

Upper Onny Invasive Plants Project

2016

**A report of the control and survey update of the
rivers East and West Onny for Himalayan balsam
and Japanese knotweed.**



Rob Rowe

Funded through the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund

UPPER ONNY INVASIVE PLANTS PROJECT REPORT 2016

The object of this year's project was to continue to eradicate the known stands of invasive plant species (specifically Himalayan Balsam] along the river West Onny, along Crifftin Brook and at the Bog, noting the effect of last year's work. Also to work on downstream if time permitted.

In addition, any reports that came in from the public would be investigated within the wider catchment of these two tributaries by myself as the contractor but also calling on help from the UOWG plant group to try to ensure complete coverage of the watercourses. As the contractor I identified the owners of the river contacting them for permission to survey, raising awareness of the issue and offering methods of control.

The majority of this report relates to Himalayan Balsam (HB) as only a few sites for Japanese Knotweed (JK) were found.

Contacting owners

Most riparian owner details were the same as last year although there were a few errors of details and changes of ownership.

All owners were contacted, either by phone or direct contact. This was a good opportunity to explain the project and how it was progressing. Only one person did not want us to go on their land and said they would do the work themselves.

Another owner who has HB in the garden wished to retain it but will 'keep it within the boundaries'.

Recruiting volunteers

Similarly to last year at the beginning of July, I approached Natural England and the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme for help with recruiting volunteers.

Responding to a mail out from the LPS there was a moderate response this year and eventually 4 people helped at different times and places, resulting in a total of 18 volunteer days.

A smaller number of volunteers was more practical in most cases due to there being less HB than last year. Also they were experienced people able to spot the HB quickly when not in flower

Earlier in the year I was emailed by Laura Spence, [originally from Shropshire], a tutor at Sterling College, Vermont in the USA, who contacted me via Shropshire Wildlife Trust. The college offers hands-on courses in environmental stewardship and Laura and 8 students helped pull HB for half a day.

Simon Brown, the Shropshire Outdoors Development Officer from Shropshire Council was contacted with a view to helping with his team. This did not happen on the Onny but may do so in the future. They did however clear HB at Bishop's Castle.

Promotion

Similar promotional materials were used to last year. The 'WANTED' poster was produced again [copy attached] with pictures of HB and JK and a brief description of what we were doing and where, with an appeal to contact myself with any relevant information.

This again was distributed around the catchment area and displayed on village notice boards, in local shops, pubs and churches.

There was a small response to this in the form of telephone calls to me and people had contacted me during the past year.

The double-sided flyer was again used to give to landowners and other interested parties. This

gave more information on HB and JK and how to control them [copy attached].

Survey and Work

Work started on the West Onny on 4th July and we made our way upstream from Bow Farm. Work consisted of pulling HB. No tools were used. In most places this had worked very well. It became immediately obvious that some of the really bad areas were much reduced from last year. The West Onny was cleared over the next 3 weeks, followed by the Criftin Brook. Responding to a request last year from Roger Plowden on the Plowden Estate I surveyed down as far as Hillend (a particularly bad area) at the base of the Long Mynd. Following that survey we were later able to clear the Onny downstream as far as Plowden Bridge.

At the end of August / September we returned to the upper reaches of the West Onny north of Nind to clear plants that had re-grown or been missed. Some areas were eventually cleared 3 times. Difficulty of access due to uneven ground and scrub by the river were the main challenges and it was surprising to find HB plants in certain places whereas other previously bad areas were clear.

HB was found higher up the catchment than last year, hopefully to its origin in a builder's yard. The East Onny was spot checked. No HB was found.

A small area was cleared at the head of the Rea Brook at the Gravels, just within the Upper Onny Wildlife Group area.

Time spent [in days] removing HB in each area [volunteers and my time] Last year's times shown for comparison.

	2015	2016
Confluence to Newton Farm	5	2
Newton Farm to Linley Hall	9	2
Linley Hall to A488 Welsh Lodge	2	2
Welsh Lodge to Appletree Farm	9	5
Appletree Farm to White Grit	9	7
The Bog	4	1.5
2016 Criftin Brook		5
River Onny confluence to Plowden Bridge		4
Whitegrit west along ditch <i>and</i>		1
Top of Rea Brook, the Gravels		
Total	38 days	29.5 days

The time spent from Welsh Lodge to White Grit included returning 2 or 3 times.

Volunteers were covered by Natural England's and my own insurance and we adhered to NE's risk assessment

The amount of work done would not have been possible without volunteer help for which I am extremely grateful.

Summary

This year has given an idea of the effect that a year's clearance work can have and as mentioned the effect on the lower part [below Linley Estate] was particularly impressive. What also becomes clear is the difficulty of clearing certain overgrown sites.

Although it might have been presumed that the lower part of the river would be worse, this was not the case, with some of the worse areas still right at the top. This possibly reflects the general feeling that the HB has only been present for about 5 years and came from somewhere around the White Grit area. This has now hopefully been found.

There is a natural break part way along the river above and below the Linley Estate.

