



### ... Career Development

This month we're bringing you lots of opportunities - from grants, awards and open academic positions. Check them out from page 8.



### ... Community

There's a huge amount going on in our wider community. Don't miss upcoming events - find out more from page 5.

As always, you can read about upcoming AAB events from page 3 and reports from previous events from page 12.



### ... Celebrating Life

After the terribly sad news of their passing, this month we remember the lives of two of our former Council Members - Philippa Borrill and Ian Cooper.

Join us in celebrating their lives - read their obituaries from page 9.

## Contents

AAB News.....	2
Upcoming AAB Events.....	3
Events in our Community.....	5
Community News.....	7
Career Development Opportunities.....	8
In Memoriam.....	9
Meeting Reports - Voice of the Future 2026.....	12
Meeting Reports - Monogram 2026.....	14
Update from the Annals of Applied Biology.....	15
Membership.....	17
AAB Specialist Groups.....	18
AAB Council.....	19
AAB Office.....	20
Contact Us.....	20



# AAB News

*April was a rare month for the AAB with no in-person meetings, offering us a chance to reflect and get into planning for future events.*

## In the Pipeline...

Our Specialist Groups have been busy bees this month as we start to plan in earnest for events for later in 2026 and 2027. We're still firming up details - so of course stay tuned and check our events pages online and from page 3 for updates - but we're happy to announce that we will be hosting another event with East Malling Trust: "Horticulture and Healthy Diets" on 26th November 2026 and our Plant Biology Education conference will be back 13-14th April 2027. Mark your diaries now... And of course don't miss deadlines this month for closer events!

## Digital Makeover

The AAB team have been hard at work trying to find ways to improve our members' experience and over the coming months you will start to see a digital makeover of the AAB member platform as we shift to a new system in August/September. This will be much more user-friendly and include options to fully customise your communications preferences to your special interests, so no more spurious emails from the AAB! We will, of course, keep you all updated but please forgive any teething issues whilst we transition to this new system.

## Sad news

Last month we were deeply saddened to hear that two former AAB Council Members had passed away. Many of our Plant Science community will have known Philippa Borrill as an active member of the wheat community and a strong champion of early-career researchers. Philippa was a truly exceptional scientist and we are all shocked and saddened by the news of her sudden passing from a rare immune system disorder (HLH).

Our more experienced members will fondly remember Ian Cooper, who served as Honorary Programme Secretary for the Association of Applied Biologists from 1986 to 1993. A distinguished virologist in his own right, Ian continued to contribute to the society into his retirement.

This month we'd like to take a moment to celebrate their lives and legacy. A full obituary for Philippa and Ian can be found from page 9.

# Upcoming AAB Events

## Webinar 'all about' Integrated Pest Management

*29th May, 1pm BST*

The next webinar in our series all 'aabout' plant science and sustainable agriculture comes from our Biocontrol and IPM specialist group. Featuring a Keynote from Nicolas Munier-Jolain (INRAE): "IPMWORKS, an EU-wide network of demo farms", an early-career spotlight (TBC) and highlight from Annals of Applied Biology from Xiangming Xu.

**[Register for free](#)**

## Acrylamide in Cereal Products: Progress and Prospects

*3rd- 4th June, Palermo, Italy*

Addressing the latest research and prospects for reducing acrylamide in food from breeding, farming practices, food processing and beyond.

**[Online Registration still open](#)**



## Webinar 'all about' Plant Genome Editing

*16th June, 2pm BST*

The next webinar in the brand-new AAB-PlantEd series will feature talks from Claudia Payacán-Ortiz (Neocrop Technologies): "Integrative Platform for Accelerated Development of Wheat Varieties via Multiplex Genome Editing" and Jillis Grubben (Wageningen University): "Crispr4All: Accessible Genome Editing using ThermoCas9"

**[Register for free](#)**

## International Conference on Photosynthesis Research (ICPR26)

*26-30th July 2026, Liverpool, UK*

Bringing together academia and industry to translate new mechanistic understanding of photosynthetic function into improved crop production and more efficient terrestrial carbon sinks. With Keynotes from Danielle Way (Australian National University) and Nobel Laureate David Baker and Nathan Ennist (University of Washington, USA), ICPR26 will be our biggest event to date, featuring more than 20 concurrent sessions and 9 plenaries.

