# Upper Onny Invasive Plants Project

# 2015

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

**Rob Rowe**

# UPPER ONNY INVASIVE PLANTS PROJECT REPORT 2015

The object of the survey was to identify the location and extent of invasive plant species (specifically Himalayan balsam and Japanese Knotweed) along the rivers East and West Onny from their confluence at Eaton upstream to The Bridges on the East Onny and Onny Cottage on the West Onny and eradicate if possible.
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. Based on these findings I as the contractor would develop an action plan for the control of these plants, using similar methodology as used on the River Clun.
The majority of this report relates to Himalayan Balsam as only a few sites for Japanese Knotweed were found.
As the contractor I would identify the owners of the river contacting them for permission to survey, raising awareness of the issue and offering methods of control.

**Contacting owners**
This proved to be simple in some cases and difficult in others. A wide variety of ways were tried. Yellow pages, online web site lists,personal contacts.
Of these the latter provided the majority of information with some riparian owners often knowing several others.

The response of landowners varied. All were sympathetic, some had already been controlling HB themselves, whereas others had no knowledge of it at all even though it was growing on their land. Everybody I approached gave permission to clear or was doing it themselves.
An additional benefit of this survey has been the ability to access riverside meadows and find some botanically species rich unimproved areas.

From spot checks at the beginning of the surveying it appeared that the East Onny was free of Himalayan balsam whereas the West Onny was not.

HB was found very early [11th May] right at the top of the West Onny just over the border into Wales at White Grit and again in profusion further south on 9th June.
Surveys of Shropshire Wildlife Trust wildlife sites next to the East Onny which we had undertaken in 2014 and early 2015 showed no sign of these invasive plants, however during one of these surveys considerable quantities of HB was found along the Criftin Brook [which is part of the catchment area but joins the Onny below the confluence at Eaton]

**Recruiting volunteers**
At the beginning of July I approached Natural England and the Corndon Stiperstones Landscape Partnership Scheme for help with recruiting volunteers.
Responding to a mail out from the LPS there was a good response and eventually 10 people helped at different times and places, resulting in a total of 26 volunteer man days.

Richard Small from the UOWG contacted the local Young Farmers Clubs
The Chairs of four YFC's (Chirbury & Marton, Craven Arms, Dorrington and Rushbury & Cardington) were telephoned but none answered immediately. Only the chair of Craven Arms phoned back and she expressed interest in the project. The Craven Arms YFC meets on Monday evenings, normally for two hours and there are up to 10 young people.

In the event, the need to start work on pulling Himalayan Balsam, and the availability of adult volunteers during the day, precluded organisation of a work party of YFC members who would require careful supervision as most members are 12-15 years old. The chair of Craven Arms was telephoned to explain that there hadn't been time to organise a YFC work party; an offer of a talk on invasive plants (and another topic) was offered and it is hoped that next year there will be a better opportunity to involve young people.
Under these circumstances the initial attempt to make contact with other YFC Chairs was not

pursued.

Simon Brown, the Shropshire Outdoors Development Officer from Shropshire Council was contacted with a view to helping with his team. This did not happen this time but may do in the future.

**Promotion**
At the end of June with the help of NE a 'WANTED' poster was produced [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 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. Also on talking to people later, many had seen it, so it worked as a good introduction.

A press release was sent out at this time, which obviously due to the response went in a large number of issues. Despite the request for information specifically on the area between the Long Mynd and Corndon Hill I received phone calls from as far afield as Dudley ,Bridgenorth and Tenbury Wells!
An article was also sent to the local deanery magazine.

Again with the help of NE a double sided flyer was produced to give to landowners and other interested parties. This gave more information on HB and JK and how to control them.
[copy attached]

**Survey**
Started 29th June from Eaton Bridge just downstream of the confluence, working up the West Onny.
It was often impossible to walk on the river banks. Luckily due to a dry summer the river was low and so it was possible to walk in the water for most of the way. Occasional plants were pulled as I went and larger areas marked by GPS,with details noted [for transferring to a map at a later date] and either pulled then or later with volunteers. It became obvious fairly early on that a large amount of work would be needed to clear the HB.
Other parts of the river system were surveyed as I obtained permission.
The majority of the West Onny was surveyed and then pulled but I did some removal as I surveyed and also some areas were surveyed as we removed the HB.
From the amount of HB regrowing in early September it would appear that a second clearance in the year was necessary.

