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Science Policy Newsletter

a weekly round-up of policy headlines and stories

5 April 2024

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.

Dear readers, the newsletter team will be taking a spring break before returning with the next edition on 3rd May 2024. In the meantime, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your readership.

News

Top stories

[NHS rolls out artificial pancreas in world first move](#)

NHS England has announced that tens of thousands of children and adults living with type 1 diabetes across England are set to receive an 'artificial pancreas' in a world-first initiative. The technology will mean some people with type 1 diabetes will no longer need to inject themselves with insulin but rely on technology to receive this life saving medication.

[Climate change has slowed Earth's rotation – and could affect how we keep time](#)

Climate change is starting to alter how humans keep time. Indeed, the effect of melting polar ice could delay the need for a 'leap second' by three years, says Nature News.

[More people care about climate change than you think](#)

In this article, Hannah Ritchie, Deputy Editor and Science Outreach Lead at Our World In Data, demonstrates that the majority of people in every country support action on climate, but the public consistently underestimates this share.

Health and biomedicine

[NHS to try out Alzheimer's disease blood tests](#)

According to BBC News, a study to assess whether blood tests could help diagnose people with very early Alzheimer's disease is being launched by the NHS.

[Scientists identify gene variants linked to obesity risk](#)

A study led by researchers at the Medical Research Council (MRC) has identified genetic variants in two genes that have some of the largest impacts on obesity risk discovered to date, says UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

[Scientists identify Achilles heel of lung cancer protein](#)

Researchers have shown for the first time that a crucial interface in a protein that drives cancer growth could act as a target for more effective treatments, writes King's College London.

Food and drink

[Warning over 'risk' of calorie labelling on restaurant and cafe menus](#)

BBC News reports on a study by Public Health Scotland, which suggests that the potential harm of showing calorie counts on food menus could outweigh the benefits. The move could heighten the risk of relapse in people who have experienced eating disorders in the past.

[World squanders over 1 billion meals a day - UN report](#)

Households across all continents wasted over 1 billion meals a day in 2022, while 783 million people were affected by hunger and a third of humanity faced food insecurity. Food waste continues to hurt the global economy and fuel climate change, nature loss, and pollution. These are the key findings of a newly published UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report.

Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

[TB vaccine may enable elimination of the disease in cattle by reducing its spread](#)

New research, led by the University of Cambridge and Penn State University, shows that vaccination not only reduces the severity of tuberculosis (TB) in infected cattle, but also reduces its spread in dairy herds by 89%.

[New 'destructive fishing' definition to kickstart fresh era in fishing policy](#)

A new working definition of 'destructive fishing' has successfully been drafted following a rigorous consultation process involving 80 fisheries experts from over 30 countries, writes King's College London. This new definition provides a consensus-led draft for leaders to build upon in international policy discussions, and will meaningfully support countries to prohibit destructive fishing practices.

Environment and ecology

Five years of beaver activity reduces impact of flooding

A project supported by the Environment Agency to reintroduce beavers to East Anglia has successfully reduced the impact of flooding and drought over 5 years.

Carbon credits would enable restoration of UK saltmarshes say experts

A study led by the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH) has found that the introduction of a carbon credit scheme, enabling companies to invest in the restoration of the UK's degraded saltmarshes and voluntarily offset their greenhouse gas emissions, would be viable.

Water and air

New approach to monitoring freshwater quality can identify sources of pollution, and predict their effects

According to scientists at the University of Cambridge and Trent University, Canada, analysing the diversity of organic compounds dissolved in freshwater provides a reliable measure of ecosystem health.

Climate and energy

Measuring climate impacts on health

In this blog, Gillian Flower, Climate & Health Statistician at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reflects on the achievements of the ONS' Climate & Health Project – a four-year project funded by Wellcome looking at gathering evidence to measure the impacts of climate change on health.

Renewable electricity growth

Scotland's capacity for electricity generation from renewable sources increased by 10% within a year, with the largest growth coming in offshore and onshore wind installations.

Great apes threatened by mining for electric vehicle batteries

According to New Scientist, a surge of mining in some African countries for materials used to make green energy technologies puts gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos at risk.

Waste

Fairer charges scheme for regulating waste shipments comes into effect

The Environment Agency has introduced a new and fairer charges scheme for regulating waste shipments, ensuring it can continue its work to protect people and the environment from hazardous waste.

Animal Research

Discovery could end global amphibian pandemic

A fungus devastating frogs and toads on nearly every continent may have an Achilles heel. Scientists have discovered a virus that infects the fungus, and that could be engineered to save the amphibians, says Science Daily.

Memories are made by breaking DNA – and fixing it

A study in mice has revealed that nerve cells form long-term memories with the help of an inflammatory response, writes Nature News.

