

March 2024

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News

RSB news

[Parliamentarians questioned by scientists in Voice of the Future 2024 over key issues: AI, food security, and STEM job pipelines](#)

Voice of the Future, organised by the Royal Society of Biology on behalf of a number of learned societies, allows early career scientists to question parliamentarians in a role-reversal of a normal select committee inquiry. This year's event was held on Tuesday 12th March 2024 in Committee Room 11, House of Commons.

[RSB's response to the Spring Budget 2024](#)

The Chancellor recently presented the 2024 Spring Budget, setting out Government's spending commitments for the year ahead. The Royal Society of Biology is disappointed by the announcements which failed to deliver on the promise to spend £20 billion on R&D in 2024-25.

[Heads of University Biosciences launch new strategy at parliamentary reception](#)

The Heads of University Biosciences (HUBS), a special interest group of the RSB, met at the House of Commons on 29th February to unveil its new strategy for 2024 to members of the Higher Education (HE) community.

[RSB BioArtAttack3D 2023 competition winners announced](#)

With over 300 photos of fabulous artworks submitted by the competition's entrants this year featuring models of birds, arachnids, and forests, the winners have been selected.

[The Biologist](#)

The latest issue of The Biologist dives into Kew Garden's [enormous new report](#) on the state of the world's plants and fungi. Plus, we speak to the 'queen of pain' Professor Irene Tracey about her [decades of research on how we perceive pain](#).

Plant health and biosecurity

Emergency pesticide authorisation to protect sugar beet crop conditionally approved

This Government press release reports that a neonicotinoid pesticide will be permitted for use on the 2024 sugar beet crop in England, only if there is a danger as evidenced by an independent prediction of virus incidence of 65% or more.

Invasive plant time bombs: A hidden ecological threat

This Science Daily article highlights a study showing that invasive plants can stay dormant for decades or even centuries after they have been introduced into an environment before rapidly expanding and wreaking ecological havoc.

Predatory insects protect apples from pests when flowers are planted on farms, finds study

The Global Plant Council highlights a study showing that bugs including hoverflies, lacewings and ladybirds play an important role in keeping Britain's apples healthy, with wildflower strips planted around apple orchards providing a habitat for predatory insects that prey on pests that deform and damage apples.

RHS disease ranking highlights top 10 gardening problems in 2023

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has published its annual disease ranking, revealing the top ten problems for gardeners in 2023.

Plant breeding

£13.5 million for 48 engineering biology R&D projects

UKRI reports on funding for new projects that will use engineering biology to tackle challenges in the fields of health, environment, food production and sustainability.

Marine algae implants could boost crop yields

This Science Daily article reports that scientists have discovered the gene that enables marine algae to make a unique type of chlorophyll, and have successfully implanted this gene into a land plant, paving the way for better crop yields on less land.

Soil and root health research expertise attracts Farming Future's funding

The John Innes Centre has announced that its researchers will work alongside farmers and agritech partners in a £1m research collaboration to boost crop productivity by unearthing the secrets of soil and root health.

New technology in DUS testing

Writing for NIAB, Dr Margaret Wallace explains how new technologies are helping in DUS testing and seed certification.

Agriculture

EU consumers increasingly exposed to ‘forever chemicals’ in fruit and vegetables, NGO study warns

Euractiv reports on a study showing that fruit and vegetables in the EU are increasingly contaminated with toxic PFAS – the so-called ‘forever chemicals’ that the Commission dropped plans to ban last year.

New initiative aims to curb the toxic impacts of agriculture

The governments of Ecuador, India, Kenya, Laos, Philippines, Uruguay, and Vietnam have come together to launch a \$379 million initiative to combat pollution from the use of pesticides and plastics in agriculture, reports the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

Food security

Common plant could help reduce food insecurity, researchers find

The Global Plant Council highlights a study showing that the water plant *Azolla caroliniana* can double its biomass in two days, capture nitrogen from the air, be fed to poultry and livestock, and could serve as life-saving food for humans in the event of a catastrophe or disaster.

EAC ask: Where is the Land Use Framework? As Committees debate food security

The Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee has said that the Government has not delivered the much-awaited Land Use Framework in 2023 as pledged, hindering crucial scrutiny of plans for food security.

Root microbes may be the secret to a better tasting cup of tea

The Global Plant Council highlights a study showing that the making of a delicious cup of tea depends on another key ingredient: the collection of microbes found on tea roots.

Biodiversity and conservation

Hedgerow regulations to be brought into law to protect wildlife

This Government press release says that English hedgerows will be protected in law as the Government sets out its plans for domestic hedgerow regulations, following a consultation last year.

Thousands of species set to benefit from new government funding

According to this Government press release, lapwings, water voles and dragonflies are among the species to benefit from new government funding awarded to restore and create nature-rich landscapes across England.

UK invests in monitoring of natural environment

New sensing systems for monitoring of our waterways, habitats, soil and greenhouse gas emissions will receive £12 million funding from NERC, Defra and Innovate UK, reports UKRI.

Forestry

[Payment rates increased to benefit farmers, land managers and trees](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Forestry Commission have announced a significant uplift in England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) payments to increase tree-planting across the country.

