

Plant Science Newsletter – a monthly round-up of policy headlines and stories

May 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 and debate

RSB news

[RSB welcomes Sir Ian Boyd as the next President at this year's AGM](#)

The Society is pleased to announce that its next President will be the marine biologist and Government scientific adviser Professor Sir Ian Boyd FRS FRSB.

Plant health and biosecurity

[Plant Health Week takes root at RSB](#)

10-16 May 2021 is National Plant Health Week in the UK, providing an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of healthy plants. The initiative is part of the activity marking the International Year of Plant Health.

[National Plant Health Week highlights how plants benefit people](#)

BBSRC, part of UKRI, is partnering with Defra in May for National Plant Health Week, highlighting how healthy plants benefit both the planet and people.

[Plant Passporting e-learning module launched](#)

Defra launches training to maintain compliance with Plant Passport system, helping to protect industry and the wider environment from harmful plant pests and diseases.

Plant breeding

[GE field trial application submitted to Defra](#)

Rothamsted Research has applied for a five-year licence to carry out field trials of gene edited wheat.

[Not all gene-edited crops should be treated equal, warn MEPs](#)

There is a need to ensure a targeted approach to gene editing because not all genomic techniques confer the sustainability benefits promised in the European Commission's new study, EU lawmakers have warned.

Agriculture

[Vital soil organisms being harmed by pesticides, study shows](#)

The tiny creatures are the 'unsung heroes' that keep soils healthy and underpin all life on land, The Guardian reports.

[EU Court backs Commission's ban on controversial neonicotinoid pesticides](#)

The EU's highest court has ruled that the European Commission was entitled to restrict the use of three neonicotinoid pesticides linked with bee decline after an attempt to overturn the decision from the agrochemical company Bayer, EURACTIV reports.

[AHDB winding down horticulture and potatoes operations as Ministerial decision awaited](#)

AHDB announces it is winding down significant activities on behalf of the horticulture and potatoes sectors.

Food security

[Future-proofing the food system to tackle global challenges](#)

The Global Food Security programme has published a scenarios report exploring potential transformation pathways to align the UK food system with the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

[Third of global food production at risk from climate crisis](#)

Food-growing areas will see drastic changes to rainfall and temperatures if global heating continues at current rate, according to research described in The Guardian.

Biodiversity and conservation

[Green light for 'net zero' equivalent for nature](#)

The government has promised to "halt the decline of nature" as part of a new drive to improve the environment, BBC News reports.

[UK secures historic G7 commitments to tackle climate change and halt biodiversity loss by 2030](#)

G7 Environment and Climate ministers commit to protect land and ocean to bend the curve of biodiversity loss by 2030.

[Natural England to get 47% funding increase amid 'green recovery' plans](#)

Conservation watchdog given boost after decade of funding cuts that left it at 'crisis point', The Guardian reports.

[Governments achieve target of protecting 17% of land globally](#)

UN report warns that quantity not matched by quality, with many conserved areas poorly protected, as Germany backs new landscapes fund for developing countries.

[Wildlife: Almost half of Wales' protected sites 'not monitored'](#)

Almost half of Wales' protected sites are not being monitored due to a lack of funds, according to a report from RSPB Cymru, reported by BBC News.

[End mowing of road verges to create huge wildlife habitat, says UK study](#)

Managing verges for nature would create combined area the size of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and Edinburgh for wildflowers.

Forestry

[Forestry Commission Chair welcomes new England Trees Action Plan to treble tree planting rates in England](#)

Forestry Commission at the helm of ambitious new commitments to tree planting to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises.

[44,000 trees to be planted as Urban Tree Challenge Fund reopens](#)

More trees in urban areas will help support people's health and wellbeing as well as wider environmental benefits, as we build back greener from the pandemic.

[Controversial forestry experiment will be largest-ever in United States](#)

At the Elliott State Forest in Oregon, researchers will explore how best to balance timber production with conservation.

[Brazil's Amazon: Deforestation rises ahead of dry season](#)

Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil rose by 43% in April compared to the same month last year, government data has shown.

[Food brands challenge deforestation rules in UK environment bill](#)

The Guardian reports that new bill will enforce fines on UK-based companies that fail to cut links to illegally deforested land.

[Forests the size of France regrown since 2000, study suggests](#)

An area of forest the size of France has regrown naturally across the world in the last 20 years, a study suggests.

Sustainability

[Sales of peat compost to gardeners to be banned from 2024](#)

Funding for restoration of peatlands and tripling of tree planting in England also announced, The Guardian reports.

[Trials to suck carbon dioxide from the air to start across the UK](#)

A major £30m project will test trees, peat, rock chips, and charcoal as ways of removing climate-heating emissions, The Guardian reports.

[Nature has enormous potential to fight climate change and biodiversity loss in the UK, according to new report](#)

A new report launched by the British Ecological Society details how nature can be a powerful ally in responding to the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

[Peat compost to be banned – luckily, green alternatives are just as good for your garden](#)

Writing in The Conversation, Coventry University academics describe how alternatives to peat compost can still keep gardens blooming beautifully.

Other news

[Scientists are more likely to study bold and beautiful blooms, but ugly flowers matter too](#)

Research described in The Conversation finds that scientists exhibit a bias towards more visually striking plants.

[RHS ready to cultivate new audience with huge Salford garden](#)

New RHS garden, billed as 'Europe's biggest gardening project', is to finally open after Covid delays, reports The Guardian.

Opinion

[Greening the planet: we can't just plant trees, we have to restore forests](#)

An article in The Conversation contrasts tree planting with forest restoration.

Opportunities

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

Consultations

[Draft policy statement on environmental principles](#)

The Government is consulting on the draft policy statement on environmental principles which sets out how five internationally recognised environmental principles should be interpreted and proportionately applied. The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. Please contact consultation@rsb.org.uk for more information and if you would like to contribute.

Closes: 2 June 2021

[Role of biomass in achieving net zero](#)

This call for evidence aims to strengthen the Government's evidence base around biomass and will contribute to a review of the potential for biomass to support the UK's net zero target.

Closes: 15 June 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

[Parliamentary Links Day 2021](#)

Parliamentary Links Day is the largest science event on the annual Parliamentary events calendar. This year's theme is Science and Climate Change.

Online, 22 June 2021

[BSPP Plant Health Club 2021](#)

A new monthly meeting series aims to facilitate open discussions and networking opportunities. Meetings are primarily targeted at PhD students and early career researchers, but all are welcome. Dates and times of meetings will vary to enable as many people as possible to attend, and each meeting will take a theme.

[#UKPlantSciPresents webinar series](#)

The series returns for its spring season. View the full range of presentations and register for free [here](#). Recordings of all past webinars are available to view, and further webinar titles will be announced as the year progresses. Thanks to support for this series from the Monogram Small Grains Network, Bristol Centre for Agricultural Innovation, NovogeneUK and Arabidopsis Events UK.

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...

[Devon hedge laying champion's ancient craft](#)

Steven McCulloch, from Devon, has won national competitions styling hedges and laying them.

[Growing the future report](#)

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](#).

The Biologist

The next issue of *The Biologist*, out in the first week of June, will explore proposals to reintroduce lynx to the UK, efforts to protect bats in UK churches, the rise of remote and automated experimentation in bioscience, and the importance of understanding biofilms. Meanwhile, online at thebiologist.rsb.org.uk, you can find a new collection of interviews about the Society's network, including [profiles of our members and Fellows](#), [Q&As with RSB staff](#) about their work and [a peek inside our members' labs](#).

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