



Non Native Invasive Species

Our countryside, rivers and seas are home to native species, both plants and animals, and those which have been introduced from abroad, termed “non-native species”. Many non-native species, like sheep and wheat, are beneficial to our economy and environment and do not cause any harm, however, a minority have serious negative impacts on our native British species, our health and our economy. These are termed “Invasive non-native species” (INNS). It is important to note that it is not just the plants or animals themselves that pose a threat but also the diseases they may carry with them, such as crayfish plague.

Rivers form a particularly good conduit for these invasive plants, fish, invertebrates and diseases and it is particularly important to approach the control of them and their eradication on a catchment scale. Boats and fishing gear also provide a good means of transport for small fragments, for example fish eggs and small invertebrates, between water bodies, both within and from outside a river system. Once established, invasive non-native plants and animals can out-compete native species, disturb the community structure and damage biodiversity. Within Britain alone, INNS cost our economy approximately £1.7 billion every single year. And the threat to biodiversity and our environment is just as great, with INNS being considered one of the greatest threats to biodiversity worldwide.

Key issues within the Stour

Within the Stour catchment there are several invasive non-native species that are threatening the biodiversity and water environment as identified below.

American Signal Crayfish:

These were introduced for farming in the 1980s in gravel pits close to the Stour and have since escaped throughout the system. Not only do they predate on invertebrates, disturbing their community make up, but they dig into soft banks, increasing the erosion risk and they can out-compete the native and now rare White Clawed Crayfish. Overall, in the Stour, numbers are not too high, possibly due to eel numbers controlling them. However the key threat they pose is the fungus disease they carry, known as Crayfish Plague, which is generally fatal to White Clawed Crayfish. In 2014, a serious mortality occurred on the River Allen when American Signal Crayfish were found in the river. One approach to conserving the native



crayfish is by establishing isolated new refuge sites, known as Ark sites, which are currently being sought for the remaining native crayfish in the Stour headwaters.

Himalayan Balsam: This attractive riverbank species spreads by means of large seeds which float downstream. Although it provides a valuable source of nectar for bees, as an annual species which dies off during the winter, its widespread invasion of river banks results in bare soil over the winter months, increasing bank erosion. This plant is generally ‘pulled’ by volunteers and land owners to control it but headwaters must be cleared first to reduce the seed supply replenishing sites downstream.



Japanese Knotweed: This species is found on riparian and terrestrial sites and is so strong it can damage buildings and ground surfaces. Being highly resistant to chemical and physical control measures, this species is difficult to manage and eradicate. Waste containing this plant is subject to specialist disposal because of its risks of spreading. A biological control agent has been identified, tested and approved for this plant.





Giant Hogweed: Originally an ornamental plant, this species has escaped into our countryside where it is often found on riverside banks. Giant Hogweed poses not only a threat to biodiversity and the environment but also our health as it is a highly toxic plant that causes blistering of the skin following exposure to the sun. As a result this plant requires specialised treatment.



Giant Hogweed, RPS Group PLC

Of course there are many more invasive species within Dorset, the UK and from abroad that we need to be aware of and vigilant for. For more information on invasive non-native species please visit: www.nonnativespecies.org.

Solutions and how you can help

Once established, INNS can be difficult to manage and as such require different management controls from chemical treatment to biological controls and repeated removal over several years, all of which are expensive and time consuming solutions. Consequently, the best approach is prevention rather than treatment. The British Non-Native Species Secretariat provides the national plan, advice and develops campaigns to raise awareness of INNS already in the UK and the risk of species poised to cross the channel. Visit www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm to find out more about how you can help stop the spread of these species.

The “Be Plant Wise” campaign is raising awareness amongst gardeners, pond owners and retailers about the risks of invasive non-native aquatic species and for people to not dump plants in the wild but dispose of them correctly.



Raising awareness of INNS, how they spread and how people can help reduce the spread is a key tactic. The “Check, Clean, Dry” campaign targeted at all water sports and users to prevent the spread of aquatic species through the disinfecting and drying of all kit, including equipment, footwear and clothing, which may be in contact with water between uses on different rivers, or before moving upstream.



Within Dorset and the Stour catchment various projects, including the Return of the Natives project, has been working with volunteers to control INNS and raise public awareness of the threats of INNS, control and preventative methods used. If you would like to get involved please see the volunteering section or download.



Himalayan Balsam pulling with Volunteers, Sarah Williams