**[Register now - Abstract submission for posters closes 15th May](#)**



## International Symposium on Rice Functional Genomics (ISRFG2026)

*8-10th September 2026, London UK*

The 23rd ISRFG will bring together a global community of rice researchers to discuss 'fundamental science for climate resilient rice'. We're happy to announce that, thanks to generous funding from the Global Methane Hub, we have now opened travel awards for residents of Low-Middle Income Countries supporting registration, accommodation and up to £500 of travel costs.

**[Register now! Submit your abstracts by 15th May](#)**



## Auxin 2026

*4-8th October 2026, Albufeira, Portugal*

We are delighted to announce that the Auxin2026 meeting will take place in the Algarve next year. This quadrennial event brings together leading and emerging researchers in auxin biology to discuss the current state and future prospects for this exciting and fast moving research area! With 27 invited speakers from around the world, don't miss out!

*Register now - early-bird rates end 31st May*



## ECPro 2026 - Career Essentials for Applied Biologists

*20th - 21st October, Nottingham UK*



Save the date - the ECPro group will be hosting their first conference this October, focussing on communication and career development for early career applied biologists. With talks, panel discussions, workshops and plenty of opportunities to network with fellow early career professionals across academia and industry - a full programme will be announced soon. Watch this space and save the date!

## Advances in Integrated Pest and Pathogen Management - IPPM26

*3-4th November, Leicester UK*

IPPM26 will be returning to Leicester by popular demand. Save the date - further details to be announced soon.

## Sustainable Crop Nutrition - AAB President's Meeting

*17-18th November, York UK*

Join us as we address global issues in sustainable crop nutrition, bridging fertilizer use, soil health and plant uptake of nutrients essential to human health. The AAB President's Meeting is a biennial celebration of the research interests of the current AAB President - Professor Dale Sanders FRS. The programme will feature talks from submitted abstracts and invited speakers: Stephanie Swarbreck (Niab), Ute Kraemer (University of Bochum) and Tim Mauchline (Rothamsted Research) and award talks from the 2026 AAB President's Medallists.

*Register now - Medallist Nominations close 31st May*



## Advances in Nematology 2026

*10th December, London UK*

Advances in Nematology will be hosted at the Linnean Society of London again on 10th December 2026. Watch this space for further information later in the year.

## International Advances in Plant Virology - IAPV 2027

*6-8th April 2027, Cambridge UK*



Save the date - the biennial IAPV will be hosted next April in Cambridge. Design the conference logo for your chance to win free registration. Send your design to [jordan@aab.org.uk](mailto:jordan@aab.org.uk) by 31st May.

*Logo competition closes 31st May*

# Events in our Community

## RSB Plant Health Webinar: Digital Viticulture: The future of vine health *6th May, 3pm BST, Online*

Join Dr Katie Gold from Cornell University and Rob Poyser from Vinescapes, who will discuss the future of Vine Health and disease control, as well as Dr Gold's Grape Sensing, Pathology, and Extension Lab at Cornell (GrapeSPEC).



[Register for free](#)

## Royal Society Environment Prize Lecture: Feeding the world without costing the earth

*16th June, London & Online*



Join us for the Royal Society Environment Prize Lecture delivered by Professor Andrew Balmford FRS. Professor Balmford will consider how to reconcile biodiversity conservation with meeting human food needs and other land-demanding activities.

[Register for free](#)

## SEB Plant Environment Physiology Group Early Career Workshop

*24th July, Liverpool UK*

Ahead of Photosynthesis 2026, the Society of Experimental Biology's PEPG group are pleased to present this one day satellite meeting aimed at Early Career Researchers working in the field of photosynthesis and plant physiology. Join us to network and share your research and experiences in a relaxed environment. Featuring talks from submitted abstracts, a Poster Session and a 'Careers Panel discussion', featuring Erik Murchie (University of Nottingham), Elizabete Carmo-Silva (Lancaster University), Gemma Molero (KWS) Ian Smilie (LI-COR) and Jordan Robson (AAB).

[Submit your abstracts by 15th May!](#)



## 9th International Plant Phenotyping Symposium: "Phenotyping for All: Bridging the Gap in Global Agriculture"

*12-16th October, Accra, Ghana*

The International Plant Phenotyping Network (IPPN) and the West Africa Centre for Crop Improvement (WACCI) are honored to invite you to the 9th International Plant Phenotyping Symposium (IPPS9). For its historic first edition on the African continent, this symposium convenes a global community of scientists and industry partners to confront the challenge of food insecurity in an era of unprecedented global shocks. IPPS9 will focus on the adaptation and deployment of plant phenotyping tools specifically tailored to serve Pan-African research and agriculture.

