

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

April 2022

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

Plant health and biosecurity

[New pilot requirement for tree suppliers announced to strengthen UK biosecurity](#)

The government announces that from June 2022, applicants for its tree planting grants will need to source saplings from approved suppliers.

[Carbon-capturing wood ants under threat from invasive plant](#)

A carbon-capturing ant is coming under threat from a non-native plant found across the UK, according to a conservation group, BBC News reports.

Plant breeding

[Dawn of a new era](#)

Rothamsted scientists welcome changes to UK rules around gene editing.

[Base edit your way to better crops](#)

A Nature News feature explores applications of genome editing methods to tailor the productivity and consumer appeal of important crops.

Agriculture

[Farming push to delay eco-friendly subsidies risks net-zero target – report](#)

A delay in introducing new environment-based farming subsidies will leave 'substantial gap' in efforts to reach net zero, according to new analysis, described in The Guardian.

[Soil sampling scheme aims to improve farm yields](#)

Soil Nutrient Health Scheme to be rolled out across Northern Ireland following successful pilot, BBC News reports.

[UK farmers call for weedkiller ban over Parkinson's fears](#)

Some British farmers are calling for a ban on the UK production of toxic weedkiller Paraquat, saying studies suggest it could be a factor in the onset of Parkinson's Disease, BBC News reports.

[Climate change and farming driving insect decline](#)

A study, described by BBC News, reports that areas with high-intensity agriculture and substantial climate warming have greatest declines in insect abundance and diversity.

[Daffodils to treat Alzheimer's could be Welsh hill farming's future](#)

A hardy daffodil variety, grown under stress in wind-swept conditions, produces higher levels of the chemical galanthamine used in dementia treatment, BBC News reports.

Food security

[UN says up to 40% of world's land now degraded](#)

Rising damage, caused mostly by food production, puts ability to feed planet's growing population at risk, The Guardian reports.

[Global food prices rise to highest ever levels after Russian invasion](#)

World wheat prices soared by 19.7% in March as war in Ukraine disrupted Black Sea exports, FAO price index described in The Guardian reveals.

[Climate mitigation measures could impact food security](#)

Strategies to decarbonise agriculture could cause food prices to rise, a study described by the Global Plant Council has found.

[Sea-farmed supercrop: how seaweed could transform the way we live](#)

The Guardian explores the potential for seaweed as a key protein source in the shift to eating less meat.

Biodiversity and conservation

[Funding battles stymie ambitious plan to protect global biodiversity](#)

Researchers are disappointed with the progress towards new global biodiversity framework, but haven't lost hope, Nature News explains.

[Most UK national parks deliver 'negligible benefits' for wildlife](#)

The British Ecological Society's new Protected Areas and Nature Recovery report recommends land is classed as protected only if wildlife is proved to be recovering over long-term, The Guardian reports.

[Plants hold key to developing future cancer treatments](#)

Scientists say the natural world has an important role to play in creating new drugs to fight the disease, The Guardian reports.

[Plant sunflowers and lavender to save garden species, says RSPB](#)

The Guardian relays a plea for gardeners to help stem decline of species including starlings, bumblebees and hedgehogs.

[Giant orchids found growing wild in UK for first time](#)

Range typically found in southern and central Europe is expanding north as climate warms, The Guardian reports.

Forestry

[Tropical forests have big climate benefits beyond carbon storage](#)

Nature News describes a study reporting that trees cool the planet by one-third of a degree through biophysical mechanisms such as humidifying the air.

[Uncontrolled tree planting 'could harm landscape' conservationists warn](#)

Planting trees to tackle climate change could endanger some of Wales' most scenic landscapes, according to warnings described by BBC News.

[Fears tree plant schemes could price out farmers](#)

A group of MPs have warned farmers in Wales could soon be 'priced out' by rich corporations buying up land for carbon offsetting, BBC News reports.

[Forestry Commission launches ground-breaking apprenticeship programme for the forestry sector](#)

The government announces a new opportunity offering career pathways into the forestry sector for people from all backgrounds and abilities.