Government and Parliament

Lords Committee questions fairness of latest changes to immigration rules

In its 20th Report of Session 2023–24, the cross-party House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee has highlighted concerns about the Government's plans to increase the income required for British citizens and settled residents to bring a partner to the UK, known as the Minimum Income Requirement (MIR). The report comes after the Committee considered the Home Office's latest Statement of changes in Immigration Rules.

Research funding and higher education policy

£35 million investment to improve population-wide health

UKRI has established a new network, Population Health Improvement UK (PHI-UK), to bring together researchers from across the UK to boost research into sustainable and equitable population health improvement.

Major research and innovation infrastructure investment announced

UKRI reports that the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Michelle Donelan, has announced new funding that will equip the UK's research and innovation base for the future. Five new infrastructure projects are to share £388 million, with additional £85 million to support UKRI's Digital Research Infrastructure Programme.

Open access and publication policy

How papers with doctored images can affect scientific reviews

This Nature News article highlights scientists who surveyed 1,035 journal articles and found troubling images in nearly 20% of the papers, showing how image manipulation in scientific studies is impacting our consolidated knowledge base.

Opinion: Putting research integrity checks where they belong

Writing in the Scholarly Kitchen, Angela Cochran, Vice President of Publishing at the American Society of Clinical Oncology, argues that journals are not equipped to police the world's scientific enterprise and that institutions should take responsibility for conducting integrity checks and providing validation to the journals.

Business and industry

Pioneering biotech business programme welcomes first start-ups

The Biotechnology Business Incubation Centre (Bio BIC), a collaboration between the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), is on a mission to enable small biotechnology businesses to achieve their full commercial potential by bridging the gap between science and the market.

Ethics

[New policy briefing identifies top ethical challenges for research using neural organoids](#)

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics (NCOB) has published a policy briefing note identifying key ethical considerations raised by neural organoids – small, lab-grown structures made from human stem cells and used to model different aspects of the developing brain – and areas where further ethical guidance, policy and regulatory decisions could be needed.

Digital technologies

[AI helps to detect invasive Asian hornets](#)

New research from the University of Exeter shows that artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used to detect invasive Asian hornets and raise the alarm.

[UK & United States announce partnership on science of AI safety](#)

The UK and US have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will see them work together to develop tests for the most advanced AI models, following through on commitments made at the AI Safety Summit last November.

[Increasing AI transparency](#)

Scotland is to become the first part of the UK to make it mandatory to register any use of AI within the public sector. The Register is currently voluntary, with public bodies encouraged to submit information. Mandatory registration will begin with Scottish Government departments as part of a phased approach across the wider public sector.

International news

[Bird flu confirmed in person who had contact with infected dairy cows](#)

A person in Texas has been infected with bird flu after exposure to dairy cows who had the virus. It is the first time a human has contracted the disease from a mammal, reports New Scientist.

[Tropical-forest destruction has slowed – but is still too high](#)

The loss of pristine tropical forests slowed last year, but the world is still falling far short of a global goal to end deforestation by 2030, says Nature News. Findings from an analysis of satellite data highlight the need to improve conservation of tropical forests to protect biodiversity and slow climate change.

[Early-career researchers lament potential loss of Europe's largest transdisciplinary science conference](#)

Over the past two decades, the EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF) has brought together scientists, policymakers, business people, journalists and citizens to discuss European science and its broader policy and societal implications. On 26th January, the European Association for the Advancement of Science and Technology (EuroScience), which created the conference and owns the ESOF brand, filed for bankruptcy. Now, all signs are pointing to this year's event as the last one, at least in its current form, writes Science.

[Australian lab-grown meat cultured from quail cells hits the market in Singapore](#)

A parfait made from Japanese quail cells has become the first Australian lab-grown meat to hit the world market, reports ABC News.

Other

[Some bamboo toilet paper contains only tiny amounts of bamboo](#)

Toilet paper made from bamboo is supposed to be more eco-friendly than traditional paper made from virgin wood pulp. However, new tests suggest some products contain as little as 3 per cent bamboo, says New Scientist.

[Plastic-free vegan leather that dyes itself grown from bacteria](#)

Researchers at Imperial College London have genetically engineered bacteria to grow animal- and plastic-free leather that dyes itself.

Opportunities

[Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships 2024](#)

Bioscience undergraduates can now apply to the Royal Society of Biology's paid summer research projects. Successful applicants will receive a stipend of £380 per week and gain great research experience working with leading plant health researchers on 8-10 week placements. Twelve 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 [studentships webpage](#).

Closes: 21 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

[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.

[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 from **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**.

BioArtAttack (2D) 2024

The Royal Society of Biology's **BioArtAttack (2D) 2024** opens to entries from **8th March**. The competition is a 2D art drawing and painting competition for 7 – 18 year olds to draw or paint their favourite animal, plant or fungi. Prizes include £50 for winning students and the deadline for entries is **30th June**. Visit the Royal Society of Biology's **website** for more information.