[Register now - early-bird rates end 14th May](#)

## New Phytologist Symposium: Forest interactions

*13-16th October, Leysin, Switzerland*



Explore plant interactions in forest environments at all levels from micro- to macro-scales and across the whole spectrum of plant biology.

[Submit your abstract by 20th May](#)

## Rank Prize Symposium - Hidden Hunger: from plant breeding to policy

7-10th September, Lake District, UK

Applications are currently open to join the next Rank Prize symposium as an early-career speaker this September. To apply please send a CV and short statement of interest (max 1 page) to [helen.berrington@rankprize.org](mailto:helen.berrington@rankprize.org)



Apply by 30th June



## Plant Pathology 2026 (PPATH2026) and Early Careers Plant Pathology 2026 (ECP2026)

8-11th September, Norwich UK

The British Society for Plant Pathology (BSPP) invite you to register for their annual meeting. Featuring a fantastic set of confirmed speakers, plus plenty of opportunities to present from submitted abstracts. PPATH2026 will also feature a session co-organised by the AAB Applied Plant Pathology group on "Surveillance and Improved Disease Control".

Abstract deadline for oral presentations: 31st May

## UK Precision Breeding – Farming Futures Conference

24th September, Norwich UK



Join the John Innes Centre for a one-day conference bringing together farmers, breeders, researchers, policymakers, and industry leaders to explore the fast-evolving opportunities of precision breeding in the UK.

Save the date

## Adapt to Thrive: Enhancing multi-stress tolerance for crop resilience (CROPADAPT2026)

14- 15th October, Ghent, Belgium



The junior scientists at ILVO are excited to invite you to a dynamic, young scientist-led plant symposium that brings together researchers, students, and professionals from across the plant sciences community. The program is structured around two complementary perspectives: immediate resilience, focusing on how plants endure stress today, and future resilience, exploring innovative ways to shape the next generation of crops.

Register now - early-bird rates end 1st July

## New Phytologist Next Generation Scientists 2026

1st- 4th December, Pune, India & Online

Exclusively for early career researchers in plant science (including PhD students and any researcher with up to five years' experience since gaining/defending their PhD, excluding career breaks). New Phytologist next generation scientists meetings brings early career researchers together with more established researchers from around the world, including New Phytologist and Plants, People, Planet Editors and Advisors.



New Phytologist  
next generation scientists

Apply by 20th May

# Community News

*Do you have something to share with our community? Opportunities, jobs, achievements... we'd love to hear about them. Get in touch with AAB Office!*

## Fascination of Plants Day - 18 May 2026

The eighth international "Fascination of Plants Day" will be celebrated on 18th May by plant scientists across the world under the umbrella of the European Plant Science Organisation (EPSO). Find events in your area and ways to get involved at <https://plantday18may.org/>.



Fascination of  
Plants Day  
2026

## Resilient farming for a resilient future



The British Ecological Society's Scottish Policy Group have set out their vision for resilient farming in Scotland in a new report, where agriculture leads the way in addressing climate and nature crises, and regenerative farming supports healthy soils that are resilient to a changing climate. [Read it now.](#)

## Farmers - Rothamsted Need Your Help

Rothamsted Research are asking for farmers to fill in two surveys: one [monitoring carabid beetles](#) - as part of the AgZero+ project exploring the use of tools by farmers for monitoring beneficial insects, and the potential to provide data on the best farm management options to support natural-enemy pest control.



ROTHAMSTED  
RESEARCH

The second survey explores two of the biggest challenges facing arable farming today: [drought and blackgrass](#). Open to farmers, agronomists and farm managers across the UK - Rothamsted are looking for your experience of how drought is affecting crops, how blackgrass behaves under dry conditions, and what management approaches are being used in practice. The aim is to put farmer experience at the centre of future solutions. Each survey will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

## ICYMI - Catch up on Past Webinars



In case you missed it, you can catch up on the [International Barley Hub's Webinar Series](#) over on the James Hutton YouTube Channel - including a fantastic talk last month from Sharon Zytynska (University of Manchester) on "Induced resistance in barley how rhizobacteria, genotype, and environment shape aphid defence". And of course, don't forget you can also catch up on all previous webinars in the AAB's series all 'aabout' plant sciences and sustainable agriculture too over on the [AAB channel!](#)

# Career Development Opportunities

## AAB President's Medals

Nominations are open for three new AAB President's Medals, celebrating emerging applied biologists and members of the community who are driving positive change: the Plant Science Medal (for research excellence in Plant Sciences) and Sustainable Futures Medal (for implementation or development of sustainable practices in agriculture, horticulture, forestry & land management) are aimed at those within 5-15 years of their highest degree whilst the Accessibility in Applied Biology Medal is open to all! Don't miss out - [nominations close 31st May](#).



