

Local Wildlife Sites – South East Wales Project

The following information outlines the best practice guidelines for managing the habitat type listed below in a manner that is sympathetic to wildlife. It is part of a series relating to various habitat types and management issues that have been produced by your local Wildlife Trusts.

No.14 Invasive Weed Control (Aliens)

What are Alien Invasive Weeds?

- There are many plants within the UK that have been introduced by accident or due to trade and collection, which are non-native or alien species.
- A number of these are highly invasive and detrimental to our native flora and fauna as they can take over habitats and out-compete other species. Due to this, approximately 50 different plant species are listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act which provides legislation to help control their spread.
- Many of these species are aquatic and it is beyond the scope of this document to provide recommendations relating to them all. However three species namely Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed are particularly widespread and potentially very damaging to habitat for wildlife as well as reducing the suitability of the land for other activities, the control of these is discussed in more detail.



Japanese Knotweed



Giant Hogweed



Himalayan Balsam

Why do they need to be controlled?

- Within the UK, The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 states that it is an offence under section 14(2) of the Act to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed on Schedule 9, Part II, these species are commonly referred to as "Schedule 9 species".
- If not controlled these plants will spread and can take over the land reducing its value for both wildlife and agriculture, as limited other species can thrive in the dense mono-culture stands they produce.
- These plants can also lead to the destabilisation of riverbanks resulting in the loss of land.
- It is the case therefore that controlling these species to conserve valuable wildlife habitats can have agricultural benefits and ensure legislation is complied with.
- For advice on the control of native invasive species such as Creeping Thistle, Dock and Ragwort please refer to the separate Toolkit No. 13 and for Bracken control please refer to Toolkit (No. 12).

Management Recommendations

The control of the aforementioned weeds can be achieved by a number of means, with the best methodology altering dependent on the species involved and the nature of the site. Particular care and consideration needs to be given to the best method of control when the site has high ecological value or near watercourses, as it needs to be ensured that there is no resultant harm to valuable wildlife.

The following is recommended to ensure invasive alien weed species do not negatively impact upon the wildlife and economic value of your land:

Prevention

- Care should be taken when importing soil on to your site that it is not contaminated by these invasive alien species.
- If any of these species are present on your site great care should be taken to ensure they are not spread to other parts of your land either in material being moved or on wheels/tracks of machinery.

Control

Japanese Knotweed

This plant first arrived in Britain in the nineteenth century as an ornamental garden plant. It is now a serious problem along roadsides, rivers and derelict land where it has displaced native species and has been known to cause structural damage. The plant can grow up to 3 metres and will usually be in large clumps. The root rhizomes can spread out 7 metres from the plant and are orange/yellow if cut.

The following are potential control methods:

- **Mechanical Control**
 - ❖ It can be cut, although this will not get rid of the plant. The cut needs to be near the base in one clean cut so there are no fragments from which a new plant could re-grow. A scythe method is best.
 - ❖ Flailing should be avoided as stems regenerate from nodes.
 - ❖ Stems should not be pulled up as the crown attached to the base will re-grow.
 - ❖ Cutting should take place every 2-4 weeks through the spring and summer.
 - ❖ Grazing shoots will help to keep the plant in check, but to fully remove the plant new growth needs to be treated with herbicide.
- **Chemical Control**
 - ❖ A bioactive formulation of glyphosate which has been approved for use near water by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is effective for large areas.
 - ❖ The top and underside of the leaves should be sprayed in May when the plants are smaller. Ideally this should be done with a spot sprayer.
 - ❖ An alternative to spraying is to inject the stem with a 1 in 10 dilution, to avoid spray drift in the surrounding habitat. Although injecting is only practical for small areas.

Disposal – Whether cut or sprayed the plant should not be removed from the site without a waste licence from NRW. If a cut stem is dried until it is crisp and brown it can be disposed of as inert waste or burnt.

