



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

# Communicating your work and building better engagement with your research

**Date:** Thursday 20 March

**Time:** 2pm-4pm

**Venue:** Pinnacle Room L16, CREATE Tower



## Jacqueline Garget

### **Communications Manager (Research)**

Office of External Affairs & Communications (OEAC)

University of Cambridge

## Oliver Francis

### **Head of Strategic Communications**

MRC Epidemiology Unit

University of Cambridge

## Olivia Lee

### **Communications & External Affairs Manager**

Cambridge CARES

# Schedule

2:00 - 3:00pm	The importance of science communications and knowing your audience
3:00-3:05pm	Break
3:05 - 3:25pm	Policy engagement with research
3:25 - 3:35pm	Communications at CARES - what we've done and how we can work better together
3:35 – 4:00pm	Q&A
4:00pm	Refreshments

2:00 – 3:00pm

# **The importance of science communications and knowing your audience**

**Why should you  
care about communicating  
your work?**

## **Share latest findings with a wide audience**

- Share your knowledge and expertise
- Raise your profile
- Inform public debate
- Generate excitement about your project/research
- Build support for your work from local communities

## **Create impact**

- Inform policy-making
- New collaborators

## **Promote your organisation**

- Demonstrate value to society
- Attract funding

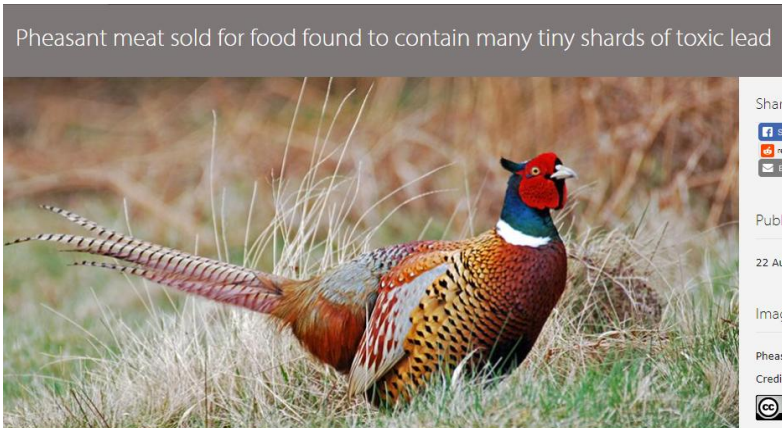
# What makes a story newsworthy?

## IS IT NEWS?

- Brand new discovery
- First time ever...
- Significant milestone
- Volunteers/ public engagement needed
- UK-relevant (for UK media)
- Stories not subjects



