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PHC Bulletin Newsletter



Updating you on recent activities of the Plant Health Centre

Issue 4, April 2021

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Welcome to Issue 4

Welcome to the fourth edition of our Bulletin Newsletter. The start of the year saw a return to national lockdown for Scotland and the wider UK, bringing with it the multitude of challenges we are now all too familiar with and, as a result, this is the first of our bulletins for 2021.

Upcoming event

In the meantime, we have been continuing to operate in a fully virtual capacity, and we will be hosting a half-day online event on 3rd June to keep you up to speed with all things PHC (see Events section). This will include presentations on three recently completed projects that have assessed large-scale biosecurity risks to Scotland from landscaping and infrastructure plantings, non-specialist and online horticultural sales, and large-scale tree plantings for environmental benefits. Given that Scottish Forestry recently approved the largest woodland creation scheme this century - approximately 1.4 million trees, mostly Scots pine, birch, rowan, oak, aspen and alder are to be planted - the findings of these projects are very timely and important.

Ongoing plant health issues

In addition to the ever-changing COVID situation, since our last bulletin the Brexit transition period came to an end, with impacts for plant movements; some negative for Scottish industry (e.g. restrictions on the export of seed potatoes) and some hopefully positive, for example Defra introduced UK-wide legislation that implements new measures for *Xylella*. These measures came into force on 4th March 2021, and existing requirements that apply to the import of other host plants (Olive, Almond, Lavender, Rosemary and *Nerium oleander*) from countries where *Xylella* is known to occur have been strengthened.

A new addition to our website

At the start of 2021, the **Scottish IPM Assessment Plan** was simultaneously moved from the Scottish Government website to the [PHC website](#) and received a significant upgrade, courtesy of SRUC colleagues. This tool replaces older plans used by the Voluntary Initiative and Quality Assurance Schemes - Red Tractor and Scottish Quality Crops. Our Sector Lead for Agriculture, Prof Fiona Burnett has written an [article in Scottish Farmer](#) on its launch.

Recent reports and new projects

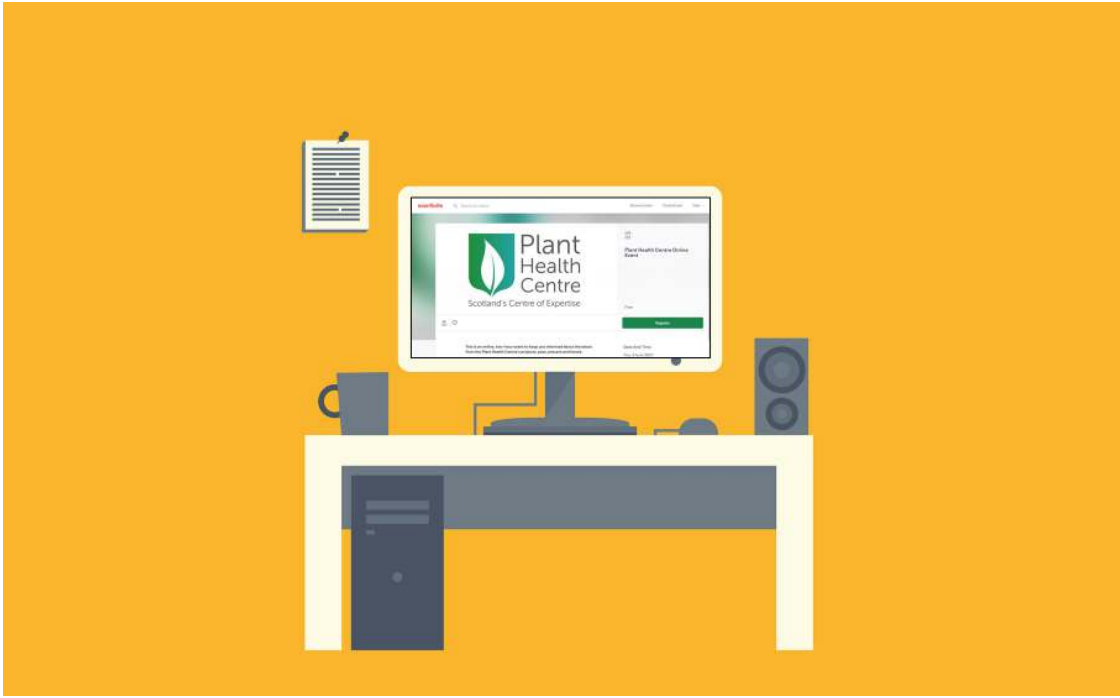
In addition, the first quarter of 2021 has seen the publication of several final reports from our commissioned projects - on Pesticide withdrawals and the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, as well as a report from a Centre-led working group on the growing threat of Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) to the Scottish potato industry (see the Publications section of this bulletin for more information).

Finally, we are very excited about having six newly commissioned projects that have either just started, or will be starting very soon. These include a Plant Health Fellowship in the natural environment, further research into *Xylella fastidiosa* vector ecology in Scotland, identification of links between farmer and agronomist perceptions on pest and disease risk and pesticide usage, a preliminary investigation into the threat of Bronze Birch Borer, research into the causes and potential management options for PCN, and a project to help the Centre's communication with our stakeholders.

All in all at the Centre we are starting the year on an upbeat note, and look forward to a time when we will be able to see everyone face to face again. In the meantime, we hope that you can join us for our online event in June.