## 6 open Assistant Professor Posts at the University of Warwick

The School of Life Sciences (SLS) wishes to appoint six excellent and ambitious early career principal investigators to our academic research and teaching staff. We are looking for individuals who develop innovative and original research programmes that address current and future challenges with strong potential for translation and impact, in or across the specific areas of life science including environmental biology or environmental microbiology and plant/crop science including phenomics, plant physiology, genetics/breeding or virology. [Apply by 31st May](#).



## Monogram ECR General Travel Award

Open to all members of the Monogram community from academia or industry, early-career travel awards of up to £500 are now available to support travel to workshops, training or visits to collaborators. To apply for funding send your CV and proposal letter (1 page max) to [MonogramNetworkUK@gmail.com](mailto:MonogramNetworkUK@gmail.com) by 31st May.

## Royal Society Grants

Current open grant calls at the Royal Society include the [International Exchange grants closing 4th June](#) - for scientists based in the UK to travel and stimulate new research collaborations - and the [Short Industry Fellowship closing 28th May](#) - to fund short collaborative projects between academia and industry. Visit the [Royal Society](#) website for further calls.

The logo for The Royal Society, featuring the text 'THE ROYAL SOCIETY' in white, all-caps, serif font on a red rectangular background.

THE  
ROYAL  
SOCIETY



## Global South Conference Travel Grant

Biology Open has launched a new grant offering up to £3,000 to early-career researchers based in the Global South, wanting to attend international scientific meetings relating to the broad areas of research covered by the journal. Find out more and [apply by 19th June](#).

## Global Methane Hub LMIC Travel Grant

Thanks to generous funding from the Global Methane Hub we are pleased to open travel grants for residents of Low-Middle Income Countries to attend the International Symposium of Rice Functional Genomics this year in London. Find out more and [apply by 1st June](#).



# In Memoriam



## *Professor Philippa Borrill*

1989 - 2026

It was with terrible sadness that the AAB community learnt of the recent passing of Professor Philippa Borrill. A truly exceptional scientist, Philippa was a warm and uplifting person, and her death has been felt deeply by the global plant science community.

Philippa's scientific career started at the University of Cambridge, where she read Plant Sciences. Graduating in 2010, she began her PhD at the John Innes Centre working in the laboratories of Professor Cristóbal Uauy and Professor Alison Smith. There, investigating how the process of senescence affects wheat nutritional quality, she found herself drawn to the vast genetic resources available in wheat and the potential to generate real impact working on this staple crop consumed by billions around the world.

Awarded a BBSRC Future Leader Fellowship in 2015 to continue her research at the JIC, over the next few years she helped build several pivotal resources for the global wheat research community: contributing to the gene expression atlas for wheat and sequencing mutant populations that researchers around the world now rely on. For these outstanding contributions she received the International Wheat Genome Sequencing Consortium Leadership Award in 2017.

Philippa went on to establish her own group at the University of Birmingham, continuing to publish prolifically, and was awarded the Rank Prize New Lecturer Award in 2018. Returning to the John Innes Centre as a Group Leader in 2021, Philippa's lab aimed to understand gene function in wheat, with a goal of improving the grain's nutritional quality - a quest complicated by the polyploid nature of the wheat genome. With this in mind, Philippa's group continued to develop genomics and training resources for the wheat community.

Despite all the pressures of forging a successful research career, Philippa took on numerous community roles that looked to lift the careers of others. Philippa's commitment to the community was evident in both her scientific contributions and the dedication with which she supported the people around her. Her scientific excellence and community spirit were highlighted through numerous society awards throughout her career, including the New Phytologist Tansley Medal (2019), the Society for Experimental Biology President's Plant Medal (2022) and the Carlotta award (2025).

We were particularly grateful for the active role that Philippa played in the Association of Applied Biologists. Philippa joined the AAB Council in 2019 as 'Early Career Champion' and became a regular contributor to our society, ensuring that activities were tailored towards improving engagement with Early Career Professionals (ECP) and leading organisation of the first AAB ECP workshop in December 2023. Philippa also served on the Monogram Network Committee from 2020-2024, as chairperson from 2021-2023, actively shaping the UK's cereal research community.