# What makes a story newsworthy?



**Relevance to people's lives**



**Topical/ fits news agenda**



**Quirky**



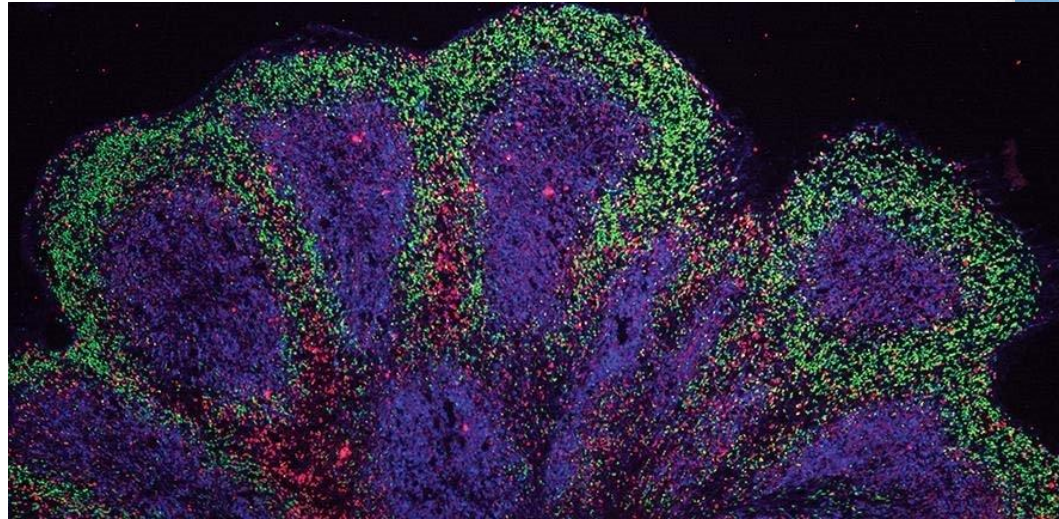
**Surprising**



# What makes a story newsworthy?

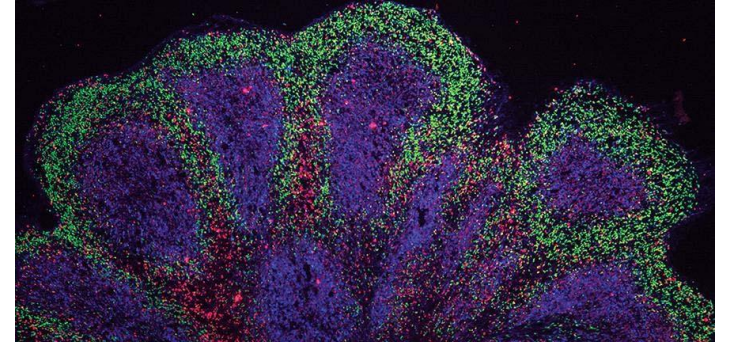
## Strong images or video

- Not stock
- Own rights, or have permission







# How do we select stories?

- We need **at least** five working days' notice
- We are able to embargo the release
- The first and/or last author(s) are from Cambridge
- The story is likely to be covered in national and/or international media outlet
  - *Have you ever seen this type of story covered in the media?*
- Strong video or images
- It is of strategic importance (e.g. a major grant or donation)
- The story fits into a particular campaign
- Is another organisation already publicising the study?





# Understanding the environmental and social risks from the international trade in ornamental plants

Amy Hinsley , Alice C. Hughes , Johan van Valkenburg, Tariq Stark , Jeroen van Delft, William Sutherland  and Silviu O. Petrovan 

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## Abstract

The multibillion dollar ornamental plant trade benefits economies worldwide, but shifting and rapidly expanding globalized supply chains have exacerbated complex environmental, sustainability, and biosecurity risks. We review the environmental and social risks of this international trade, complementing it with analyses of illegal trade seizures and plant contaminant interception data from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. We show global increases in ornamental plant trade, with supply expansions in East Africa and South America, and highlight risks and impacts including biodiversity loss, aquifer depletion, pollution, undermined access and benefit sharing, and food security. Despite risk mitigation efforts, the interception data showed considerable volumes of contaminants in ornamental plant shipments, but taxonomic identification was not always possible, highlighting uncertainties in assessing biosecurity risks. With high-volume and fast-moving transit of ornamental plants around the world, it is essential that production standards are improved and that data on specific risks from trade are collected and shared to allow for mitigation.

**Keywords:** global plant trade, pests and pathogens, food security, water security, sustainability

# Snakes in potted olive trees ‘tip of the iceberg’ of ornamental plant trade hazards

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 LONDON TIME (BST) ON FRIDAY 17 JANUARY, 2025

Photographs and a copy of the paper can be downloaded from:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pc6eVN0zTOoLwTW-2zyHU5mB-rvR-XzZ?usp=sharing>

## Snakes in potted olive trees ‘tip of the iceberg’ of ornamental plant trade hazards

**Invasive pests are slipping unnoticed into northern Europe in huge shipments of cut flowers and potted plants, say researchers, with potential to damage food crops and the natural environment**

Continental European snakes, geckos and Italian wall lizards are making their way to northern Europe undetected among imports of ornamental olive trees destined for gardens and green spaces.

These hitchhiking intruders can become invasive pests that cause extensive damage to the natural environment - as has happened in previously snake-free islands of the Mediterranean like Majorca.

They're also a red flag for a bigger problem: the range of potentially serious agricultural and environmental pests being unwittingly imported to Britain and mainland Europe on ornamental plants and cut flowers, simply because they are difficult to detect in high-volume, fast-moving shipments of plants.