- Sonia Humphris, Plant Health Centre Manager

Events



You may be aware that in previous years around this time we have jointly run Scotland's Plant Health Conference with the Scottish Government, NatureScot, HTA and Scottish Forestry. However, due to COVID we have decided that the next of these conferences will be postponed until such time as we can have an in-person event, hopefully later this year or early next year. In the meantime, we thought that many would appreciate an update from the PHC.

We are pleased therefore to announce that the Centre will be hosting an online, half day event on the 3rd of June 2021 (AM), and you are, of course, invited to join us - registration is free and now open via [Eventbrite](#).

Over the course of two hours, speakers from the Plant Health Centre will update you on our recent, current and potential projects - including recently completed research that has assessed large-scale biosecurity risks to Scotland from landscaping and infra-structure plantings, non-specialist and online horticultural sales, and large-scale tree plantings for environmental benefits. There will be some live talks, as well as 'anytime' content that you can view when it suits you.

Links to the day's events will be sent to those who have registered via [Eventbrite](#) prior to the 3rd of June.

Publications



Since our last edition of this bulletin, we have published five reports or policy summaries from Plant Health Centre projects:

As mentioned in the PHC News section, the Plant Health Centre now hosts the Scottish IPM Assessment [Plan](#). The creators of the tool have written a [policy brief](#) to accompany it.

The Project "Potential impacts arising from pesticide withdrawals to Scotland's plant health", which quantifies the impacts on Scottish plant health that will arise from pesticide withdrawal scenarios and sets this in the context and time frame of alternative management tools, now has its [Final Report](#) published. An addition report "[Economic impact of pesticide withdrawals to Scotland, with case studies](#)" has been [published](#) to build on the data and results from the above project, and uses case studies to understand the likely magnitude and distribution of potential impacts and how they may be mitigated.

Following a Ministerial round table meeting on PCN in June 2020, a working group of over 50 potato industry, government and academic partners was set up (from both Scotland and the wider UK) to identify a clear strategy for dealing with the PCN crisis. Following over 320 person hours of scheduled meetings, plus many days of personal discussions, recommendations for how to combat the growing threat of PCN to the Scottish potato industry have been proposed and are detailed in the [Final Report](#) of the working group.

Lastly, the [Final Report and Policy Summary](#) for the project "Monitoring for the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (BMSB) *Halyomorpha halys* in Scotland" are published. This feels like a very timely contribution to the issue of BMSB, as this pest has been caught in [pheromone traps in England](#). You can read more about this in a [press release](#) about the findings of the project, and there is also a newly published [BMSB fact sheet](#) available on the Defra Plant Health Portal - it is a very helpful guide that also shows you other UK native shield bugs that could easily be mistaken for BMSB.

New Projects



Since the start of the year, we have commissioned six new projects that have either just started or are due to commence very soon. Further details on each can be found on our [projects page](#).

PHC2020/03 - Plant Health Fellowship in the Natural Environment - Dr Ruth Mitchell (James Hutton Institute) will be furthering our understanding of the plant health threats to the natural environment in Scotland in order to protect this valuable resource. The fellowship is based at NatureScot.

PHC2020/04 - Improving knowledge of *Xylella fastidiosa* vector ecology: modelling spittlebug occurrence and abundance in the wider landscape in Scotland. Dr Daniel Chapman (University of Stirling) is leading researchers from UKCEH, Forest Research, SASA and SRUC to build on the results of the previous PHC Xylella projects (PHC2018 / 04 / 05 / 06) to further refine Scottish Government's contingency and preparedness measures for the possible arrival of *Xylella fastidiosa*.

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. Drs Henry Creissen and Elliot Meador (SRUC) will explore 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, pesticides or otherwise. This project will identify accurate, efficient and trusted sources and test whether these sources are influential in appropriate usage of control options across key arable regions and crop types.

PHC2020/06 - A preliminary investigation into the threat of Bronze Birch Borer (BBB - *Agrilus anxius*) to Scotland. A research team from Forest Research and National Museums Scotland, led by Katrina Dainton, will draw together available evidence and gather new evidence relating to the threat of Bronze Birch Borer to Scotland, covering; the current presence of *Agrilus* species (and natural enemies) in Scotland; identification of areas at

risk currently and under future climate scenarios (host species distribution and pest ecology); assessment and review of available *Agrilus* surveillance methodologies; and mapping of likely pathways of BBB entry into Scotland. This project is being jointly funded with Scottish Forestry and NatureScot.

PHC2020/08 – Modelling the spread of PCN in Scotland to identify the key factors responsible and the most appropriate management options for future mitigation. Dr Peter Skelsey (James Hutton Institute) will apply cutting-edge mapping, statistical, and machine learning techniques to existing landscape-scale datasets, in order to better understand the main areas of PCN infestation in Scotland and how this is changing over time, identify what key factors are responsible for that spread, and which management options would make the biggest impact on reducing spread.

PHC2020/07 – Enhancing the Plant Health Centre’s communication with stakeholders. This project will help the Centre implement our recently developed Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, supporting our ability to identify plant health needs across Scotland through effective two-way interactions with our stakeholders, and helping to keep plant health and biosecurity at the forefront of our stakeholders' minds.

New project calls are advertised on our [website](#) (none currently live), and we alert our twitter followers whenever a new call goes live (twitter address at the end of this bulletin).



Scottish Government
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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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