Philippa was a genuinely lovely person and an extraordinary scientist; without a doubt the community will deeply miss her. We are exceptionally honoured to have known her. We will remember her as a thoughtful scientist who was never afraid to ask the important questions, someone who always made time for people and championed others, and as a colleague whose presence made the world a little brighter. Our thoughts are with Philippa's family, friends and all those who were lucky enough to know her.

Philippa's family has asked that donations can be made to one of her favoured charities; 'Cats Protection' 'Miniature Donkeys For Wellbeing' or 'Mind' at <https://drphilippaborrill.muchloved.com/>



## ***J. I. (Ian) Cooper M.A., Ph.D*** ***1941 - 2026***

Sadly, Ian Cooper passed away at the end of February 2026. He was a distinguished UK plant virologist with a long-standing career. He authored many publications on viruses infecting natural plant ecosystems, amenity plants and crops. Ian obtained a BSc in Botany from Newcastle University and was awarded a Botany MSc from Imperial College London University. His St. Andrews University PhD study under the supervision of Bryan Harrison was on the soil-borne potato disease caused by tobacco rattle virus. This was undertaken in 1966-1969 at the Scottish Horticultural Research Institute (which later became the Scottish Crop Research Institute and then James Hutton Institute). After completing his PhD, Ian was offered a postdoctoral position working on soil-borne potato viruses at this same Institute. In 1972, he joined the Unit of Invertebrate Pathology, Commonwealth Forestry Institute, Oxford University. Subsequently, this Unit evolved into the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Institute of Virology, then the Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology, and finally the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH). He rose to the position of Principal Scientific Officer in Oxford making major contributions to all four of these organisations, including helping maintain them as centres of excellence in virology. Following his retirement in 2002 he was appointed a CEH Fellow (2002-2010) where he continued mentoring research and supporting students and staff.

After he established his Plant Virology research group in Oxford 1972, Ian led this group successfully right through to his retirement in 2002. He made many significant contributions to the study of the viruses of trees, shrubs and natural ecosystems, and was a pioneer in identifying and characterizing viruses affecting forest and amenity trees and shrubs. His research fundamentally shifted the focus of plant virology from only dealing with crops and pastures to the broader natural environment. He authored the definitive textbook "Virus Diseases of Trees and Shrubs" (1983, 2nd Edn.), which became the standard reference in this field. He also authored the important book "Viruses and the Environment" (1993, 2nd Edn.) and co-edited the book "Virus Diseases and Crop Biosecurity" (2007). Influential, reviews he co-authored included "Responses of Plants to Viruses: Proposals for the Use of terms" (1983) which provided standardized definitions for terms like immunity, resistance, and tolerance, and helped bridge the nomenclature gap between virologists and plant breeders. His reviews also included "Wild Plants and Viruses: Under-Investigated Ecosystems" (2006) which, amongst other things, emphasised the role of viruses in diminishing wild plant "fitness", i.e. their ability to survive, grow, and reproduce. Another example of a critical achievement arising from his research included moving beyond purely agricultural contexts over how viruses are transmitted through seeds, pollen, and soil-borne vectors to include natural environments. He also demonstrated that viruses move in both directions between managed crops and natural vegetation. He then explored how external factors like global warming and atmospheric pollution interact with viral diseases, potentially exacerbating their effects on trees and shrubs. Later in his career, he investigated whether transgene-derived virus resistance might provide wild plants with a selective advantage, potentially increasing their weediness or invasiveness, and developed a phased approach for the environmental risk assessment of transgenic plants to identify potential hazards to the natural environment. He also undertook research exploring the broader relationship between microbial diversity and the stability of ecosystem functions.

In 1986-1993, Ian served as Honorary Programme Secretary for the Association of Applied Biologists. He was responsible for overseeing the planning and scientific content of the Association's many scientific meetings and symposia, liaising with its diverse specialist groups and ensuring the high standard of research presented at all its events. His work as Programme Secretary was also instrumental in the Association's successful centenary commemoration, and the continued success of its journal, the Annals of Applied Biology.

Ian is remembered with gratitude by the many coworkers, colleagues, PhD students and others who were lucky enough to have known him over the years. He set high standards and rigour to the research he led, and inspired others to achieve and flourish. He was both nationally and internationally respected for his many contributions to the advancement of plant virology. He was a regular contributor at scientific meetings across the world and amongst many visits to other collaborating institutions in Europe and North America, enjoyed two sabbaticals in Western Australia in the 1990's. His international contributions were always much appreciated.

