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## PHC Bulletin Newsletter



Updating you on recent activities of the Plant Health Centre

Issue 3, December 2020

### In this Bulletin

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PHC News



Events



New Project Calls



Blog Spot

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### PHC News



### *Farewell to 2020*

Welcome to the third issue of our bulletin newsletter, which will be the last for 2020. This year will of course be remembered for the global pandemic that has had such a major impact on us all, and disrupted or cancelled many of the plans that the plant health community had to promote the importance of plant health in what was the UN's International Year of Plant Health. However, groups and organisations (including here at the Centre) have demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity in transitioning their activities to online formats to keep the crucial work of communication within the plant health community and knowledge dissemination to the wider society active over these challenging times. We at the centre would like to end the year by thanking all those who have gone the extra mile for plant health this year in Scotland and beyond. It should be with a real sense of achievement that we go into 2021, a year that will bring not just a continuation of many of the challenges faced in 2020, but an additional layer of difficulties for many in the plant-based sectors as the complexities of Brexit unfold. Nevertheless as a community we should take encouragement from what we have achieved this year in spite of the challenges, and remember that biosecurity and the value of our green spaces has perhaps never been so prominent in the minds of the public, industry and governments, which presents unique opportunities to achieve positive changes for plant health policies and practices.

-Sonia Humphris, Plant Health Centre Manager

### *Award for our Director*

The Centre's Director Professor Ian Toth was recently awarded the British Potato Industry Award 2020 by AHDB in recognition of his invaluable contribution to the potato industry over the past 25 years. An example of Ian's ongoing contribution to the success of the potato industry is the lead role he is currently taking in a Centre coordinated working group bringing together policy, science and industry to tackle the issue of Potato Cyst Nematode in Scotland. We hope that you will join us in congratulating Ian on this recognition of many years of dedication to the humble spud.

### *Adding value to the Centre*

Members of the Centre's Directorate and SART have been successful in gaining funding for two new projects as part of a Bacterial Plant Pathogens Initiative funded by the UK Government's Strategic Priorities Fund, with funding partners including Scottish Government, BBSRC, NERC and Defra. A team that includes those who delivered the Centre's Liberibacter project ([PHC2018/03](#)) have been awarded a £2.3 million project to investigate the biology, environment and agricultural practices of the insect vectors of *Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum* (the causal agent of crop diseases including zebra chip of potato). A second project worth £2.1 million investigates the biology of how the bacterial pathogen *Pectobacterium* (the causal agent of blackleg disease of potato) reaches, infects and is controlled by other organisms in the environment including free-living nematodes, insects and root-associated bacteria. This has built considerable collaboration between the Centre and all nine projects in this initiative across a range of bacterial pathogens and their plant hosts. For more information visit <https://www.bacterialplantdiseases.uk/>.

### *Ongoing plant health concerns*

There have unfortunately been several news stories recently that bring home the importance of plant health and biosecurity, including; the National Trust reporting its worst year for Ash dieback; nearly half a million larch scheduled to be felled on Arran to prevent the spread of *Phytophthora ramorum*; and the concerning report that *Xyllella* continues to spread in Europe – having been detected for the first time in the southern French region of Occitanie. The pathogen was discovered in a lavender plant at a garden centre during routine checks in August. Defra's Chief Plant Health Officer Nicola Spence described this as "Further evidence that *Xyllella* is being moved in trade of high risk hosts in the EU".

### *Brexit*

As this bulletin issue 'goes to press' there is still no clarity on whether the UK will have a deal with the EU, or on the specifics of a deal if it is made. However, it is important for any importer of plants from the EU into Scotland to know that from the 1st of January 2021 they will be required to use the Place of Destination as the first place of drop-off (where inspections will then take place). If this is in Scotland, then the importer will have to register with SASA – see [here](#) for more details.

### *Online resources*

There has recently been a major update of the [UK Plant Health Risk Register](#), now with more comprehensive hosts detailed for each pest.

The Plant Health Alliance (producers of the 'Plant Healthy' plant health management [standard](#)) intended to assist businesses and organisations in the development of a consistent plant health management system and their responsibilities within the plant

supply chain) have recently released five Plant Healthy [training modules](#) – this is a beta version launch to gather feedback from users.

### *Funding calls*

To end this section of the bulletin, we are excited to announce that we have three funding calls currently live – two projects (one on *Xylella*, and another on pest risk perceptions and IPM in Agriculture) and a 6-month fellowship that will be based with NatureScot. Have a look at the New Project Calls section below in this bulletin for more information – and please pass on the information to those you think might be interested in bidding or applying.

