UKSG eNews
ISSN 2048-7746
CONNECTING THE KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY

The Forest of Biologists – a biopositive publishing initiative with real world impact from The Company of Biologists

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Earlier this year, we announced a new biodiversity initiative – The Forest of Biologists – through which we're planting and protecting trees on behalf of the communities that surround our journals: *Development*, *Journal of Cell Science*, *Journal of Experimental Biology*, *Disease Models & Mechanisms*, and *Biology Open*.

As part of this initiative, we've been planting a new tree in the Young People's Forest at Mead in Derbyshire for each Research Article and Review article published in our journals. And to acknowledge the efforts of our peer reviewers, we're helping to protect the trees in a piece of ancient woodland at Great Knott Wood in the Lake District National Park, overlooking Lake Windermere. To keep track of our progress, all these real trees are also represented together in a virtual forest.

Making an impact

The initial proposal for The Forest of Biologists came from **Steve Kelly**, Professor of Plant Sciences, **University of Oxford** (and previously Editor-in-Chief on *Biology Open*). "The idea was to do something really simple," he explained. "What if every paper that we published just made one tiny contribution to improving biodiversity or fighting against climate change. Because then, if you took all the papers that we publish and put them together and added up all those tiny impacts, you could do something really substantial."

As biologists, we knew that it was important that our actions were directed and evaluated by science. We therefore chose to work with **The Woodland Trust**, the UK's largest woodland conservation charity focusing on the role that trees and woods play in tackling the threats of climate change and nature loss. In their words, "the benefits of trees in the fight against climate change are now well understood. They lock up carbon, reduce pollution and flooding, and support people, wildlife and farming in adapting to the climate crisis."

Almost a year on, we are delighted to say that the initiative has received extraordinary support and positive feedback from the communities surrounding our journals. Here are some of the comments we have received from our authors and reviewers:

- **Liver Growth and Cancer Lab** @boulter_lab: “Can @Co_Biologists do no wrong? What an awesome initiative. For every paper or review article published in their journals they plant a tree in the Young Peoples Forest, Mead as part of the #iwill campaign to promote youth social action. #ScienceInAction #moralpublishing
- **Shu Yao Leong** @jlsyao_scicom: “Just finding out about this? You get a tree for every paper you publish with JCS / Development / JEB / DMM / BO!? And you get a cute virtual tree in a cute virtual forest that just screams video game vibes? WHERE CAN I SUBMIT!
- **Richard C.A. Sainson** @rcasainson: “What a beautiful initiative from the @Co_Biologists! Another fantastic reason to publish with this nonprofit organisation!”
- **Peter Walentek** @WalentekLab: “I was really surprised but happy about the email yesterday! @Co_Biologists thanks for the great idea to recognize reviewers!”
- **DacksLanECB** @DacksLab1: "The @For_biologists initiative reminds me that good people still do good things for good reasons.”
- **Safia Mahabub Sauty** @SautySafia: "I just came across @For_Biologists and I can't believe how extraordinary this initiative is! Making science accessible while simultaneously preserving the environment? Yes, please! Check out the plants @Co_Biologists planted for their published articles.”

To record our progress, we decided to revisit the two woodland sites taking with us a film unit so that we can share these two beautiful locations, their trees and the biodiversity around them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaZ-aalPiVU

Planting new trees

Planting at the Young People’s Forest is transforming the site, formerly an open cast coal mine, into new native woodland. By working in partnership with The Woodland Trust, we ensure that this important work is done in a rigorous and sustainable way. **John Tucker**, Director of Woodland Creation at The Woodland Trust, explained that young people have been involved at the site since the outset. This has provided valuable hands-on experience, both in planting the new trees and in helping to determine the future direction for the forest, nurturing a passion for biology and environmental stewardship.

The Young People’s Forest features a strong mix of native UK tree species (including oak, lime and wild cherry), which fosters biodiversity and bolsters the resilience of this new woodland. Vole guards have done their job in protecting the saplings from damage and the new trees are thriving. As we revisited the site, we found that silver birch saplings, a strong pioneer species, had grown the tallest and will soon start to provide important shade for the other trees and plants. Grasses and other plants were already at waist height in some areas, and we saw a multitude of insects from flies and grasshoppers through to bees and dragonflies. Sky larks – classified in the UK as Red under the Birds of Conservation Concern – are one of the species now nesting at the site and we saw buzzards flying overhead.

Protecting trees in ancient woodland

Ancient woodlands are some of the most biodiverse habitats in the UK. Great Knott Wood is a beautiful woodland full of mature trees and self-seeded saplings. The stones are covered

with a variety of mosses and there are lichens and fungi all around. Again, we're working with The Woodland Trust to help protect this site. John Tucker confirms that "correct management is really vital in terms of issues such as managing light levels and removing inappropriate species – this is vital so that we can counteract biodiversity loss and ensure the preservation of these vital habitats for future generations."

Great Knott Wood features many established and veteran trees, but the number of ash trees is sadly declining in the face of ash dieback, which the Woodland Trust predicts will kill up to 80% of ash trees across the UK. The wood is a home for the iconic red squirrel as well as roe deer and red deer (though the deer are known to nibble the self-seeding saplings).

Looking forwards

We have been publishing journals and supporting the biological community for nearly 100 years. We want to make sure we also play our part in supporting nature. The Forest of Biologists brings together our love of science with a desire for greater sustainability in the way we work. Planting and protecting trees is only a part of that, and we realise that we still have a long way to go on our sustainability journey. As we continue to think deeply about our contributions to nature, we hope you'll continue to support our biopositive publishing initiative through your interest in our journals.

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