Giant Hogweed

This plant was introduced as an ornamental plant in 1893 and escaped from gardens. The plant spreads rapidly along water courses because each flower head produces thousands of seeds which are dispersed by water. It causes a problem for native plants because it forms such dense colonies of up to 5 metres in height shading out the growth of any other plant. The Giant Hogweed should not be confused with the smaller native Hogweed and other similar plants which are a native and valuable part of our flora that should be conserved.

The following are potential control methods:

- **Mechanical Control**
 - ❖ The root should be cut 15cm below ground early in the season before flowering.
 - ❖ The growing crown can also be dug out and disposed of at landfill or by composting.
 - ❖ This will need to be done for at least 5 years and possibly up to 10 years to fully remove the plant
- **Chemical Control**
 - ❖ Weed wipe or spot spray with glyphosate between March-May when the plant is approximately 1 metre.
 - ❖ This may need to be repeated for up to 10 years.
 - ❖ If the plant is bigger it needs to be approached with caution and it may be better to cut the stem above ground and inject with a 1 in 10 dilution.
- **Environmental Control**
 - ❖ Grazing with cattle or sheep from April-October can be useful but will need to be continued until no new growth occurs.
 - ❖ It is also important to re-vegetate the area as soon as possible with a dense grass mix. This will prevent seed germination of the hogweed.

It should be borne in mind that Giant Hogweed seeds profusely and the seeds can survive lying dormant in the soil for many years so you should be vigilant for any regrowth.

PLEASE NOTE – Protective clothing will need to be worn when controlling this plant as it contains poisonous sap that can cause a severe skin irritation and blistering reaction if in sunlight, which can last for years.

Himalayan Balsam

This plant was introduced in 1839 as an ornamental plant, has escaped from gardens and rapidly colonised areas of damp ground, particularly along river banks. It can grow up to 3 metres in height and spreads very effectively as the seed pods burst and scatter seeds up to 7 metres away. The stems of the plant are hollow and brittle and the plant itself can be pulled up very easily due to a shallow root system. The plants suppress the growth of native species as they grow in dense stands.

The following are potential control methods:

- **Mechanical Control**
 - ❖ Cutting should take place early in the season before flowering begins in June (no earlier as plants can re-grow again in the season).
 - ❖ This should be repeated annually until no more growth occurs.
 - ❖ The plants can also be hand-pulled and disposed of through burning or composting (as long as seeds are not present).
- **Chemical Control**
 - ❖ In mixed stands of vegetation the Himalayan Balsam should be weed wipred with glyphosate before flowering begins in June
 - ❖ Spot spraying can be carried out at a similar time of year in more dense stands.
 - ❖ This should only need to be carried out for 2-3 years.
- **Environmental Control**
 - ❖ Grazing with cattle or sheep from April-October can be useful but will need to be continued until no new growth occurs.
 - ❖ The area should also be re-vegetated with a dense grass sward before the seeds can germinate again.

Should you require any further advice regarding the management of your Local Wildlife Site please do not hesitate to contact your local Wildlife Trust:

Gwent Wildlife Trust

Tel: 01600 740600

e-mail: info@gwentwildlife.org

Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales

Tel: 01656 724100

e-mail: info@welshwildlife.org

Other toolkits available are:

No.1 Neutral Grassland (Hay Meadow)

No.2 Neutral Grassland (Pasture)

No.3 Acid Grassland

No.4 Calcareous Grassland

No.5 Marshy Grassland

No.6 Marsh Grassland (with Marsh Fritillary)

No.7 Heath

No.8 Hedgerows

No.9 Saltmarsh & Coastal Grazing Marsh

No.10 Ponds & Lakes

No.11 Scrub control

No.12 Bracken control

No.13 Invasive weed control (natives – thistle, dock etc.)

Further useful documents include:

- ❖ General information on invasive plants: www.gov.uk/japanese-knotweed-giant-hogweed-and-other-invasive-plants
- ❖ Environment Agency – Managing non-native invasive plants: http://cdn.environment-agency.gov.uk/LIT_5001_d24b8c.PDF

This Toolkit has been produced as part of the Local Wildlife Sites – South East Wales Project which is funded by the Welsh Government Resilient Ecosystems Fund 2013-2015