In a study [published today in the journal \*Bioscience\*](#), researchers say that despite regulations and border checks, imported cut flowers and pot plants present a growing risk because the sheer volume of trade makes it difficult to monitor and control. Insects, fungi, reptiles, spiders and various agricultural pests are being transported live across the world on ornamental plants destined to brighten up our homes and gardens.

The multi-billion dollar global market for ornamental plants is growing fast and geographically expanding, and improved standards are urgently needed, they say.

The changing climate means that disease-carrying insects like mosquitoes, which decades ago would have arrived in northern Europe and died from the cold, might now survive. It is also enabling some ornamental plants themselves to become invasive pests as growing conditions change.

"Ornamental olive trees for sale in the UK can be over 100 years old, with many hiding places amongst their gnarly bark and the soil they're transported in. This is incredibly risky in terms of importing pests," said Professor William Sutherland in the University of Cambridge's Department of Zoology, who was involved in the study.

He added: "Adult snakes and lizards are just the tip of the iceberg. If they're getting through, what's the chance of us spotting small insects and fungi – the things that really cause the problems? It's inconceivable that officials can thoroughly check an import of a million roses from Kenya, for example."

"The sheer volume of cut flowers and ornamental plants being traded at speed around the world makes it extremely difficult to intercept all the pests and diseases they carry. Even with the best of intentions, unwanted hitchhikers are getting through customs import checks all the time," said Dr

Silviu Petrovan, a researcher in the University of Cambridge's Department of Zoology and a senior author of the paper.

Suppliers do not always operate within the law. Orchids and cacti are amongst the high-value plants sometimes illegally stripped from tropical habitats and included in shipments. Regulations to prevent the trade in protected wild plants are challenging to enforce on a large scale.

"Even with a global trade in cultivated ornamental plants, there is still a market for rare species taken from the wild, and this can lead to rapid species declines, as well as increased risks that wild pests and plant diseases may enter the supply chain," said Dr Amy Hinsley, a researcher at the Oxford Martin Programme on Wildlife Trade at the University of Oxford, who was involved in the study.

### No joke

Petrovan, a frog specialist, became interested in the topic when he was asked to identify a live frog found in roses in a florists' shop in Sheffield. At first he thought it was a prank, because he didn't recognise it as any European species. When he realised it was a tree-frog that must have arrived with the cut roses from Colombia via Ecuador, he was stunned.

"Finding a South American tree-frog in a Sheffield florist was extraordinary. It made me realise that if you can get this type of fragile small vertebrate arriving alive in a flower shipment without being noticed at customs, just how hard it must be to detect very small agricultural insect pests or their eggs," said Petrovan.

With no comprehensive international database on the types and numbers of pests found on imported ornamental plants, it is difficult to fully assess the extent of the problem. To gain a snapshot, the team analysed records of pests found in ornamental plants at customs in The Netherlands over [2017-2018](#), and reported to DEFRA in the UK over 2021-2023. In both cases, over 80% of the pests intercepted were insects.

Petrovan and Sutherland are part of St Catharine's College [BioRISC](#) initiative.

The research was primarily funded by Arcadia and the David and Claudia Harding Foundation.

### ENDS -

**Reference:** Hinsley, A. et al: '[Understanding the environmental and social risks from the international trade in ornamental plants](#).' *BioScience*, January 2024. DOI: [10.1093/biosci/biae124](#)

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### About the University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge is one of the world's leading universities, with a rich history of radical thinking dating back to 1209. Its mission is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.



# Media coverage: what to expect

Science & Environment

## Warning of stowaway snakes and tree-frogs hiding in pot plants

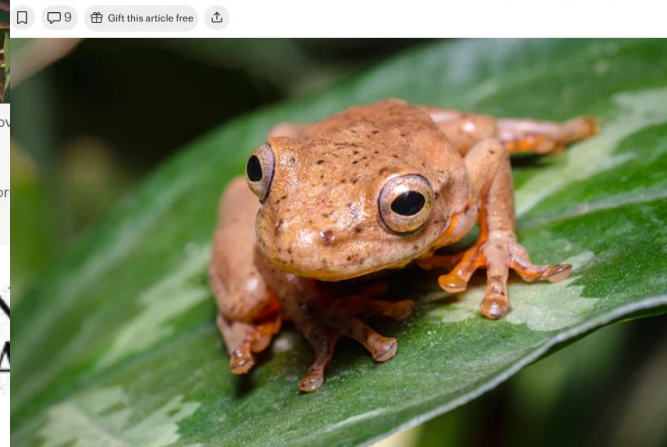


UK NEWS WEBSITE OF THE YEAR 2024  
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## Colombian tree-frog found among roses in Sh florist

