques with the Royal Society of Biology's laboratory-based courses. Currently available to book are the brand new [ELISA](#) and [Polymerase Chain Reaction](#) courses at Keele University, and [Aseptic Techniques](#) and [Cell Culture: The Basics](#) at the University of York. Visit [our training events webpage](#) for full details and to book your place on these courses.

[British Ecological Society Pedagogical Grants](#)

The BES has launched [a new grants portfolio](#), including [pedagogical grants](#). Their pedagogical grants aim to facilitate research that improves learners' experiences while promoting excellence in teaching within ecology. The deadline to apply is **8th March**. A second round of funding will open on 5th July.

Plant Health Professional Register

Those working in plant health are encouraged to apply for the RSB's **Plant Health Professionals Register**, which was created in partnership with Defra to recognise individuals with skills and experience that align with the current **Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain**. You are also invited to join our **Plant Health Professionals LinkedIn network** where you can explore and share job opportunities, events and more.

Consultations

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

Bioscience Careers Day 2024

5 March 2024 - 7 March 2024

12:00 – 14:05 each day

Online (Zoom)

Find out about the variety of careers open to bioscience students at this year's online Royal Society of Biology **Bioscience Careers Day (BCD)**. This year the BCD will take place over three days from Tuesday 5th March to Thursday 7th March. Each day will comprise of expert talks, Q&A's and skills workshops designed to enhance your knowledge of the variety of careers available to bioscience graduates. There will also be opportunities to chat with bioscience professionals and other students from across the UK.

Plant Health Series: Australia's plant health and biosecurity system

20 March 2024

9:30 - 10:30

Online (Zoom)

At this event, as part of the RSB Plant Health Series, Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith, Australia's chief plant health protection officer, will be delivering this keynote address, discussing points related to Australia's plant health and biosecurity system. This will be followed by an opportunity for an audience Q&A and discussion.

Building a new woodland

27 April 2024

10:00 - 12:30

Low Burnhall Wood, South Rd, Durham DH1 3TX

This event, by the RSB Northern Branch, will involve a guided walk around Low Burnhall Wood, Durham, to find out about the Woodland Trust's work to establish a new woodland.

And finally...

Kew's top 10 new species of 2023

Kew's scientists and international partners share their 10 favourite new species named to science in 2023.



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