Consultations

Food, Diet and Obesity

The House of Lords Select Committee on Food, Diet and Obesity has published a call for written evidence for its inquiry into the role of foods, such as 'ultra-processed foods' (UPFs) and foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) in a healthy diet, including how they influence health outcomes. The Committee is keen to hear from a diverse range of individuals and organisations.

Closes: 8 April 2024 at 10:00am

Methane inquiry

The Lords Committee has launched an inquiry on methane to examine whether the UK is on track to achieve the target set out by the Global Methane Pledge, of which it is a signatory. The inquiry aims to understand the progress the UK has made in reducing domestic methane emissions across sectors including fuel supply, agriculture, and waste management. The inquiry will also explore the UK's methane emissions in an international context and explore what UK actions on methane reduction will have greatest impact. The Committee welcomes submissions from anyone with answers to the questions in the call for evidence.

Closes: 15 April 2024

Feedback survey on the "Towards Responsible Publishing" proposal by cOAlition S

cOAlition, an international group of 28 research funders working together to promote open approaches to scientific publishing, has recently introduced its "Towards Responsible Publishing" proposal. The current survey offers a platform for to express views about the ideas presented in the proposal, and influence its further development, ensuring it resonates with the needs and aspirations of the research community.

Closes: 22 April 2024

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

Engineering biology inquiry

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee is conducting an inquiry into engineering biology. The committee will explore engineering biology's potential, particularly in delivering UK economic growth through commercialisation and for improvements to public services, which areas of engineering biology the UK is well placed to exploit and where additional support may be needed, and the ethical, regulatory and safety implications of rapid developments in the field.

Closes: 7 May 2024

Consultation on fairer food labelling

The UK government, the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive are jointly publishing this consultation which seeks views on proposals to improve transparency and consistency through improved country of origin, and animal welfare labelling in the UK.

Closes: 7 May 2024

Consultation on proposed reforms to the regulated products authorisation process

This joint Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) consultation concerns initial proposals for legislative reform to streamline the authorisation process for regulated products. Regulated products are food and feed products which require authorisation before they can be sold. These include food additives, flavourings, novel foods, GMOs as food and feed, food contact materials and feed additives.

Closes: 5 June 2024

Research Excellence Framework 2029 open access consultation

The four UK higher education funding bodies are opening a consultation concerning the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029 Open Access Policy. The proposed policy aims to embed progress in the sector for open access submission for journal publications. It also introduces an open access requirement for longform publications. They invite responses from any organisation, group or individual with an interest in research or scholarly publishing.

Closes: 17 June 2024, midday

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

6th Science Policy for Biodiversity Forum online sessions

From 8 to 11 April 2024

Online (Zoom)

The International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS) and the European Countries Biologists Association (ECBA) are organising a series of webinars to explore how science, technology and innovation can drive effective implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The upcoming sessions will delve into crucial topics such as **Invasive Alien Species**, **Digital Sequence Information (DSI)**, the intersection of **Indigenous Peoples in Conservation Biodiversity**, and the development of **Biodiversity Conservation Indicators**.

Horizon Europe Hour – Webinar for European stakeholders

9 April 2024

10:00 – 11:00 GMT

Online

Innovate UK will be hosting 'Horizon Europe Hour' every month, providing a platform to connect directly with UK National Contact Points and ask specific questions you may have on Horizon Europe funding for research and innovation. This webinar is for European stakeholders who are looking to collaborate with UK organisations across Horizon Europe. Everyone is welcome, whether you are new to Horizon Europe or if you are more experienced.

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.

Animal Research - Changing the Frame

20 April 2024

6:00 – 7:00

Online (Zoom)

Join us and our speaker **Bella Lear**, Chief Executive of **Understanding Animal Research Oceania**, to learn more about how animal research benefits society. As a professional science communicator, Bella has worked for two decades creating social change to support the impact of science. She now works in Australia and New Zealand providing, communication-support on animal research.

Building a new woodland

27 April 2024

10:00 – 12:30

Low Burnhall Wood, South Rd, Durham, DH1 3TX

Join the RSB's Northern Branch committee on a guided walk around Low Burnhall Wood, Durham, and learn about the Woodland Trust's work to establish a new woodland.

[A fear of fungi](#)

7 May 2024

18:00 – 19:00

Online (Zoom)

Despite being relatively unpopularised as a branch of infectious disease biology, the most recent estimate of global annual attributable deaths due to fungal pathogens is around 2.5 million - more than due to HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, breast or prostate cancer. This online lecture on fungal pathogens will be delivered by Professor Neil Gow, whose lab is within the **MRC Centre for Medical Mycology**, one of the largest groupings in the field with more than 120 researchers.

And finally...

[Right- or left-handed? Protein in embryo cells might help decide](#)

Researchers have examined rare genetic variants from a database of more than 350,000 individuals' genetic data to hunt for clues for what could determine the dominant side of the human brain, says Nature News.



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