Rising number of foreign pests that could threaten the UK's biodiversity are also arriving on or



The scale of imports of cut flowers is hard to monitor and control, meaning more foreign wildlife such as the Colombian tree frog can pass through



Tech > Science

## HITCHHIKERS Urgent warning over food crops being destroyed by rising stowaway pests and non-native frogs invading Britain

Experts said if live animals are getting past the border, then much smaller and more invasive insect and fungi could too

Millie Turner, Senior Technology & Science Reporter  
Published: 12:50, 17 Jan 2025 | Updated: 14:40, 17 Jan 2025



## Stowaways hiding on a plant near you: snakes, frogs... ghost slugs?

A host of 'hitchhiking intruders' are slipping into Britain, hidden among shipments of ornamental plants



European tree frogs are arriving in flowers imported from the Netherlands  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE/PA

# Responding to journalists by email

Journalists often work to very tight deadlines. Respond as soon as possible.

Don't expect to see the article before it's published.



# Speaking to journalists – radio/TV interviews

Be positive, calm, and enthusiastic.

Remember your audience – you're talking to the public. Use simple language and avoid acronyms or technical terms.

If you want to move the discussion away, give a short answer and then bring it back to your key messages with a 'bridge' – for example “and that's why...”

Give full answers, and give the interviewer something to help them with the next question.

Remember you are effectively talking to one person, not to a vast audience.

# Speaking to journalists – controversial/ difficult topics

What is the one question you wouldn't want to be asked – and how would you answer it?

Don't speculate if you're uncomfortable

Don't repeat negative phrases

Show empathy: show you understand where people are coming from even if you don't agree with them

# Media coverage: FAQs

- Will the media contact me?
- Do I really have to speak to the Daily Mail?
- Can I ask for the questions in advance?
- Can I speak 'off the record'?
- Can I say what I want once the interview is over?
- Will I see the article before it's published?
- What happens if I'm misquoted or the article is wrong?