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## Events



Shortly after Issue 2 of our newsletter bulletin it was the UK's Plant Health Week (as part of the UN's International Year of Plant Health), running from the 19th to the 27th of September. For this week the Centre launched our Key Principles for Plant Health in Scotland, that outline important steps to protect plant health in Scotland. To introduce these principles and furnish them with some examples, our Directorate filmed a conversation about them that you can watch [here](#). We also published an information booklet that further details these principles, which you can find on our [website](#) and is also available as a PDF to [download](#). We encourage you to circulate these to anyone you think might benefit from the messages and advice in them.

During Plant Health Week we also sought to bring these principles to life, as well as highlighting the importance of plant health to the wider community, through a series of stand-alone news pieces, mostly produced by our Science Advisory and Response Team ([SART](#)), each highlighting the importance of plant health to some of Scotland's iconic

plant-based assets. Our contributions were articles on:

“[Protecting our humble spud](#)” – by Ian Toth and Damian Bienkowski (James Hutton Institute)

“[Sudden Larch Death – an invasive tree killer and how you can do your bit to help](#)” - by Sarah Green and Chris Quine (Forest Research)

“[Taking steps for healthy forests in Scotland](#)” – by Stephen Cavers (UKCEH) and Ruth Mitchell (James Hutton Institute)

“[Why fans of whisky and gin need to worry about plant health](#)” – by Sarah Gurr (University of Exeter), Fiona Burnett (SRUC) and Sarah Green (Forest Research). This article was [picked up](#) widely in the mainstream press.

Two videos – “[Keeping Scotland’s Garden’s Healthy](#)” and “[Clean Your Boots](#)” – with David Knott and Katy Hayden (Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh)

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## New Project Calls



We are pleased to announce that we are commissioning two projects and one fellowship which are currently “live” for applications: all three opportunities can be found on our [website](#).

The deadline for all three calls is 12pm on Monday 21st December 2020.

### Fellowship PHC2020/03 - **Plant Health Fellowship - Natural Environment**.

This Fellowship aims to further our understanding of the challenges posed by plant health threats to the natural environment in Scotland in order to protect this valuable resource. The Plant Health Fellowship requires an ambitious postgraduate to lead on an evidence-based review of the threats to this sector to inform future policies aimed at mitigating these risks. The person will be based at NatureScot, either in person and/or virtually depending on COVID-19 restrictions, and supported by Scotland’s Plant Health Centre. Applications for this position will be via the royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh [vacancies page](#).

**PHC2020/04 - Improving knowledge of *Xylella fastidiosa* vector ecology: modelling vector occurrence and abundance in the wider landscape in Scotland.**

This project will build on the results of previous *Xylella* projects commissioned by the Centre and will address the knowledge gaps highlighted by those projects including: production of a detailed picture of the presence and abundance of *Xylella* vectors across differing landscapes; assessment of appropriate vector trapping methods for *Xylella* surveillance programmes; refinement of *Xylella* spread and risk models that incorporate Scottish *Xylella* vector data; and the analysis of the suitability of current EU *Xylella* eradication strategies versus alternatives within the Scottish context.

**PHC2020/05 - Identifying links between farmer and agronomist perceptions on pest and disease risk, the information sources they use to determine pesticide usage and the uptake of IPM methods.**

This project aims to understand where growers and agronomists currently gather information to form their impression of pest and disease risk and inform their decision making on the need for interventions, pesticide or otherwise. The project will identify accurate, efficient and trusted sources and test whether these are influential in the appropriate usage of control options across key arable regions and crop types.

If you are aware of any individuals or research groups with the required skills and enthusiasm to take on these projects or fellowship, then please pass on these details to them.

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## **Blog Spot - Meet Vincent, the Plant Health Centre's modelling fellow**



I am a mathematical biologist (a.k.a. theoretical biologist) and the Plant Health Centre's modelling fellow. My job is to take biological questions, such as "how will a potentially invasive crop pest spread if it arrives in Scotland?" and try to provide meaningful answers

and estimates by using mathematical models. I provide a modelling capacity for the Centre to support those that develop plant health policy, using my research to give the highest quality scientific advice to make the best-informed decisions that they can. Since joining the Centre, I have focussed on the threat to Scottish forestry from wood borer insects, specifically, a notorious pest of Common Ash – the Emerald Ash Borer. But before I tell you about that, how did I get here?

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Please visit our [website](#) to read the rest of [Vincent's blog](#), plus others.



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The Plant Health Centre is a virtual centre of expertise funded by Scottish Government through RESAS (Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division) to help tackle plant health challenges for Scotland



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