

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.

We are deeply saddened by the recent death of our former colleague [Alessandro Coatti](#). Our thanks to the community for the many tributes and messages of support that have been coming in.

News

RSB news

[RSB appoints new CEO](#)

The Royal Society of Biology is delighted to announce the appointment of Dr Doug Brown as its new CEO, who will take up the post this coming autumn.

[A first for apprenticeships at the RSB's Accreditation Awards Ceremony 2025](#)

The RSB's annual Accreditation Awards Ceremony saw nearly 100 programmes across various higher education institutions around the world accredited this year.

[What is next for Biology in the Curriculum and Assessment Review in England?](#)

In this article, the RSB responds to the interim report published by the Curriculum and Assessment Review Panel.

[MPs quizzed by young scientists at RSB's Voice of the Future 2025](#)

MPs and Peers were put in the hot seat once again at the RSB's annual Voice of the Future event, when they were questioned by a range of early career scientists on topics ranging from AI to how researchers can advise on policy.

Plant health and biosecurity

[Cameras Reveal Secret Allies in the Fight Against Oilseed Rape Pests](#)

Rothamsted Research reports that in-field cameras have uncovered unexpected predators of two major oilseed rape pests, potentially aiding control strategies.

Researchers reveal why young plants may be more vulnerable to disease

This Science Daily article highlights a study showing that plants which fight disease at a young age suffer costs to growth and future evolutionary fitness.

'Smart' roots make strategic use of water

Rothamsted Research highlights a study which suggests that plants are able to modify their root hydraulics to maintain water status and strategically use soil water.

Brown marmorated stink bug is establishing in UK

Niab is monitoring brown marmorated stink bug, an invasive pest native to Asia, in a Defra-funded project.

Plant breeding

New study to identify nutritionally superior and yield-stable oat varieties

The James Hutton Institute has been awarded funding for a project which aims to identify nutritionally superior and yield-stable oat varieties through a combination of experimental and on-farm field trials.

Agriculture

Nature boost: Government launches first action plan on pesticides in a decade

Environmental risk from pesticides is to be reduced by 10% over the next five years under a new plan set out by all four UK Governments, according to this Government press release.

End of the brown field? Regenerative agriculture brings ecological benefits

A new report by the British Ecological Society finds strong evidence for the benefits of cover crops combined with other nature-friendly practices.

Developing low-N growing strategies for out-of-season strawberry production in TCEA

Niab reports that a consortium is pioneering an innovative approach for commercial Totally Controlled Environment Agriculture (TCEA) strawberry production, with the aim to enhance productivity, optimise resource use, and improve profitability.

Africa has an opportunity to deliver on Net-Zero Agriculture

Rothamsted Research highlights a commentary piece discussing what policies are needed for Africa to achieve net-zero agriculture.

Farming Reforms Could Cut Emissions by a Quarter and Boost Water Quality

A new study has revealed that targeted farming interventions could slash agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in England by up to 30% while significantly improving water quality and biodiversity, reports Rothamsted Research.

Food security

Government invests more than £45 million in groundbreaking technologies to boost Britain's food security

New inventions and technologies to increase profits, boost food production and help protect nature have been supported by three special Government funds, according to this Government press release.

New study highlights ways to future-proof cocoa production

The Global Plant Council highlights a study showing that sustainable agricultural practices that both protect pollinator populations and mitigate climate risks could help secure – and even improve – global cocoa yield.

Microplastics: are they poisoning crops and jeopardising food production?

Writing for the Conversation, Denis Murphy, Emeritus Professor of Biotechnology at the University of South Wales, discusses a study showing that microplastics can reduce photosynthesis in land plants and marine and freshwater algae.

Biodiversity and conservation

New proposals to ban heather burning on peatland to protect air, water and wildlife

According to this Government press release, nature-rich peatland habitats are to be better protected under plans which would ban burning on peat in the uplands, improving health and wellbeing of people in nearby communities.

Meeting of major landowners to boost nature's recovery

The 'National Estate for Nature', which consists of public, private and civil society landowners, recently met to discuss land management plans to meet the country's legal Environment Act targets, reports this Government press release.

Growing wildflowers on disused urban land can damage bee health

This Science Daily article highlights research showing that wildflowers growing on land previously used for buildings and factories can accumulate lead, arsenic and other metal contaminants from the soil, which are consumed by pollinators as they feed.

RHS develops 'robust lawn' that works for people, pollinators and pets

The Guardian reports on the design of a hardy lawn for the Chelsea flower show that can be occasionally mown and trampled by dogs, as well as support pollinators.