**Some other ways to  
communicate with the  
public...**

# Features are not specifically linked to a new research finding

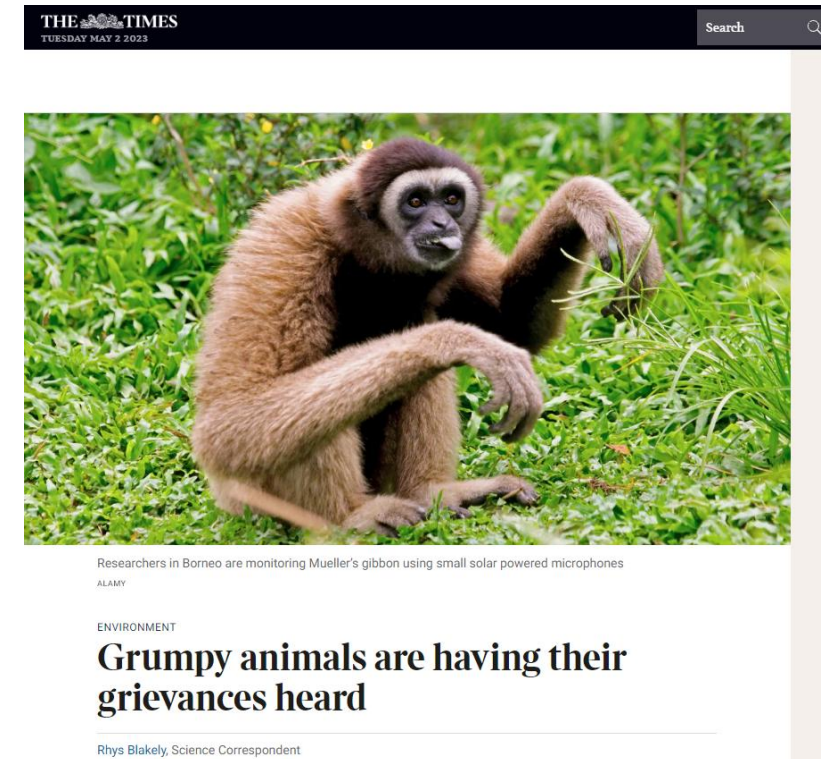
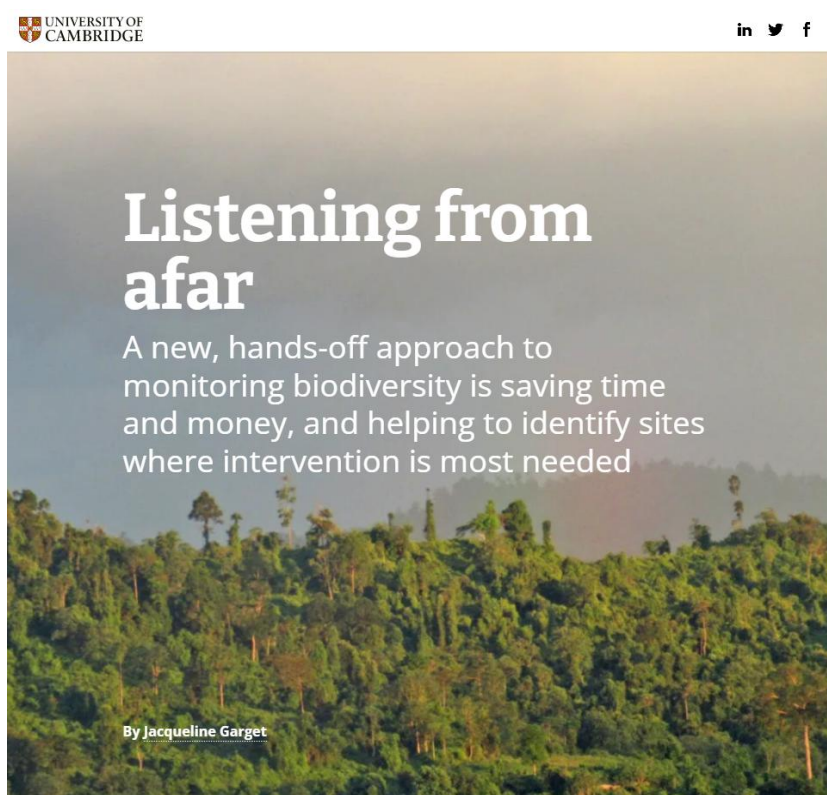
Instead, they might be any or all of the following:

- in-depth
- topical
- strategic
- picture-led
- expert opinion





# Pitching features





# Expert comment

BBC

For you

Home

News

Sport

Weather

iPlayer

Sounds

NEWS

Home | InDepth | Israel-Gaza war | Cost of Living | War in Ukraine | Climate | UK | World | Business | Politics

Newsbeat

## Spider surge: Why are more creeping around?

© 17 September 2014



skynews

16 May 17° 11°

Watch Live

Home | UK | World | Israel-Hamas War | Politics | US | Climate | Science & Tech | Business | Ents & Arts | More

## 'Bug splat' survey records 'staggering' drop in number of insects squashed on cars

Drivers taking part in the Kent Wildlife Trust and Buglife survey were asked to count the insects squashed on their vehicles - with the results described as "extremely concerning".

© Wednesday 24 April 2024 10:35, UK



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### Killer whales learn to sink yachts off Gibraltar

Hell-bent on revenge after being hit by boat, an orca named Gladis is now teaching others to attack, researchers believe

