

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

June 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

[Links Day brings an international community together to discuss climate change](#)

Links Day, a staple event in the Parliamentary science calendar, this year brought together keynote talks and panel discussions on climate change with a range of policymakers, politicians and sector leaders.

Plant health and biosecurity

[New Tree Health Pilot to launch this summer](#)

The Government announces plans to protect trees, woods and forests from pests and diseases in England.

[Himalayan balsam: UK volunteers battle playboy of horticultural world](#)

The Guardian reports as Cumbria becomes the latest county to raise an SOS about Himalayan balsam.

Plant breeding

[U.K. set to loosen rules for gene-edited crops and animals](#)

Science News reports on expectations that the UK Government could amend rules, making it easier to test and commercialize some genetically engineered crops and livestock.

[Strawberry fields forever? New variety tastes great ... and grows all summer](#)

A new strawberry variety developed by NIAB EMR is creating a stir in the horticulture industry, the Observer reports.

[GM grass cleanses soil of toxic pollutants left by military explosives, new research shows](#)

A grass commonly used to fight soil erosion has been genetically modified to successfully remove toxic chemicals left in the ground from munitions that are dangerous to human health, new research shows.

[Brewers could swap barley for higher-yielding wheatgrass](#)

Plant geneticists aim to enhance wheatgrass to provide environmental benefits of perennial crop for brewing industry.

Agriculture

[Environment Secretary shares further information on funding split for future farming schemes](#)

The Environment Secretary, George Eustice, confirmed from 2028 an even-split of funding between the future farming schemes.

[Environmental claims of new EU farm subsidy policy are questioned](#)

The Guardian reports on criticisms of the provisional agreement for the new five-year Common Agricultural Policy in the EU.

[Farmers urgently need to diversify, but they cannot do it alone](#)

Horizon Magazine comments on the need to boost biodiversity on farms to make them more resilient to climate change and protect future food security, reporting that it will not happen without change across the food supply chain.

[World's soils 'under great pressure', says UN pollution report](#)

The Guardian reports on the UN's Global Assessment of Soil Pollution, which finds that although soils provide 95% of all food, they are damaged by industrial farming, mining and urban pollution.

Food security

[Microbes and solar power 'could produce 10 times more food than plants'](#)

The system would also have very little impact on the environment, in contrast to livestock farming, scientists say.

[Ghana's farmers aren't all seeing the fruits of a Green Revolution](#)

A study reported in the Conversation concludes that despite the hopes – and hype – pinned on this second Green Revolution, it has failed to address the needs of poor farmers in Ghana.

[Climate crisis to hit Europe's coffee and chocolate supplies](#)

Research reported in the Guardian shows that increasing droughts in producer nations will also make palm oil and soya imports highly vulnerable.

Biodiversity and conservation

[Government sets out commitments to biodiversity and sustainability in G7 Nature Compact](#)

Government announces commitments agreed by G7 leaders to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, and tackle deforestation, marine litter and illegal wildlife trade.

[Government commits to 'nature-positive' future in response to Dasgupta review](#)

Responding to the Dasgupta Review on The Economics of Biodiversity, published earlier this year, the Government agreed with the Review's central conclusion that nature, and the biodiversity that underpins it, ultimately sustains economies, livelihoods and well-being.

Among other [RSB Consultation responses](#), you can read the RSB response to the Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity, conducted by HM Treasury [here](#).

['Quick fixes' to the climate crisis risk harming nature](#)

BBC News reports on joint IPCC-IPBES report describing how interlinked crises of climate change and nature loss must be tackled together.

['Orchidelirium': how a modern-day flower madness is fuelling the illegal trade](#)

The Guardian investigates the threat to orchids from theft, both in the wild and in the botanic gardens at Kew.

[Orchid thought to be extinct in UK found on roof of London bank](#)

Colony of small-flowered tongue orchid plants discovered in rooftop garden of investment bank, the Guardian reports.

Forestry

[Glasgow to plant 18m trees as city readies for Cop26 climate summit](#)

Clyde Climate Forest project hopes to plant 10 trees for every resident over next decade, the Guardian reports.

[Woods for wildlife and people get £16m funding boost in England](#)

The Guardian outlines a new scheme for England that will see landowners paid for planting that protects wildlife, reduces flood risk and increases public access.

[Half the trees in two new English woodlands planted by jays, study finds](#)

Former fields were naturally regenerated with oak trees growing from acorns buried by the birds, a new study described in the Guardian shows.

[More than 20 countries come together to pledge support for the world's forests](#)

The COP26 FACT Dialogue has brought together 23 countries to endorse a joint statement that commits to working together to protect world's forests.

[Gabon is first African country paid to protect its rainforest](#)

Gabon has become the first African country to receive payment for reducing carbon emissions by protecting its rainforest, under a UN-backed scheme described by BBC News.

People

[Yuan Longping \(1930–2021\)](#)

An obituary of the crop scientist whose high-yield hybrid rice fed billions.

[New chair to lead task force on sustainable farming of peatlands](#)

The Government unveils its new task force on peatlands.

[First new board members of Office for Environmental Protection](#)

Dr Paul Leinster CBE, Professor Richard Macrory, Professor Dan Laffoley and Julie Hill MBE have been appointed to the OEP Board.

[Robin Wall Kimmerer: ‘Mosses are a model of how we might live’](#)

The Observer interviews moss scientist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer about the secrets of mosses – and what they might teach us about surviving the climate crisis.

Opinion

[A growing concern: peat is bad for the planet – and for plants](#)

Gardener and ethnobotanist James Wong explains why there’s simply no reason to continue using peat.

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

[Position available: post of Senior Editor for The Journal of Horticultural Science and Biotechnology](#)

The Trustees for The Journal of Horticultural Science & Biotechnology are seeking to recruit a Senior Editor.

Closes: 14 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

[Horticultural Quality and Food Loss Network: Funding available](#)

The Network is providing a range of funding opportunities to its members, including pump-priming funds for feasibility studies and preliminary data collection to facilitate new collaborations (with emphasis on industry involvement and multidisciplinary) with ring-fenced funds for Early Career Researchers (ECRs), Business Interaction Vouchers (BIV) and Networking Visit Funding (NVF).

Closes: 6 August 2021

Events

[Re-imagining the first-year student experience](#)

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.

16 July 2021

[HVB Annual Meeting](#)

The annual meeting of the High Value Biorenewables network is free for network members, including accommodation, on a first come, first served basis. The event will include a networking dinner and a day of topical talks, flash presentations, updates and opportunities for ECRs to present their work.

22-23 September, Harrogate (if COVID-19 restrictions allow)

[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...

[Ghostly caterpillar webs cover Bedford trees](#)

Hungry caterpillars have covered a 100ft (30m) expanse of trees in a huge ghostly-looking web, BBC News reports.

[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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