Ian was also a model father fondly remembered by his family, wife Audrey and daughters, Wendy and Elaine.

Roger Jones, 30th March 2026



**International Advances in  
Plant Virology  
IAPV 2027**

6- 8th April 2027  
University of Cambridge

*Logo Competition*  
Win free registration to IAPV 2027

Submit your logo to  
[jordan@aab.org.uk](mailto:jordan@aab.org.uk)  
by 31st May 2026

**aab**  
ASSOCIATION OF APPLIED BIOLOGISTS

# Meeting Reports - Voice of the Future 2026

*We were very proud to support five of our early-career members (coincidentally all women in science!) to attend the 2026 Voice of the Future event at the Houses of Parliament. This month we hear from two more attendees..*

**Qurat Ul Ain Ali Hira**  
*James Hutton Institute, UK*  
[qurat.ulainalihira@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:qurat.ulainalihira@hutton.ac.uk)

On 20 March, I had the honour of attending the Voice of the Future event at the Houses of Parliament as an Early Career Representative of the Association of Applied Biologists (AAB). Organised by the Royal Society of Biology, this prestigious event brings together early career scientists from across the UK to engage directly with parliamentarians and senior policymakers on issues shaping the future of science and innovation. Representing AAB and the wider scientific community at such a high profile forum was both a privilege and an inspiring experience.

The event provided a unique platform for early career researchers to voice concerns, ask questions, and contribute meaningfully to discussions on national science policy. Sitting alongside representatives from multiple scientific societies, I was struck by the breadth of expertise present in the room and the shared commitment to ensuring that science remains at the core of evidence based policy-making. Being able to engage directly with MPs, Lords, and senior government officials reinforced the importance of an open dialogue between scientists and decision makers.

One of the most impactful moments of the event was the discussion around the need for long term, stable funding for applied biological research, particularly in areas such as climate resilience, plant health, and sustainable agriculture. These discussions highlighted a clear gap that can exist between ambitious government strategies and the practical realities of sustaining research capacity, education, and skills development. Hearing policymakers engage seriously with these concerns demonstrated the value of early career voices in shaping future priorities.

Beyond the formal sessions, the networking opportunities were equally valuable. Informal conversations with fellow AAB delegates, early career researchers from other scientific disciplines, and policymakers created space for meaningful exchanges of ideas. These interactions illustrated the interdisciplinary nature of current scientific challenges and the importance of collaboration across fields to address them effectively.

As an international student in the UK, this experience was particularly significant for me. Observing first-hand how UK policymakers interact with scientists and how scientific evidence feeds into policy discussions enhanced my understanding of the science–policy interface and strengthened my sense of belonging within the UK research community. Reflecting on the event, I felt both valued and empowered as an early career scientist.

***“As an international student and an early career member of the AAB, it was a great honour to see how UK policymakers actively work with scientists to shape a better future for science and technology. This experience has given me a deeper understanding of the policy process and has significantly boosted my confidence to engage in these conversations moving forward.”***

What impressed me most was the genuine interest shown by parliamentarians in hearing directly from early career researchers. There was a clear recognition that the voices of emerging scientists are essential for building a resilient, inclusive, and forward looking research environment. This made the experience not only informative but also personally motivating.

I left the Voice of the Future event feeling optimistic, confident, and proud to represent both AAB and the wider scientific community. I am grateful to the Association of Applied Biologists for supporting early career researchers in accessing such opportunities and to the Royal Society of Biology for organising a well run and impactful event. Experiences like this play a vital role in empowering the next generation of scientists to contribute actively to the future of UK science and innovation.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would sincerely thank the Association of Applied Biologists for selecting my question and providing me with the opportunity to participate in this event.

## **Elizabeth Pendlington**

**CABI, UK**

[E.Pendlington@cabi.org](mailto:E.Pendlington@cabi.org)



*Elizabeth and Qurat (centre left and right) with fellow AAB delegates Gina and Mollie (Left, Right) in front of the Houses of Parliament ahead of VOF 2026.*

Stepping into Portcullis House felt like being in a slight parallel universe. Upon walking through the inner doors past security we circled round an atrium where MPs and civil servants sat chatting in a space that was reminiscent of a university building. Then the next minute we were walking along a corridor with modern portraits of past prime ministers.