James Crisp  
23 May 2023 - 7:27pm

Related Topics

Whales, Mediterranean, Yachts, Gibraltar, Europe, Nature

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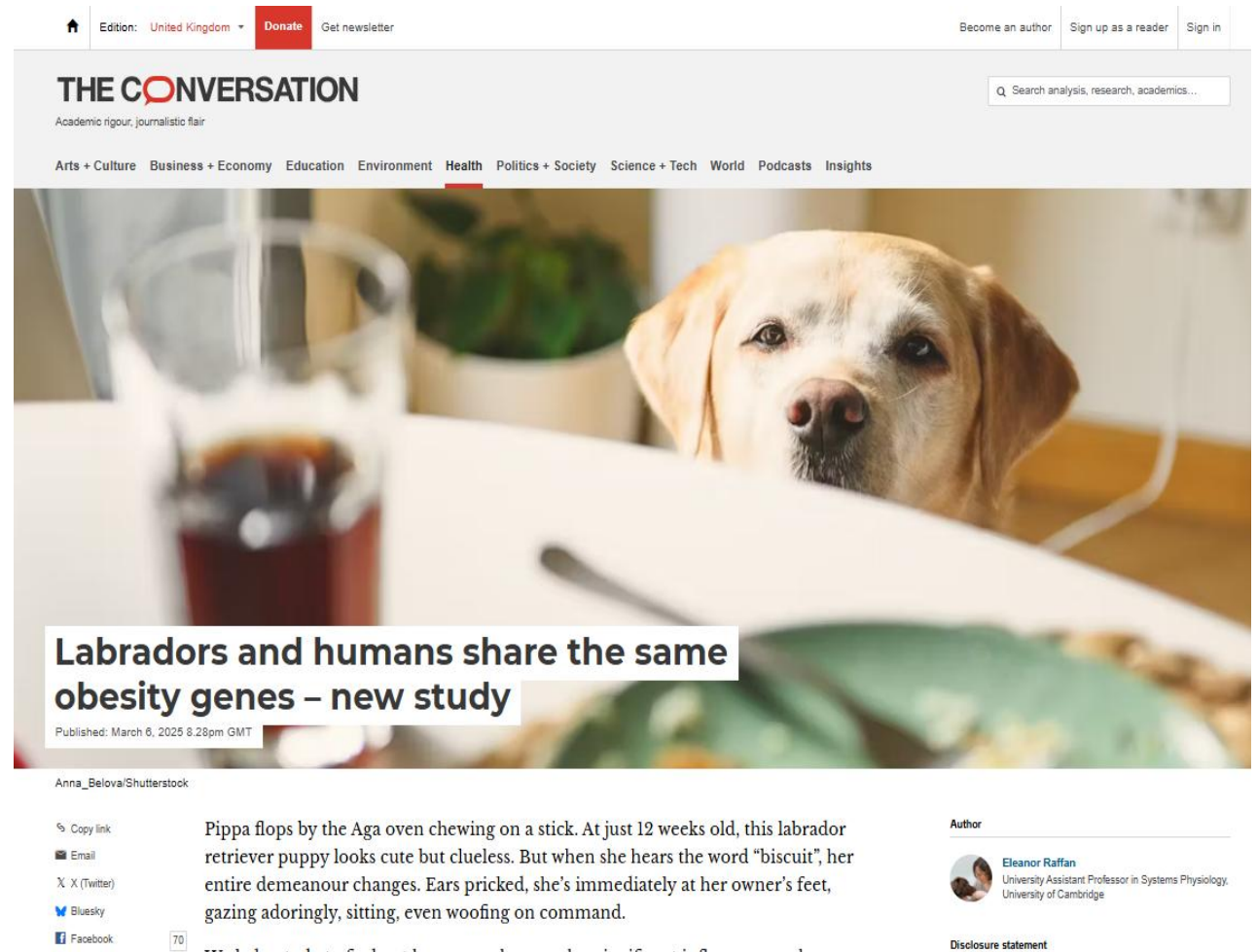


Killer whales attack a sailing boat off the coast of Morocco | CREDIT: Stephen Bidwell / SPANIS

# Pitch an idea directly to ‘The Conversation’

<https://theconversation.com/uk/pitches>

- News insights/ analysis
- New research
- Interesting stories



The screenshot shows the homepage of 'THE CONVERSATION' website. The header includes navigation links for 'Edition: United Kingdom', 'Donate', and 'Get newsletter'. A search bar is located on the right. The main navigation menu lists various topics: Arts + Culture, Business + Economy, Education, Environment, Health (highlighted), Politics + Society, Science + Tech, World, Podcasts, and Insights. The featured article is titled 'Labradors and humans share the same obesity genes – new study', published on March 6, 2025. The article text begins with 'Pippa flops by the Aga oven chewing on a stick. At just 12 weeks old, this labrador retriever puppy looks cute but clueless. But when she hears the word “biscuit”, her entire demeanour changes. Ears pricked, she’s immediately at her owner’s feet, gazing adoringly, sitting, even woofing on command.' The author is Eleanor Raffan, a University Assistant Professor in Systems Physiology at the University of Cambridge. A disclosure statement is also present.