Above the estate is nearly all small grazed fields with some woodland and gardens, whereas to

the south there are larger grazed areas and some intensive arable. At the moment the middle section of Linley Estate [approx 4 km] is virtually clear of balsam.

Japanese Knotweed was only found or reported in two new locations and the landowners are dealing with it themselves.

ACTION PLAN

We now have a much clearer picture of the problem. This year's work has shown how effective last year's clearance was and gives an idea of how much work will be needed in the future.

Although it is an ongoing problem it seems it could be kept under control with a lessening input of time and money each year, unlike other river systems where it is totally out of control. Given that the seed bank of HB is viable for about 3 years and some will probably always flower and seed however carefully the river is checked, we may never be able to remove it completely but bring it to very low levels with continual vigilance.

2016/17

- Explore possibilities of funding for next year and apply to **Severn Rivers Trust, AONB,**
- Maintain contact with landowners to thank them for their help and cooperation and encourage them to continue playing an active role in reporting and removing HB.
- Recruit and organise volunteers in June
- Clear in July when it is most visible with a follow up a month later

Presuming that the work we have done this year will again have had some significant impact, hopefully the amount of HB will be lower again next year.

Estimate for proposed work in 2017

UPPER ONNY CATCHMENT

July 2017 [based on team of 4 people per day; supervisor and 3 volunteers]

West Onny [west of A488] 2 days;

[east of A488] 2 days

Crifftin Brook 1 day

The Bog 1 day

August 2017

West Onny, Crifftin brook and the Bog 3 days

3 supervisor days to set up/contact landowners/report afterwards

Total 12 days supervisor time and 27 volunteer days.

12 days at £150/day

Other costs? Insurance £200

RIVER ONNY PLOWDEN ESTATE.

As we did this year we could work on down river with resources allotted or apply for more funding. Hopefully we could work with the fishermen in that area

This is all dependant on funding and also begs the question; is it really the remit of the Upper Onny Wildlife Group to move out of the UOWG area?

Rob Rowe September 2017



BALSAM CLEARANCE ON CRIFTON BROOK



CLEARING BALSAM AMONGST FALLEN WILLOW BRANCHES AT WHITE GRIT



BROAD LEAVED HELLEBORINE NEAR THE TOP OF THE WEST ONNY



ELEPHANT HAWK MOTH LENDING A HELPING HAND, EATING BALSAM

Upper Onny Invasive Plants Project

This project aims to survey the Rivers East and West Onny and to provide landowners with advice and support for the removal of invasive plant species.

If you identify **Himalayan balsam** or **Japanese knotweed** on your land, please contact Rob Rowe on 01588 630648 or rob@robrowe.co.uk

Himalayan Balsam

Introduced as a garden plant in the 19th century, this tall, attractive, annual plant is now widespread in the UK and is highly invasive, especially along rivers and in woodland, where it out-competes our native plants. It has explosive seed heads and seed is dispersed by wind and water downstream.



Himalayan Balsam's characteristic features :

- pink-purple trumpet –shaped flowers, sweetly scented
- stem hollow, sappy, fleshy and brittle, green to red in summer
- leaves opposite, in whorls of 3-5, finely serrated edges
- seed capsule, 2.5cm (1in) long, hangs on red stalk

Controlling Himalayan Balsam

- **handpulling** from the roots: if the stem snaps, pulling must be completed to include the roots
- **strimming** below the lowest node or joint before the seed capsules are formed
- plants can be left on site to decompose

Japanese Knotweed

Introduced as an ornamental plant, its rapid annual growth and relentless spread allow it to over-run native species. Japanese knotweed is a strong-growing, clump-forming perennial, with tall, dense annual stems. Stem growth is renewed each year from the stout, deeply-penetrating rhizomes (creeping underground stems).



Japanese Knotweed's characteristic features:

- in spring and summer, bamboo-like shoots grow to 2.1m (7ft) tall
- leaves are up to 14cm (5½in) in length on zig-zag stems
- creamy-white flower tassels produced in late summer and early autumn reach up to 15cm (6in).
- dies back to ground level in winter
- does not produce seeds, but can grow from very small sections of rhizome

Controlling Japanese Knotweed

- herbicide control is recommended
- destruction on site by burning after drying
- digging out can be attempted, but re-growth usually occurs, the waste must not be placed in Green Collection or household waste bins; it is classified as controlled waste for disposal in licensed landfill sites only

Stiperstones &
Corndon Hill Country
LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME



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THE
UPPER ONNY
WILDLIFE GROUP

This project has received funding from the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund

WANTED:



Japanese Knotweed



Himalayan Balsam

INFORMATION

on the whereabouts of these two plants

These non-native plants spread rapidly and have a serious impact on the local environment, smothering riverbanks, spreading into fields and outcompeting native plants.

This Upper Onny Invasive Plants project aims to locate these two species in the Upper Onny area and control them for landowners before the plants can become a problem.

**If you have seen these plants in the Onny area
between the Long Mynd and Corndon Hill,
please contact Rob Rowe:
rob@robrowe.co.uk or 01588 630648.**

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