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PlantSci Newsletter – a monthly round-up of plant science policy headlines and stories

November 2020

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

[Plant inspectors and rising prices: UK garden industry set for Brexit shock](#)

Nurseries say doubling up of regulations will mean a rise in costs and EU suppliers going elsewhere.

[Industry urged to check plant import and export guidance](#)

Government sets out updates for plant and products exports when the transition period ends.

Plant breeding

[Existing guidance appropriate for gene editing assessment, says EFSA](#)

EURACTIV reports on a new Scientific Opinion published by EFSA concluding that genome editing does not pose any additional hazards compared to conventional breeding or other genetic modification methods.

[Climate change: Aberystwyth elephant grass research could help unlock greener energy](#)

Researchers in Wales have helped sequence the genome of the energy crop miscanthus.

[Global wheat diversity mapped in huge international collaboration](#)

Researchers provide insight into wheat genetics, hoped to ensure future food security.

Agriculture

[Details of 'biggest farming shake-up in 50 years' set out](#)

The Guardian reports £1.6bn subsidies for owning land in England to end, with funds going to improve nature

[Government unveils path to sustainable farming from 2021](#)

Roadmap to better, fairer farming system published today

[Landmark Agriculture Bill becomes law](#)

New legislation sets out how farmers and land managers in England will be rewarded in future with public money for "public goods".

[Chips are down: Brexit uncertainty causing Scottish potato crisis](#)

Confusion over ability to sell to Northern Ireland after 31 December hits farmers hard, reports The Guardian.

[Government consults on use of fertilisers to clean up our air](#)

Consultation launched on how to cut ammonia emissions from the use of solid urea fertilisers to better protect human health and the environment.

Food security

[UK food system mapped and quantified in new report](#)

The expansive UK food system has been mapped and quantified in a new report led by the Global Food Security programme, which reveals both the value of the agri-food sector and the multiple challenges it faces.

[UK increasingly reliant on fruit and veg from climate-hit countries – study](#)

Researchers say trend could lead to supply problems and hinder efforts to promote healthy eating.

[Africa becomes first continent to chart soil fertility in every single field](#)

A landmark map charting soil fertility every 30 metres across the whole of Africa has been developed by a group of international scientists.

Biodiversity and conservation

[Amazon fires: Year-on-year numbers doubled in October](#)

The number of fires blazing in Brazil's Amazon region in October 2020 was more than double those in the same month last year, satellite data suggests.

[National Trust steps in to rescue rare English lichen](#)

Ancient lungwort translocated from fallen oak to nearby trees in trust's largest-ever move.

[Surprise discovery of rare plant at Norfolk 'ghost pond'](#)

A rare plant has reappeared after more than a century in hiding, reports BBC News.

[War of the weedkiller: why environmentalists are concerned about moves to ban Roundup](#)

Many say herbicide is an essential tool in preserving biodiversity but others say it's a 'delusion' to think weed control is only possible with 'poison'; The Guardian reports on the debate in Australia.

[Chinese flower has evolved to be less visible to pickers](#)

Fritillaria delavayi, used in traditional medicine, turning grey to blend into rocks, reports The Guardian.

Forestry

[ZSL report finds many palm-oil companies failing to meet 2020 zero-deforestation targets](#)

International conservation charity the Zoological Society of London is urging the palm oil industry to ramp up its reporting and take greater responsibility for its part in tackling the world's climate and biodiversity crises, as they release their annual assessment of 100 of the world's most significant palm oil producers, processors and traders.

[Government sets out world-leading new measures to protect rainforests](#)

Legislation will make it illegal for larger businesses to use products unless they comply with local laws to protect natural areas.

[Climate change: Protecting the rainforest through your shopping basket](#)

New laws should help prevent consumers from buying food grown on rainforest land that has been illegally logged.

[NI Water to plant one million trees on its estate](#)

Northern Ireland Water has announced plans to plant one million trees on its estate and hopes to complete the work within a decade.

[134,000 trees to be planted through Urban Tree Challenge Fund](#)

Winning projects of second round of £10 million Forestry Commission fund will plant thousands of trees in our towns and cities.

[Forestry Commission admits mistakes in peat bog row](#)

The Forestry Commission has admitted making a mistake after giving permission for a peat bog to be planted with trees.

[Tree in a million set for Westminster](#)

A very special Christmas tree that is one in a million is destined to become the most famous in Britain, reports Forestry England.

Business and industry

[Unilever sets target of €1bn in annual sales of plant-based foods](#)

Multinational plans to cash in on consumer trend towards reducing meat and dairy intake, reports The Guardian.