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Academic rigour, journalistic flair

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**Labradors and humans share the same obesity genes – new study**  
Published: March 6, 2025 8:28pm GMT

Anna\_Belova/Shutterstock

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Facebook

Pippa flops by the Aga oven chewing on a stick. At just 12 weeks old, this labrador retriever puppy looks cute but clueless. But when she hears the word “biscuit”, her entire demeanour changes. Ears pricked, she’s immediately at her owner’s feet, gazing adoringly, sitting, even woofing on command.

We led a study to find out how genes have such a significant influence on why

Author  
**Eleanor Raffan**  
University Assistant Professor in Systems Physiology,  
University of Cambridge

Disclosure statement

# How to write an effective press release

(or web news, or newsletter article, etc...)

# How to write an effective press release #1

## The 'inverted pyramid' of news

The **headline** must say clearly what the news is.

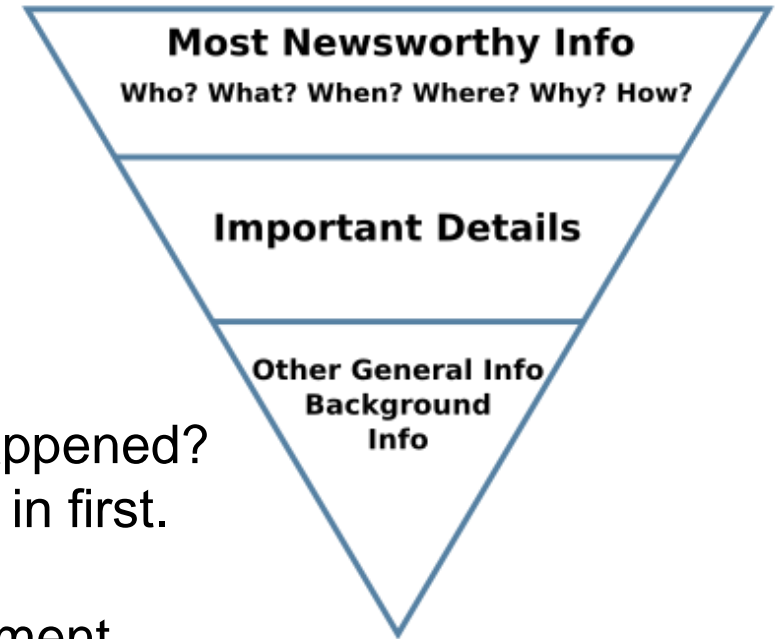
**The opening summary** tells the story in a sentence or two:  
What did you find / what happened? What's the news?

**Get to the point!** Start at the end: what did you find? What happened?  
Battle for the reader's attention. Get the most important things in first.

All paragraphs should stand alone, with a complete fact/ statement.

Editors cut from bottom up.

No links.



# Which one of these headlines does a better job and why?

Discoveries gleaned from human ancient dna

Ancient DNA reveals reason for high MS and Alzheimer's rates in Europe



SCIENCE

## Ancient gene shows why Britons are more likely to have multiple sclerosis

DNA variants brought to the UK by migrants in the Stone Age have shaped our predisposition to conditions including diabetes, Alzheimer's and multiple sclerosis



FINANCIAL TIMES

WORLD UK COMPANIES TECH MARKETS CLIMATE OPINION LEX WORK & CAREERS LIFE & ARTS HTSI

Genomics + Add to myFT

### Ancient European migration patterns linked to modern-day disease risks

Study harnesses millennia-old human DNA to plot 'genetic divide' on origin and health risks

EQ

Science Space Animals Health Environment

## Ancient DNA helps trace multiple sclerosis origins in European descendants

January 10, 2024

6 min 162



The New York Times

ORIGINS

### Ancient Skeletons Give Clues to Modern Medical Mysteries

DNA fragments from thousands of years ago are providing insights into multiple sclerosis, diabetes, schizophrenia and other illnesses.

