

July 2024

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## News

### Top stories

#### [New Ministers appointed to the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology](#)

Following the 2024 General Election, a new suite of Ministers have been appointed to the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology, writes the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE).

#### [RSB's response to the King's Speech 2024](#)

The RSB has responded to the Labour government's policy agenda in the Kings Speech, evaluating how the government's legislative plans will affect education, research, and innovation.

### RSB news

#### [New Biorisk Professional Registration Scheme launched](#)

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) is delighted to announce the launch of the Biorisk Professional Registration Scheme (BPRS) – a new professional registration scheme for biorisk specialists. The programme, developed in conjunction with the Biorisk Strategic Leadership Group (BSLG), will allow practitioners to benchmark their competence, develop professional skills, and share learning.

#### [When is flying ant day 2024 and why do they appear?](#)

Scientists at the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) discredit the claim that there is one annual day where flying ants emerge and highlight the surprising benefits they provide to the environment.

#### [King's Birthday Honours 2024 recognises RSB Fellows](#)

The RSB is delighted to announce that five members have been recognised in King Charles III's Birthday Honours list for 2024, which acknowledges outstanding achievements of people across the United Kingdom.

## **Plant health and biosecurity**

### **Hope from an unexpected source in the global race to stop wheat blast**

New research reveals that wheat varieties with resistance to another pathogen, powdery mildew, also confer protection against wheat blast, reports the John Innes Centre.

### **Study shows climate change boosts olive tree-devouring bacteria in the Mediterranean**

The Global Plant Council highlights research offering predictions about the future expansion of the disease *Xylella fastidiosa* under different scenarios posed by global warming.

### **Not so simple: Mosses and ferns offer new hope for crop protection**

Mosses, liverworts, ferns and algae may offer an exciting new research frontier in the global challenge of protecting crops from the threat of disease, reports Science Daily.

## **Plant breeding**

### **Shortage of skilled plant breeders could impact global food security**

A lack of scientists specialised in plant breeding could lead to 'dire' food security implications in Australia, and around the world, according to new research highlighted by the Global Plant Council.

### **Untapped diversity in historic wheat collection revealed**

A decade-long collaborative study has discovered huge genetic potential that could be used to improve modern wheat varieties, reports Rothamsted Research.

## **Agriculture**

### **Disastrous fruit and vegetable crops must be 'wake-up call' for UK, say farmers**

This Guardian article discusses how UK fruit and vegetable production has plummeted as farms have been hit by extreme weather.

### **AI shows how field crops develop**

This Science Daily article discusses how researchers at the University of Bonn have developed software that can simulate the growth of field crops.

### **Promising initial results in biochar field trials**

Trials have shown that adding relatively small amounts of biochar to soil can significantly increase the amount of nutrients essential for crop growth, thereby boosting crop yield, reports the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

### **Reforestation of riverbanks needed to intercept soil loss from Brazilian sugar cane plantations**

Rothamsted Research highlights a study showing that soil loss from sugar cane plantations makes up the main proportion of sediments in three Brazilian rivers, confirming that retaining natural vegetation on riverbanks would be the best way to reduce soil erosion from farmland.

## **Biodiversity and conservation**

### **Protecting just 1.2% of Earth's land could save most-threatened species, says study**

Protecting just 1.2% of the Earth's surface for nature would be enough to prevent the extinction of the world's most threatened species, according to a new study highlighted by the Guardian.

### **Preserving Ethiopia's biodiversity: A success story in enset conservation**

This Kew Science article highlights a project which aims to maintain and enhance agrobiodiversity in Ethiopia.

## **Forestry**

### **Deforestation in Colombia falls to lowest level in 23 years**

The Colombian Government has reported a 36% decrease in deforestation, with most gains in the Amazon forest where conservation efforts are focused, according to the Guardian.

### **Amazon deforestation cut by 83% in places protected by Indigenous communities – new research**

Writing for the Conversation, Johan Oldekop, Reader in Environment and Development at University of Manchester, Bowy den Braber, Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Sheffield, and Marina Schmoeller, PhD Candidate at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), discuss the different deforestation rates in areas protected by Indigenous communities.

### **Study shows climate change is moving tree populations away from the soil fungi that sustain them**

The Global Plant Council highlights a study showing that trees, especially those in the far north, may be relocating to soils that don't have the fungal life to support them.

## **Sustainability**

### **NIAB to lead crop development in new Bezos Sustainable Protein Centre**

NIAB reports that the Bezos Earth Fund has announced the establishment of a new \$30 million Sustainable Protein Centre, based at Imperial College London, which aims to develop sustainable protein alternatives and expand consumer choice.

## **Other news**

### **Novel fungi study gives rare glimpse into "evolution in action"**

A group of common mushroom species known as bonnets has given scientists a rare glimpse into "evolution in action", according to a new study supported by the James Hutton Institute.

## Opportunities

### [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 or refine your laboratory techniques with the Royal Society of Biology's laboratory-based courses. These include courses in [Microscopy and Bioimaging](#), [Tissue Culture](#), [DNA Analysis](#), and [Protein Identification](#) at University of East Anglia on **12th-13th September**. 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.

### [\(Biology Week\) National Spelling Bee 2024](#)

After a tremendous inaugural year, the National Spelling Bee returns in the Autumn term of 2024. Teachers can register their school's students to take part from June 2024. Please use your school email address as the point of contact when you register your school to take part. This competition is open to all secondary aged students across the UK. Please register using the [online registration form](#) by **16th September 2024**. You will be sent participation details and further information after registration closes. The competition will commence in late September with an **online final in Biology Week on 11th October 2024**.

## Consultations

### [Consultation on UK REACH](#)

The Government is seeking stakeholders' views on proposals to reduce costs to businesses transitioning from the EU REACH regime to UK REACH, whilst upholding existing human health and environmental protections. Views on initial UK REACH Improvements are also being sought.

**Closes: 25 July 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

### [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.

### [Biology Week & Plant Health Series: Behind the scenes at Kew Gardens](#)

10 October 2024

10:30 - 15:30

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond TW9 3AE

Join the Royal Society of Biology for a visit to the [Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#), one of the UK's most impressive and important botanical research institutions that houses the "largest and most diverse botanical and mycological collections in the world", for an event as part of the [RSB Plant Health Series](#). Attendees will hear from a series of expert speakers, including representatives from the [Centre for Forest Protection](#) who will be discussing their ongoing projects, as well as an overview of genomic and tree health research taking place at Kew.

## And finally...

### [Queues gather at Kew to sniff 'corpse flower' stink](#)

A flower, which is said to stink like rotting flesh and usually only emerges once every two years, has bloomed at Kew Gardens.



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