



Lostwithiel Town Council

Himalayan Balsam Management Plan

Approved 7 September 2021 - Minute reference 132/21

Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan balsam, *Impatiens glandulifera*, was introduced to Britain in 1839, but escaped from gardens into the wild. It prefers moist soils, and rapidly colonises riverbanks. Himalayan balsam develops into dense stands that kill off native plants and other flora.

A single plant can produce 2,500 seeds and the explosive seed pods can throw the seeds over 7 metres away from the plant.

Himalayan Balsam also causes a less obvious problem for native species, like many flowering plants, it produces a sugary nectar to attract insects. However, the flowers produce more nectar than any other native European species and this makes it more attractive to bees and other insects luring them away from pollinating our native flowers.

Legislation

The primary aim of UK Himalayan Balsam related legislation is to prevent the spread. It is an offence to plant Himalayan Balsam or cause it to grow in the wild.

Stages of growth

Seedlings – The seedlings of this annual plant begin to emerge as early as March

Leaves – The leaves are dark green and lance shaped. They have a dark-red midrib, serrated edges and can grow up to 150mm long. The stems are pinkish-red, brittle and hollow with side branches originating from joints in the stem. Foliage growth is evident from March - July

Flowers – Himalayan Balsam can grow up to 3 metres tall.

Characteristic slipper shaped purplish-pink or white flowers beginning to appear in June - September.

Seed pods – In late July/August and again late September/October its distinctive 'exploding' seed pods mature which are capable of catapulting its white, brown and black seeds distances of up to 7m. Each pod can contain up to 16 seeds.

Control

In order to control Himalayan Balsam in situ it must be prevented from producing seeds until the seed bank is exhausted. Existing plants can be killed by hand pulling, cutting the stem below the first node or by applying herbicide. As the seed bank is short lived, two years of control action taking place before plants set seed should eradicate the species. Monitoring with follow up treatment should be maintained until at least one year has passed with no Himalayan Balsam growth. Control carried out after the plants have set seed is unlikely to have long-term benefits. Removal or herbicide treatment of plants that have already shed their seeds is of little benefit as the plants die at the end of the growing season regardless.

Action

In order of preference Himalayan Balsam should be controlled by

- Hand pulling
- Cutting
- Herbicide application

Control method	Use	Positives	Negatives	Eradication timescale	Cost relative to effort
Hand pulling	Small stands	Prevents damage to other species and/or habitats. Avoids herbicide use	Labour intensive	Kills adults immediately. Follow up treatment for seed bank of 2-3 years	Moderate
Cutting/strimming	Medium stands	Avoids herbicide use	Collateral damage to other species is difficult to avoid	Kills adults immediately. Follow up treatment for seed bank of 2-3 years	Moderate

Herbicide treatment	Individual plants to large stands	Easier and quicker than physical removal and can be used on difficult to reach stands	Herbicides can damage the environment. Use restricted in some areas.	Kills adults immediately. Follow up treatment for seed bank of 2-3 years	Low
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Lostwithiel Town Council's preferred method of eradication is by hand pulling and cutting at ground level. Himalayan Balsam has very shallow roots growing to a depth of 10-15cm a gentle tug is therefore usually enough to remove the entire root system.

The Himalayan Balsam should be cut at ground level and only pulled in areas where ancillary damage could be caused i.e., to the rabbit fencing.

Multiple plants can be pulled simultaneously, however gloves should always be worn to avoid injury. This can include stings from nettles which are often found growing next to Himalayan Balsam. In some areas it will be necessary to cut back brambles and undergrowth to enable access to the Himalayan Balsam to cut at ground level.

Pulled plants should not be placed on soil or damp areas as they can readily re-root. The plants can be allowed to dry out or composted. Once dried, the remains can be left on site as they will reduce to small amounts.

In approving this policy, the Council delegates to the Town Clerk, the authority to instruct a contractor to hand pull Himalayan Balsam plants three times annually until the Council is confident that the plant has been eradicated. The Clerk will agree with the contractor the location and the extent of the site(s) and the contractor will be advised that the timings of the hand pulling must be as follows: -

- late May/early June
- mid July/early August

- late September/early October.

References

Cornwall Council www.cornwall.gov.uk

Property Care Association Guidance Note Management of Himalayan Balsam