Sustainability

[Global food system emissions alone threaten warming beyond 1.5°C – but we can act now to stop it](#)

While most people recognise the role of burning fossil fuels in heating the atmosphere, there has been less discussion about the necessary changes for bringing agriculture in line with a “net-zero” world, writes John Lynch, Postdoctoral Researcher in Physics, University of Oxford, in The Conversation.

Other news

[Flower power: Covid restrictions fuel boom in plant and bulb sales](#)

Sales of medicinal plants such as echinacea have risen by almost 3,000% at some outlets, reports The Guardian.

Opportunities

RSB Gopher Science Lab free online training for primary teachers

The Royal Society of Biology is offering 40 state-funded primary schools in the UK the opportunity for four teachers to have free access to RSB’s Gopher Science Lab [online training course](#). With thanks to generous support from [The Worshipful Company of Horners](#) enabling RSB to offer this opportunity. Primary school teachers working in UK based, state-funded, primary schools can email [Amanda Hardy](#) to apply on behalf of their school to access the paid-for online training places on a first come first served basis.

RSB's Science at Home festival resources online

RSB and some of our science friends have worked together to run our first ever virtual science festival - [RSB's Science at Home](#) - with activities and resources available online, so you can now take part in the festival any time that suits you. With a range of videos, activities, games and more straight to your computer screen to entertain and engage you and your family. Take part today and tell your friends via [#RSBScienceAtHome](#).

[RSB School Biology Teacher of the Year Award](#)

Do you know an amazing biology teacher? Students, parents and carers can now [suggest a teacher](#) who they think is outstanding for the Royal Society of Biology’s School Biology Teacher of the Year Award. Visit the Society’s [website](#) for further information.
Closes: 29 January 2021

[Sustainable food production: apply for grants and investment](#)

Businesses can apply for a share of £5 million and support from investors to fast-track projects that help food production achieve net zero emissions.
Closes: 13 January 2021

Consultations

Consultation on RSB's 11-19 Biology Curriculum Framework

This month, the Royal Society of Biology's [Biology Curriculum Committee](#) are pleased to be opening a closed consultation on our 11-19 biology curriculum framework. The committee would like to seek clarity on the overall organisation, presentation and message of the framework document. We are keen to receive feedback from a wide range of committee members and member organisations. Please do check our [webpage](#) for further details on when the consultation will open. If you have any direct questions, please contact helen.mitchell@rsb.org.uk.

[Draft Strategy for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Research 2022-2027](#)

The Scottish government funds a multi-million-pound portfolio of research on the environment, natural resources and agriculture. This consultation allows you to give your views on the priorities for future research, and to ensure that the strategy is setting the right direction and approach for the future research portfolio.

Closes: 14 December 2020

[Consultation on regulating quality and standards in higher education](#)

The Office for Students is consulting on its approach to regulating quality and standards in higher education. Since 2018, the focus has been on assessing providers seeking registration and they are considering whether and how it should develop its approach now that most providers are registered.

Closes: 12 January 2021

[SMEs transforming food production: series A investor partnership](#)

UK registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are transforming food production towards net zero can apply for a share of up to £5 million in grant support. The grant funding is from the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund.

Closes: 13 January 2021

[Reducing ammonia emissions from urea fertilisers](#)

As ammonia emissions are predominantly from agriculture (87%) and around 8% are from the use of solid urea fertilisers, The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs seeks your views on three policy options that give us the greatest ammonia emission reductions from regulating the use or sale of solid urea fertilisers.

Closes: 26 January 2021

[Equity in the STEM workforce](#)

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Diversity and Inclusion in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) has launched its inquiry into Equity in the UK STEM workforce, and is currently inviting submissions of evidence.

Closes: 29 January 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

Sanger Seminar Series

The Wellcome Sanger Institute is pleased to launch a series of virtual seminars, showcasing the diversity of genomic research at the Institute aimed at tackling some of the biggest challenges in human health and disease. The virtual seminar series will take place monthly and is freely available and open to all who wish to attend.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all in person RSB events due to take place in 2020 have been cancelled, postponed or moved to an online format. Updated information will be made available on the [RSB events pages](#). Postponed events will hopefully run in late 2021. We recommend also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

And finally...

Is it a bird? Is it a bee? No, it's a lizard pollinating South Africa's 'hidden flower'

The Guardian reports on a chance encounter with a 'weird plant' in the Drakensberg mountains that led to a startling discovery.

Growing the future – a report from the UK Plant Sciences Federation (UKPSF)

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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