The East Onny was surveyed in full in the lower reaches and spot checked higher up.
No HB was found.

**Time spent removing HB in man days in each area[volunteers and my time]**

Confluence to Newton Farm 5 days
Newton Farm to Linley Hall 9 days
Linley Hall to A488 Welsh Lodge 2 days
Welsh Lodge to Appletree farm 9 days
Appletree fm to White Grit 9 days
the Bog 4 days
**Total 38 man days**

The amount of time spent on removal reflected the much larger areas of HB than had initially been anticipated.
Volunteers started 17th July through till August 11th working on 11 days
Our work consisted of pulling HB. No tools were used. In most places this worked very well
In 3 areas I/we returned to an area that had been pulled a couple of weeks previously. From the amount of plants which had not died /regrowth it became apparent that they needed to be

shredded more and ideally hung on fences or bushes to dry out if possible.

Volunteers were covered by Natural Englands insurance and we adhered to NE's risk assessment

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

**Summary**

Although it might be presumed that the lower part of the river would be worse this was not the case, with some of the worse areas 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.

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

Above is nearly all small grazed fields with some woodland and gardens while 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.

JK was only found or reported in a few locations and Natural England is following this up or the landowners are dealing with it themselves.

Signal crayfish are believed to be in the whole of the East Onny and at least in the lower part of the West Onny [seen at Bow House caravan park.]

**ACTION PLAN**

This year has given an idea of the extent of the HB and JK in this area.
Given that it took approximately 40 man days to clear HB this year that is a considerable input of time and labour.
However we now have a clearer picture of the problem, both where the HB and JK is and how much there is and how long it could take to clear.
Hopefully after removing such a large amount there would not be so much next year but this remains to be seen.
It is an ongoing problem which could be kept under control with a reasonable input of time and money, 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 always flower and seed however carefully the river is checked, we may never be able to remove it completely but it could be brought within control with the continued help of volunteers and landowners.

**2015/16**

- Explore possibilities of funding for next year and apply to ***AONB,Severn Rivers Trust, landowners?***
- Contact landowners to thank them for their help and cooperation and encourage them to play 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
- Organize.'Balsam Bash Bonanza' with local people one week in mid July around White Grit area.

*Presuming that the work we have done this year will have had some significant impact,we may hope that the percentage of HB will be down in subsequent years but this estimate is based on this years results plus clearing Criftin Brook, doing a follow up clearance and allowing for the fact that this years work took 50% longer than I had anticipated.*

*Proposed work for 2016*

***July 2016 [ based on team of 4 people per day;supervisor and 3 volunteers]***

***West Onny*** *[west of A488] 4days;*
*[east of A488] 3days*
***Criftin Brook*** *1day [not cleared 2015]*
***the Bog*** *1day*
***Total 9 supervisor + 27 days volunteer =36days***
***August/Sept 2016***
***4 supervisor + 8 volunteer days***
***3supervisor days to set up/contact landowners/report afterwards***

***Total 16 days supervisor time and 44 volunteer days.***

**16 days at £150/day**

**Other costs?**

**Rob Rowe September 2015**

HIMALAYAN BALSAM PULLING WITH VOLUNTEERS ON THE WEST ONNY

THICK HIMALAYAN BALSAM NORTH OF NEWTON FARM, WEST ONNY

BALSAM EXPANDING AWAY FROM RIVER NEAR THE TOP OF THE WEST ONNY

THICK BALSAM  NEAR WHITE GRIT AROUND OVERGROWN PONDS

NO LAUGHING MATTER! THICK BALSAM NEAR WHITE GRIT

# 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

Bro Stiperstones a Corndon Hill

NATURAL ENGLAND

Shropshire Hills

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.

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