[Derbyshire ash trees playing vital role in protecting species](#)

Ash tree samples from Derbyshire woodlands are being collected by Natural England as part of a national project to protect the tree species from being devastated by disease.

[Rainforest's next generation of trees remain threatened 30 years after logging](#)

UKCEH reports on research which shows that rainforest seedlings are more likely to survive in natural forests than in places where logging has happened – even if tree restoration projects have taken place.

[Giant redwoods: World's largest trees 'thriving in UK'](#)

BBC News reports on a study that has shown giant redwoods - the world's largest trees - are flourishing in the UK.

[International Day of Forests 2024](#)

To celebrate the UN's International Day of Forests, the British Ecological Society takes a deeper look at the significance of forests to our planet and communities, and highlights some innovative new methods to conserve these important environments.

Sustainability

[Green spaces and wetlands keep cities cool during heatwaves](#)

UKCEH highlights research showing that botanical gardens can cool the city air by around 5 degrees Celsius during heatwaves, with parks and wetlands also significantly reducing air temperatures.

Opportunities

[International Horizon Europe campaign launches](#)

At the start of 2024, the UK associated to Horizon Europe. That means that Horizon Europe applicants can take their bids to the next level by utilising the UK's thriving R&D infrastructure. The UK Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) is encouraging the brightest thinkers with the biggest ideas from across Europe to partner with UK scientists, researchers and businesses through the world-leading Horizon Europe programme, as part of a new international campaign. Further information can be found at the [UK's Horizon Europe Hub](#), which includes a tool for searching for Horizon Europe partners.

2024 David Miller Travel Bursary Award

The David Miller Travel Bursary Award aims to give two young plant scientists or horticulturists the opportunity of overseas or domestic travel in connection with their horticultural careers. Full details and eligibility criteria can be found on the [SCI website](#).

Deadline: 15th April 2024

John Maddox Prize nominations 2024

Nominations for the 2024 John Maddox Prize are now open for researchers who are standing up for science and advancing public discourse. More information can be found on this [website](#).

Closes: 20 May 2024

Signs of Spring Survey

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 **17th June**.

Photography Competition 2024

'Transforming Life' is the theme of this year's Royal Society of Biology [Photography Competition](#) which opens to entries on **14th March**. Photographs on the competition's theme are invited from all amateur photographers in two age categories; 18 year olds and over, and under 18s. Visit [our website](#) for more information and to take part when the competition opens. Submit up to three images through the competition's webpage **by 20th June 2024**.

Plant Health Professional Register

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

RSB Technical Skills courses 2024

Learn new skills and refine your laboratory techniques with the Royal Society of Biology's laboratory-based courses. These include courses in [Aseptic Techniques](#), [Microscopy and Bioimaging](#), [Tissue Culture](#), [DNA Analysis](#), and [Protein Identification](#) at University of East Anglia on **22nd – 24th May**, and [ELISA Training](#) at Brunel University (London) on **31st May**. These courses contribute to the [Technical Skills Certificate](#), which was developed to support training and development of technical staff, and addresses key competencies for professional registration ([Registered Science Technician](#)). The face to face element also provides an excellent networking opportunity. Visit [our training events webpage](#) for full details and to book your place on these courses.

Consultations

Climate change and security

The Environmental Audit Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the interaction of climate change and security issues and the UK Government's approach to anticipating, preventing, and responding to the security threats posed by climate change. The RSB is currently considering a response to this inquiry, with a focus on biological security. Please contact consultation@rsb.org.uk by **10th April 2024** for more information and if you would like to contribute.

Closes: 29 April 2024

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

Land Use Summit: Prioritising land use in the midst of a climate and nature crisis

16 April 2024

9:15 – 17:30

Huxley Lecture Theatre and Bartlett Suite, London

How can we ensure wider and more collaborative discussion on how our land is used? How do we strike the balance of land set aside for food production, energy production, housing and infrastructure, and nature? Join the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and the British Ecological Society as they discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with biodiversity recovery in times of rapid global environmental changes, focusing on identifying strategic land use prioritisation for delivering mandated conservation outcomes within the UK.

[Register for your ticket](#) now.

Building a new woodland

27 April 2024

10:00 - 12:30

Low Burnhall Wood, South Rd, Durham DH1 3TX

This event, by the RSB Northern Branch, will involve a guided walk around Low Burnhall Wood, Durham, to find out about the Woodland Trust's work to establish a new woodland.

[Plant Pathology 2024 and Early Careers Plant Pathology 2024](#)

10 September 2024 - 13 September 2024

Mathematical Institute, University of Oxford, Radcliffe Observatory, Andrew Wiles Building

The BSPP invites you to register for Plant Pathology 2024 (#PPATH2024), the main annual meeting of the British Society for Plant Pathology. The first two days of the main meeting will feature open sessions based on submitted abstracts, presentations from our invited speakers, the RKS Wood Prize lecture, PH Gregory Prize session and the J Colhoun Poster Prize. ECPP2024 will run alongside the event, a chance for early career researchers to network, gain experience and share their work.

And finally...

[Darwin's plant specimens stored for 200 years to go on public display](#)

The Guardian reports that plant specimens collected by Charles Darwin on the voyage of the Beagle have been unearthed in an archive at Cambridge University.



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