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UK politics Society Science Tech Global development Obituaries

This article is more than 10 months old

### Ancient steppe herders brought higher risk of MS to northern Europe

Study of ancient DNA shows bronze age Yamnaya people spread gene variants that carry increased risk of multiple sclerosis



# How to write an effective press release #2

## Things to include

Human interest

Quotes - for authenticity, character.

Examples

Key statistics

Never leave any unanswered questions

# Think about your audience

Curious – but not interested in too much detail.

What would most interest the public? It may or may not be what is academically most interesting.

Work out the best angle.

Make a point or two – but get used to leaving things out.

Tell them why it matters. *Why should I care?*

# Writing style

**The reader doesn't know the subject like you do.**

How would you explain this to a friend in the pub, or a teenager?

Explain or avoid technical terms. Don't assume the reader's knowledge.

**Be concise and direct**

Use active sentences, not passive.

NOT: The butterflies were collected by six volunteers.

**Use plain English**

NOT: Enquire, facilitate, require, utilise.

**No one will ever complain because you made something too easy to understand!**

## Avoid things that make your writing clunky

- ‘I am going to tell you a thing now’
- ‘Here is a list of things’
- ‘Let’s recap the things I’ve told you’
- Or worse, ‘The Oxford English Dictionary defines X as...’

## Quotes: what's good?

- Does it add to the story?
- Does it give colour or interest?
- Does it sound like a sentence a real human would say?

“I am delighted with this discovery, as it truly demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of our work and the global impact of Cambridge research,” said Professor Brain.

”I am delighted with this result, as it echoes our world-leading results in the last REF,” said co-author Professor Genius Smith.

“I am delighted with this result too, and I definitely said this sentence out loud,” said co-author Professor Jane Mastermind.



# Task: Ordering info

## Headline: Genetic mutation in a quarter of all Labradors hard-wires them for obesity

Here are some jumbled up snippets from the media release. Put these in the order they should appear.

- “It’s very difficult to keep these dogs slim, but it can be done,” said Dr Eleanor Raffan, who led the study.
- This obesity-driving combination means that dog owners must be particularly strict with feeding and exercising their Labradors to keep them slim.
- The mutation is in a gene called POMC, which plays a critical role in hunger and energy use.
- Around 25% of Labradors have the POMC mutation, which researchers previously showed causes increased interest in food and risk of obesity.
- New research finds around a quarter of Labrador retriever dogs face a double-whammy of feeling hungry all the time and burning fewer calories due to a genetic mutation.
- The new study reveals how the mutation profoundly changes the way Labradors behave around food. It found that although they don’t need to eat more to feel full, they are hungrier in between meals.

# Task: Snippets in order

## Genetic mutation in a quarter of all Labradors hard-wires them for obesity

- New research finds around a quarter of Labrador retriever dogs face a double-whammy of feeling hungry all the time and burning fewer calories due to a genetic mutation.
- This obesity-driving combination means that dog owners must be particularly strict with feeding and exercising their Labradors to keep them slim.
- The mutation is in a gene called POMC, which plays a critical role in hunger and energy use.
- Around 25% of Labradors have the POMC mutation, which researchers previously showed causes increased interest in food and risk of obesity.
- The new study reveals how the mutation profoundly changes the way Labradors behave around food. It found that although they don't need to eat more to feel full, they are hungrier in between meals.
- "It's very difficult to keep these dogs slim, but it can be done," said Dr Eleanor Raffan, who led the study.

# Hone your message

# Talking about your project to non-specialists

What you're aiming for:

- Be prepared
- Get your point(s) across
- Make your work relevant to your audience
- Say something memorable (in a good way)

# **Task: Telling non-specialists about your research**

Why is it important? Why should they care?

**My research is newsworthy because...**



# Task: Telling non-specialists about your research

Prepare three key points for a radio interview.

What are the essentials you want people to know about your work?

I found **X**, it's important because **X**, it will enable/ impact/ change **X...**

# **Q&A and share experiences**

# Stay in touch

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[www.communications.cam.ac.uk/working-media](http://www.communications.cam.ac.uk/working-media)