People

['The tuber man of Kerala' on a quest to champion India's rare and indigenous crops](#)

The Guardian features Shaji NM, who has devoted his life to collecting and farming tubers such as yam, cassava and taro, and promoting them across the country.

Opportunities

[John Maddox Prize 2022](#)

As a joint initiative from Sense about Science and the international scientific journal Nature, the prize recognises researchers who have shown great courage and integrity in standing up for science and scientific reasoning, and advancing public discussion of difficult topics, despite fierce opposition and hostility.

Closes: 16 May 2022

[Membership Recruitment Officer, Royal Society of Biology \(RSB\)](#)

The RSB is seeking a membership recruitment officer to grow membership within the North West of the UK. This new target-driven role will build relationships with higher education institutions and employers to generate onsite promotional opportunities. This role would be suitable for someone with proven sales experience, excellent presentation skills and the ability to communicate with different audiences. The successful candidate is likely to live in or near the North West, and be familiar with the region.

Closes: 19 May 2022

[Apprentice of the Year Award](#)

The award celebrates apprentices and recognises their contribution to their teams and the wider bioscience community. The award forms part of the RSB's wider work supporting technical staff, through our support of the Technician Commitment.

Closes: 20 June 2022

[Photography Competition](#)

The Competition invites amateurs to submit photographs on a particular theme – the theme for 2022 is Communication. Participants can enter in one of two categories: Photographer of the Year (18 and over) with a £1000 top prize, or Young Photographer of the Year (under 18) with a £500 top prize.

Closes: 24th June 2022

[RSB Outreach and Engagement Award 2022](#)

Are you a bioscience researcher involved in science communication? If you work in any sector of UK biosciences, apply for the Royal Society of Biology Outreach and Engagement Award 2022 and win up to £1500.

Closes: 1 July 2022

[The Nancy Rothwell Award 2022](#)

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2022 specimen drawing competition for 7 – 18 year olds is now open for submissions. Prizes include art materials for students and their school can also win £100. Visit the Royal Society of Biology [website](#) for more information.

Closes: 29 July 2022

Consultations

[Higher education policy statement and reform](#)

The Department for Education is seeking views on proposals to improve outcomes, access and value for money of investment in higher education by students and taxpayers.

Closes: 6 May 2022

[The design of the UK's future research assessment system](#)

As part of the Future Research Assessment Programme (FRAP), the four funding bodies (Research England, Scottish Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland) are seeking views on the design of the UK's future research assessment system.

Closes: 6 May 2022

[Consultation on environmental targets](#)

Defra is seeking views on the first suite of Environment Act 2021 targets.

Closes: 11 May 2022

[Nature recovery green paper](#)

Defra wants to know what you think about its initial policy proposals regarding protected sites and species.

Closes: 11 May 2022

[New Deal for Postgraduate Research](#)

The New Deal for Postgraduate Research is a long-term piece of work that aims to improve the experience and quality of postgraduate research training in the UK. In this engagement exercise, UK Research and Innovation is focusing primarily on doctoral training (for example, working towards a PhD), but also welcomes comments on other research-focused training and qualifications.

Closes: 17 May 2022

[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

[BSPP Plant Health Club: Biosecurity at RHS Events](#)

Anna Platoni of the Royal Horticultural Society will share her knowledge and experiences in biosecurity at RHS events.

Online, 10 May 2022 at 12:30 pm - 1:30 pm BST

[Global Plant Council Webinar: CONNECTED](#)

In this webinar, CONNECTED Co-Director, Prof Neil Boonham, will describe the work of CONNECTED, scientific network which supports agricultural science to address the challenges of vector-borne plant viruses in Sub-Saharan Africa.

8 June 2022, 10:00-11:00 BST

[Parliamentary Links Day 2022](#)

Parliamentary Links Day is the largest science event on the annual Parliamentary events calendar. It is organised by the Royal Society of Biology on behalf of the science and engineering community to strengthen dialogue with Parliament, and to provide MPs with a more rounded understanding of the scientific issues we face.

Houses of Parliament, London, 28 June 2022

And finally...

[These flowers lure pollinators to their deaths. There's a new twist on how](#)

Two species of jack-in-the-pulpits may use sex scents to lure male fungus gnats.

[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](#).

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