Part way along the corridor we entered the Attlee suite which featured a colourful portrait of Theresa May outside - not the worst PM to be associated with an event on science policy. The Attlee suite looked in every sense like a seminar room combined with that distinct British, almost patriotic, tiredness that government and council buildings capture. Not helped by the fact that it was situated above the kitchen of Portcullis House.

Whilst waiting for the event to start I discussed phytoplankton and the difficulties of culturing aquatic organisms with a member of the British Ecological Society and at the same time admired the energy rippling round the room from the steady discussion ongoing between scientists of every field. Due to various sound issues, we were unable to hear the chair of the panel begin the questions. Unfortunately, the sound issues were not resolved till towards the end of the event which was an oversight in terms of accessibility and effective science communication.

Despite the sound issues, I still felt that I was able to engage with the question and answers going between the society representatives and panellists. I was impressed with Victoria Heath's points on neurodivergent representation and scientific communication in deprived areas of the UK. Emily Darlington came across as frustrated by the disruption Brexit has caused to our scientific partnerships with the European Union. Lauren Sullivan was particularly engaged with the questions asked to her and was the only panellist to initiate a conversation, like with our AAB representative about funding for plant sciences.

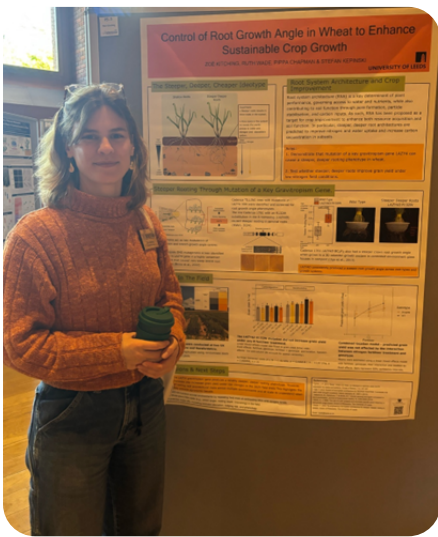
***“As a Women in STEM, I found it very encouraging that the panel was majority women and broached discussions on the “leaky pipeline.” In particular, how women struggle to re-enter the science sector after maternity leave in comparison to men taking sick leave.”***

Overall, the most positive impression I came away with was the hope and engagement radiating from all of the early career scientists in attendance. It was great to raise science issues with the policy officers and parliamentarians present but it felt like they were already aware of the issues. I would be interested to know what progress has been made on the repeated issues brought up at these events. Nevertheless, I have every hope that myself and other voices of the future will keep pushing for more effective and all encompassing science policy.



# Meeting Reports - Monogram 2026

*The annual Monogram Network conference was hosted this year at Robinson College, University of Cambridge - for the first time officially in collaboration with the AAB. Hear what our ECR travel awardees thought...*



## Zoë Kitching

*University of Leeds, UK*

*bszlk@leeds.ac.uk*

This year was the first time I attended the Monogram Cereals and Grasses Conference, made possible by a generous travel grant from the Association of Applied Biologists. The meeting was excellently hosted by NIAB at the University of Cambridge's Robinson College, an ideal location just a short and scenic walk from the city centre. On arriving at Robinson College, I was immediately struck by the friendly buzz of conversation. It was clear that this is a close and welcoming community, with many attendees already familiar with one another. This atmosphere made it easy to strike up conversations and meet new people.

The conference programme was packed with a wide range of engaging and informative talks covering diverse aspects of cereal and grass research. For me, the standout presentations were given by Dr Eric Ober and Prof. Malcolm Bennett. Both speakers have worked extensively on cereal root systems, and as a researcher in this area, it was particularly encouraging to see root research receiving such attention in a field where it has historically been overlooked. Their talks reinforced my view that improving root systems is key to increasing the sustainability of yields in an increasingly unstable climate, while also reducing inputs in a volatile global economy, given the central role of roots in determining nutrient acquisition and climate adaptation.

These talks also challenged my thinking in important ways. My own work focuses on developing a wheat root trait to improve drought tolerance, nitrogen uptake, and carbon sequestration, with a primary focus on UK conditions. However, research presented at the conference highlighted that such traits are not always easily transferable to other crops, such as sorghum or pearl millet, and may even have contrasting effects under different soil types and climatic conditions. This encouraged me to think more critically about the broader applicability of my work and the need to consider context specific responses.

