

Himalayan Balsam on the Pocklington Canal

An amateur guide to the plant and “Balsam bashing” (June 2024)

There is so much Himalayan balsam at some places along the canal it will be a multi-year project to control it and it will need the cooperation of landowners.

If passers-by can remove any plants they see, (as long as it's safe to do so) especially isolated plants away from the dense stands, then it might help to prevent further spread along the canal.

Himalayan Balsam can be most easily recognised when it's in flower. This example shows one plant coming into flower. It can also be distinguished by its oval pointed leaves and height – few other plants will grow as tall. The stem is hollow and easily bent – as shown in the second picture below.



It can be pulled up fairly easily, depending on the soil it's growing in, but may break at any point on the stem. Preventing flowering and seed maturity is key because this is an annual plant and only regrows from seed. If you can pull up the whole plant, you'll see its very limited root system (1st photo below) The second (blurry) photo shows what can happen when it has been knocked over, with the new roots appearing at the first node. To try to prevent the plant regrowing try to break or crush the lower end of the stem.

NB it's not worth trying to pull up the plant once it has started shedding seeds as this spreads the seed more than the plant might! They can also fire out and cause a risk to eyes.



Given the amount of balsam at some places along the canal we are trying to cut it near the base using slashers. This inevitably leaves some of the plant and root in the ground and some may reshoot. If possible, stand on the hollow stem left in the ground, this should help prevent regrowth. The second image below shows how it can regrow at one of the nodes after it has been cut.

