

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

### Top stories

#### [Pesticide emergency authorisation denied for 2025 to protect bees](#)

The Government has confirmed that an emergency application for the use of a neonicotinoid pesticide on sugar beet in England will not be granted.

### RSB news

#### [RSB launches new brand and strategy for 2025-2030](#)

The RSB has recently announced the launch of its new five-year strategy, from 2025-2030, and the unveiling of our new brand.

#### [Combat the winter blues by spotting the first Signs of Spring](#)

After collaborating with Field Studies Council last year for the first time on the Signs of Spring citizen science project, the Royal Society of Biology is pleased to announce its continuation of the project this year. The aim of the survey is to track 10 key indicator species with the emergence of spring across the UK, allowing members of the public – from avid nature lovers to dog walkers venturing to their local park – to chart the arrival of the new season.

#### [New grants of up to £1,000 available to RSB members worldwide](#)

The Royal Society of Biology has announced the availability of grants of up to £1,000 for its members around the world, through the new Regional Events Grant.

#### [RSB briefing on biocides cited in House of Lords debate](#)

The Viscount Stansgate FRSB addressed the House of Lords during a recent debate on the Consumer Products (Control of Biocides) Bill, with a briefing provided by the Royal Society of Biology.

## **Plant health and biosecurity**

### **Weevil used to control floating pennywort in the Cam Washes**

An innovative biocontrol project has been launched aiming to reduce the spread of floating pennywort in the Cam Washes, SSSI, according to this Government press release.

### **Pathogen-host database refocuses on genes**

A new version of the influential Pathogen–Host Interactions Database (PHI-base) has been developed and aims to provide more detail on how genes affect the outcome of interactions between pathogens and their hosts, reports Rothamsted Research.

### **New Smart Agriculture Technology for Monitoring Plants**

The Global Plant Council highlights the development of a leaf-mounted sensor which could help improve crop yields and resource management in order to meet ever-growing demands.

### **“Killer” fungal gene could provide key to wheat disease control**

Rothamsted Research reports on work done to identify a critical gene that leads to the synthesis of a protein known as *Knr4*, which could be the key to what makes some fungal pathogens so virulent.

## **Plant breeding**

### **Government committed to unlocking precision breeding technology**

The UK Government has committed to a timeline for introducing legislation that will empower researchers, companies, farmers, and consumers to benefit from precision breeding techniques, reports the Earlham Institute.

### **Weed resistant to key herbicide found in UK**

A weed that is resistant to Glyphosate has been found in the UK for the first time, reports BBC News.

### **What makes some plant species 'ripe' for domestication**

This Science Daily article highlights research proposing that some wild plant species possess certain attributes which make them more suitable for human cultivation than others.

## **Agriculture**

### **Government announces reforms to boost profits for farmers with a cast iron commitment to food production**

Speaking to farmers and landowners at the Oxford Farming Conference, the Environment Secretary set out the Government’s long-term vision to make farming more profitable and put more money back in the pockets of British farmers.

### **Fig and almond trees thriving in UK thanks to fewer frosts, RHS says**

The Guardian reports that, according to the Royal Horticultural Society, fig and almond trees are thriving in Britain as a result of fewer frosts.

### **New sequenced genome sheds light on weed resistance**

The Earlham Institute reports that it has sequenced two new *Alopecurus* genomes, providing important additions to the growing body of community resources for weed genomics.

## **Food security**

### **UK supply chains get safeguarding boost**

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has awarded £13 million across several research projects to make UK supply chains more resilient.

### **UK and Ukraine agree cutting-edge scheme to protect food security**

According to this Government press release, the UK will launch a Grain Verification Scheme to track grain stolen from occupied areas of Ukraine, as part of its landmark 100-year partnership with the country.

### **Urgent action needed to ensure UK food security, report warns**

The Guardian highlights a report from the National Preparedness Commission (NPC), which argues that urgent action is needed to secure the UK's food supply in the face of climate change-induced extreme weather, the imposition of tariffs and global insecurity.

## **Biodiversity and conservation**

### **Increasing fertiliser use drastically reduces numbers of flowers and insects on grassland**

A new study using data from Rothamsted Research in partnership with the University of Sussex has shown that increasing application of fertilisers such as nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus, can reduce flower numbers five-fold and half the number of pollinating insects in agricultural grasslands.

## **Forestry**

### **Homegrown seed that will kickstart a new breeding generation of British Douglas Fir trees**

A new generation of Douglas fir trees suitable for the UK climate is in sight thanks to a new project by Forest Research and the Conifer Breeding Cooperative.

### **Global deforestation is declining, but forests are still under extreme pressure**

Euractiv reports that although global deforestation rates have declined, forests remain under significant pressure, and rising demands for forest products and climate-related challenges have led to calls for better conservation measures.

### **New report reviews management and creation of woodland for biodiversity and wider environmental benefits**

Forest Research has published a new report which summarises the current evidence on how woodland management and creation affects biodiversity, ecosystem resilience and key environmental benefits.

### **National Trust to plant woodlands and woody habitats equivalent in size to over 800 football pitches with support from England's Community Forests this winter**

The National Trust reports that it is working in partnership with England's Community Forests to create around 519 hectares (1,282 acres) of new woodlands and woody habitats across England, equivalent in size to more than 800 football pitches.

## Sustainability

### £15m investment in research to help UK prepare for climate change

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are investing £15 million as part of the ‘Maximising UK Adaptation to Climate Change (MACC)’ programme, with the aim of developing long-term solutions to extreme weather and other effects of climate change.