The poster session provided excellent opportunities for networking and practical discussion. Talking with other researchers working on root traits in the field gave me valuable insights for my upcoming fieldwork. In particular, one industry researcher noted that a soil core break method worked well in clay soils but was ineffective in sandy soils and was also highly dependent on soils not being too dry. This raised potential concerns for my own fieldwork this year, particularly following last year's drought and the preceding dry winter. It was also validating to hear that, to date, no one seems to have identified a quick and straightforward method for accurately determining root biomass from soil cores, reinforcing that these challenges are widely shared within the field.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the conference was seeing friends from previous lab groups present their work. On both an academic and personal level, it was inspiring to see peers nearing the end of their PhDs or starting their

first postdoctoral positions confidently sharing their research. It was encouraging to see people at later stages thriving, and this left me feeling excited and optimistic about my own future career trajectory. These conversations were also valuable for comparing results and discussing potential future collaborations, and the conference was rounded off by a delicious and lively conference dinner.

I am very grateful to the AAB for the travel grant that enabled me to attend. It was a fantastic week of good science, engaging discussions, and excellent company. I am very much looking forward to attending, and hopefully presenting, at next year's conference in Nottingham.

# Update from the Annals of Applied Biology

## Call for Papers: RECROP: Plant Adaptations to Extreme Environments

**Submission Deadline: extended to 1st June 2026**

This Special Issue invites high-quality research and review articles that address strategies for crop adaptation to climate change. We particularly welcome studies on innovative breeding approaches, molecular and genomic mechanisms of stress tolerance, biotechnological solutions, and integrated agronomic practices. Contributions that bridge laboratory, field, and modeling approaches to improve crop performance and yield stability are highly encouraged. By highlighting cutting-edge solutions and practical strategies, this Special Issue aims to advance climate-resilient agriculture and inspire new approaches that ensure global food security under changing environmental conditions.

**Topics for this call for papers include but are not restricted to:**

- ◆ Genomic and transcriptomic insights into stress responses
- ◆ Gene editing approaches in stress adaptation
- ◆ Plant-microbe interactions in extreme environments
- ◆ Epigenetic regulation of abiotic stress tolerance
- ◆ Functional traits and phenotyping for stress-resilient crops

### Guest Editors:

*Prof. Musa Kavas & Prof. Kubilay Yıldırım-  
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**Annals of Applied Biology**  
**Biosciences for Sustainability**



## Special Issue: Call for Papers

RECROP: Plant Adaptations  
to Extreme Environments

**Submission Deadline:**  
**31 March 2026**



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## Call for Papers:

### Roots to Regenerative Agriculture: Soils, Biodiversity and Novel Approaches

**Submission deadline: extended to 1st June 2026**

The concept of Regenerative Agriculture is successfully engaging the agricultural community, food industry and policy makers to consider how to utilise agricultural land to maximise the delivery of ecosystem services.

Regenerative practices are intended to mimic natural processes in order to deliver, productive and healthy ecosystems, enhance soil health, minimise environmental impacts, enrich social value, increase carbon sequestration and improve resilience to climate, water availability (flood and drought).

Root systems, the rhizosphere (the soil around the roots) and soil biota are increasingly topics of conversation and research in regenerative agriculture. Regenerative practices focus on building 'healthy and functional' soils, which are full of biological life. Understanding how these micro- and macro-organisms interact with each other and plants via their root systems and in turn how these are affected by different agricultural practices and stresses (e.g. waterlogging or drought) is an important part of meeting the global challenges of food security, biodiversity loss and climate change.

This Special Issue aims to bring together submissions that explore the evidence for the novel approaches in regenerative agriculture and agroecology. The SI is organised to coincide with the Roots to Regenerative Agriculture conference organised in York, November 18-20 2025.

***Topics for this call for papers include but are not restricted to:***

- ◆ Regenerative Agriculture
- ◆ Agroecology
- ◆ Soil Health
- ◆ Soil Biodiversity
- ◆ Inter-cropping
- ◆ Root Systems and Rhizosphere

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## **Special Issue: Call for Papers**

Roots to Regenerative  
Agriculture: Soils, Biodiversity  
and Novel Approaches

**Submission Deadline:**  
**1 April 2026**



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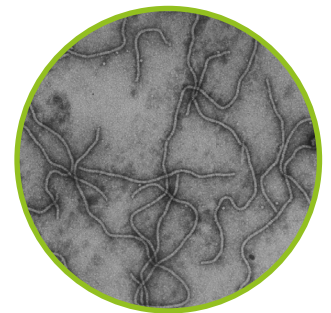
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