Forestry

Government to plant first National Forest in 30 years

A new national forest stretching from the Cotswolds to the Mendips is set to be created, the government has announced.

England's non-woodland trees freely mapped for first time

England's trees outside woodlands have been mapped by satellite and laser and are freely available for the first time revealing they make up 30% of nation's tree cover, reports this Government press release.

Which tree species fix the most carbon?

Forest Research reports on a global study involving over 200 tree species planted in 160 experimental forests across the world, to understand which tree species fix the most carbon.

Mixed-species forests outperform monocultures in carbon storage, even in extreme weather

The Global Plant Council highlights a study which found that forests with many tree species can store significantly more carbon than those with only one species.

Other news

[Unearthing the past – using historic maps to locate missing peatland](#)

The James Hutton Institute reports on a project which has allowed the classification and localisation of over five million hectares of moorlands as they appear in the first edition Ordnance Survey maps, produced between 1843 and 1882.

[What makes a Neurodiversity ally?](#)

This article by the John Innes Centre discusses what it means to be a Neurodiversity ally, and how Neurodivergent colleagues can be meaningfully supported.

Opportunities

[Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships 2025](#)

Bioscience undergraduates can now apply to the Royal Society of Biology's paid summer research projects. Successful applicants will receive a stipend of around £400 per week and gain great research experience working with leading plant health researchers on 8-10 week placements. Ten research projects are available, based in various institutions across the UK. Details of the projects, eligibility and links to apply can be found on the dedicated [studentships page](#).

Closes: 25 April 2025

[Plant Health Professional Register](#)

Those working in plant health are encouraged to apply for the RSB's [Plant Health Professional 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**.

[RSB Technical Skills Courses 2025](#)

Learn new practical skills and elevate your techniques with the Royal Society of Biology's laboratory-based courses! These include our courses in Microscopy & Microbiology on **22 May** and ELISA on **23 May** at Brunel University, and Aseptic Techniques, and Cell Culture: The Basics at the University of York on **3 and 10 June**. Visit our [training events webpage](#) for full details and to book your place on these courses.

Royal Society of Biology Photography Competition 2025

'Restoring Biodiversity and Habitat' is the theme of this year's Royal Society of Biology **Photography Competition** which is open to amateur photographers in two age categories; 18 year olds and over, and under 18s . Visit **our website** for more information. Submit up to three images through the competition's webpage by **19 June**.

Grow beans for science

Join a fun, nationwide citizen science project funded by an RSB Outreach and Engagement grant. Researchers at the University of Southampton are inviting 100 UK primary and secondary schools to grow beans, track their growth, and collect samples. Schools will receive full instructions, lesson plans, and possible support for garden setup.

Consultations

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.

Closes: 25 April 2025

Increasing teacher numbers: Secondary and further education

The Department for Education (DfE) has predicted that the secondary school population will peak in 2026/27, with secondary school pupil-to-teacher ratios at their highest since 2010. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) will hear from senior DfE officials and is welcoming evidence on subjects including: the workforce required in secondary and further education, Government decision-making on where to invest or intervene to address need, and progress in addressing recruitment and retention issues. The RSB is considering a response to this consultation. Please contact **consultation@rsb.org.uk** if you would like to contribute.

Closes: 5 May 2025

Financing and Scaling UK Science and Technology: Innovation, Investment, Industry

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee is launching an inquiry into financing and scaling UK science and technology. The backdrop for this inquiry is fifteen years of meagre growth, despite significant R&D investment, and a wider sense that the UK often fails to capitalise on its excellent science and technology base.

Closes: 9 May 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

Confident Scientific Presentations

6 May 2025 - 8 May 2025

Online (Zoom)

In this practical, interactive presentation skills training, participants will learn the foundations of how to plan, design and deliver a clear scientific presentation - with confidence.

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.

Virtual Employer Roundtable: Growing Talent in the Plant and Agri-tech sector through degree apprenticeships

9 May 2025

13:00 - 14:30

Online

Do you work in the plant science and agri-tech sector? Join Northeastern University London's upcoming virtual roundtable and share your views on sector skills needs and training opportunities. Discussions will shape the government-funded Scientist apprenticeship for the future.

And finally...

Take a blossom break at work, National Trust urges, as spring warms UK

The Guardian reports that employees are being urged to step outside to take time to observe one of the wonders of the natural world: the fleeting but lovely spring blossom season.



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