## Other news

### Government launches “national conversation” on land use

The Government has launched a consultation on a new approach to managing land use, empowering decision makers with the toolkit to protect the most productive agricultural land and boost food security.

### NCEA: Forest Research’s major programme to measure England’s natural capital

This article from Forest Research discusses the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) programme, which collects data on the extent, condition and change over time of England’s ecosystems and natural capital and quantifies the benefits to society they provide.

## Opportunities

### 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.

### Signs of Spring Survey returns for spring 2025

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. Please take part to record when you first notice these signs of spring near you as the year progresses. We are asking what you saw, when, where and what the weather conditions were when you saw this sign of spring. The survey will remain open until **18th June**.

### Vacancy: RSB Events Working Group

Are you well connected in the life sciences and passionate about shaping high-impact events? The RSB’s new online Events Working Group is seeking volunteers with strong networks and experience in event planning to help curate cutting-edge events featuring leading experts. As a member, you will play a key role in identifying and securing speakers, shaping event themes, and ensuring RSB events remain engaging and relevant. Apply by the extended deadline: **Sunday 2 March**.

### **RSB Regional Events Grants**

The RSB is offering members grants of up to £1,000 to help create inspiring events or activities that celebrate the biosciences and engage diverse audiences. Whether you are planning a biology workshop, talk series, or community project, these grants can help bring your vision to life. [Apply for a grant via mySociety](#) by **Sunday 30 March**.

### **Nominate a speaker for RSB's new webinar series**

We're launching a new series of member-exclusive webinars and need your help. We're looking for inspiring speakers to share cutting-edge insights across various biological fields. Do you have a speaker in mind who would engage and inspire our community? Share your suggestions with [events@rsb.org.uk](mailto:events@rsb.org.uk) and help shape the future of our events programme.

### **Entries open for the Harding Prizes for Trustworthy Communication in 2024**

In a time when balanced and useful information is often difficult to find, sources of trustworthy communication are paramount. In association with [Sense About Science](#) and the [Science Media Centre](#), the [Statistical Laboratory](#) celebrates those who tackle the communication of evidence well, with the annual Harding Prizes for Trustworthy Communication. Entries are open until the **15th February 2025**.

### **Call for nominations for experts and fellows for the upcoming IPBES 2nd Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services**

Applications are now open for experts and fellows to participate within IPBES as part of the 2nd Global Assessment, which will be a landmark international report. Further details on each of these positions, including the types of expertise required and the length of commitment, can be found in the relevant notification (for [experts](#), and for [fellows](#)). If you are interested in one of these positions, please apply by following the instructions found in the relevant notification. Please note the deadline for applications is **28th March 2025**. Defra will be hosting a webinar on Monday 24th February at 3:30pm GMT to provide further information on the process; if you're interested in attending please join via this [link](#). Any further questions, please contact [rebecca.love@defra.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.love@defra.gov.uk).

## **Consultations**

### **Industrial Strategy**

The Business and Trade Committee has launched an inquiry that will take a comprehensive look at the Government's proposals for a 10-year modern industrial strategy, as set out in Invest 2035. It will scrutinise the proposals in the Government's Green Paper and its forthcoming White Paper, and make recommendations for the Comprehensive Spending Review.

**Closes: 21 February 2025**

### **Under the microscope**

The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee – a cross-party group of MPs – wants to hear your ideas for topics it should put “under the microscope”. The committee's role is to look at Government policies on science, technology and innovation, and make recommendations for how these could be improved.

**Closes: 10 March 2025**

## **Land use in England**

The Government is seeking views on vision for land use in England and how to deliver it. This consultation will inform the development of a Land Use Framework. The RSB is currently considering a response to this inquiry. Please contact [consultation@rsb.org.uk](mailto:consultation@rsb.org.uk) for more information and if you would like to contribute.

**Closes: 25 April 2025**

## **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 Health Series: The importance of plant health in One Health**

**5 March 2025**

**14:00 – 15:00**

**Online (Zoom)**

The emergence and subsequent spread of pests and diseases can have a devastating economic, environmental, and public health impact across populations, affecting biodiversity, food security, and commercial trading. As new plant health threats continue to emerge, it is important to consider plant health in the context of One Health, and integrate this into appropriate practice and principles. This keynote address will be delivered by Sarah Brunel, Implementation and Facilitation Unit (IFU) Lead at the [International Plant Protection Convention \(IPPC\)](#), and will be followed by an opportunity for an audience Q&A and discussion.

## **Minoritised Life Scientists Future Forum**

**31 March 2025 - 2 April 2025**

**ICC Birmingham, Broad Street, Birmingham, B1 2EA**

The Minoritised Life Scientists Future Forum is a ground-breaking event taking place in Birmingham from 31 March to 2 April 2025, dedicated to amplifying underrepresented voices in the life sciences. This unique forum will offer over 200 hours of talks, workshops, mentoring, and professional development opportunities, all aimed at building a more inclusive future for STEM.

## **Modelling Plant Stem Cells: Evolution, Development and Regeneration**

**18 May 2025 - 21 May 2025**

**Fanhams Hall, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 7PZ**

This four-day workshop, organised by the Company of Biologists and led by experts in plant biology from Utrecht University and the Sainsbury Laboratory, offers an in-depth exploration of the evolutionary and developmental mechanisms driving plant stem cell plasticity. Through a combination of theoretical and practical sessions, the workshop will focus on experimental and computational modelling approaches to understanding plant stemness.

## And finally...

### [Darwin's favourite plant displays tentacle trick](#)

A carnivorous plant that fascinated Charles Darwin is able to increase its number of 'tentacles' when nutrients from the ground are scarce, reports BBC News.



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