

Controlling Himalayan Balsam – A Case Study

Himalayan Balsam is an invasive, non-native plant which had become established in the Clunes area in recent years. It prefers damp areas, especially watercourse banks. Himalayan Balsam can spread very quickly by firing its seeds up to 7 metres or by them being washed down watercourses. Being slightly sticky, the seeds can also be spread by animals, vehicles and people. As it grows in dense thickets up to 3 metres high Himalayan Balsam shades out native plants and when it dies in the autumn it leaves bare soil which is then at risk of being eroded. The Clunes infestation is, in particular, a threat to Moniack Gorge as the local watercourses ultimately drain into it. The Gorge is not only very beautiful but also a Site of Special Scientific Interest



When the threat it posed was first realised in 2010 local volunteers, mainly from Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust's Woodland Group started to control it in agreement with local landowners. After taking advice on control methods from Scottish Natural Heritage they concentrated initially on the highest risk location which is on a watercourse. In brief, control is by pulling up the root ball and crumpling the stem, preferably before it sets seed. Fortunately seed is only viable for about 2 – 3 years and the plant does not have thorns or sting.



Control has been successful beyond expectations. The level of infestation dropped radically and quickly in all known sites except one on which work only started in 2012 and by 2020 it was confirmed as fully eradicated.

This is a good example of how a community has acted to protect something it cares about – in this instance its local environment.