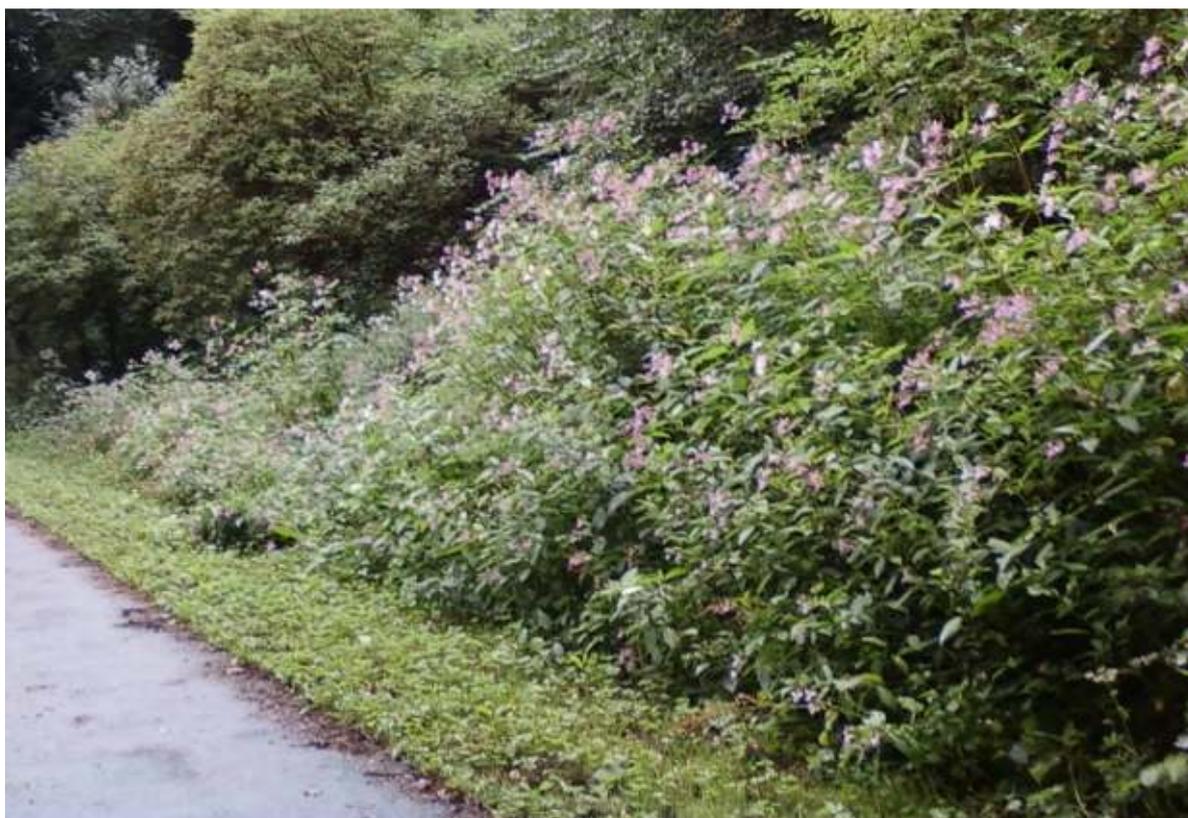


# Himalayan Balsam

---

## Ecology Technical Information Note No. 03

October 2011



## About Sustrans

Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable. We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices. Make your move and support Sustrans today.  
[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

Head Office  
Sustrans  
2 Cathedral Square  
College Green  
Bristol  
BS1 5DD

© Sustrans October 2011  
Registered Charity No. 326550 (England and Wales) SC039263 (Scotland)  
VAT Registration No. 416740656

Issue level: 03  
Owned by: NCN Director  
Contact: [hannah.roberts@sustrans.org.uk](mailto:hannah.roberts@sustrans.org.uk)

All photos by Sustrans unless noted otherwise

## Background

Himalayan balsam is a plant that is native to the western Himalayas. In the UK it has escaped from gardens to become an invasive weed. It spreads quickly and takes over river banks and path verges displacing native plants. Whilst its flowers do provide nectar for insects this is at one time of the year only. A varied verge with wildflowers provides nectar throughout the year and also has more structural diversity providing more habitats for wildlife. Himalayan balsam then dies down in the autumn and the resultant bare ground, erodes quickly and loses its soil structure.

Himalayan balsam is present or well established in sections of the National Cycle Network. A goal of management would be to eradicate this species from the network and thus massively increase biodiversity in those affected areas. Total eradication may not be possible everywhere but we can prevent the spread of this species through the landscape.

This species is also listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, as such it is illegal to cause it to spread. Construction work associated with route development could cause this species to spread if not managed properly.



## How to Recognise Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan balsam grows to approximately 3 m tall. The pinkish stems are hollow and can be easily snapped. The leaves have slightly jagged edges and are dark green with a red mid-rib. The leaves grow on stalks usually with three leaf stalks joining the main stem at the same point. It has 'slipper shaped' pink flowers on long stalks which appear from June (depending on weather and geographical location).



## Eradicating Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan balsam only lives for a year, dying off in the autumn. The seeds remain viable in the soil for two years, so if plants are stopped from setting seed for two to three consecutive years this species can be totally eradicated from a site.

If you have a site with no obvious sources of seed from outside it is worth putting in a concentrated effort on this section for two to three years to completely eradicate it from the site. This will be time consuming but will be very worthwhile. See 'How to control Himalayan balsam' for information on how to do this.

# Controlling the Spread of Himalayan Balsam

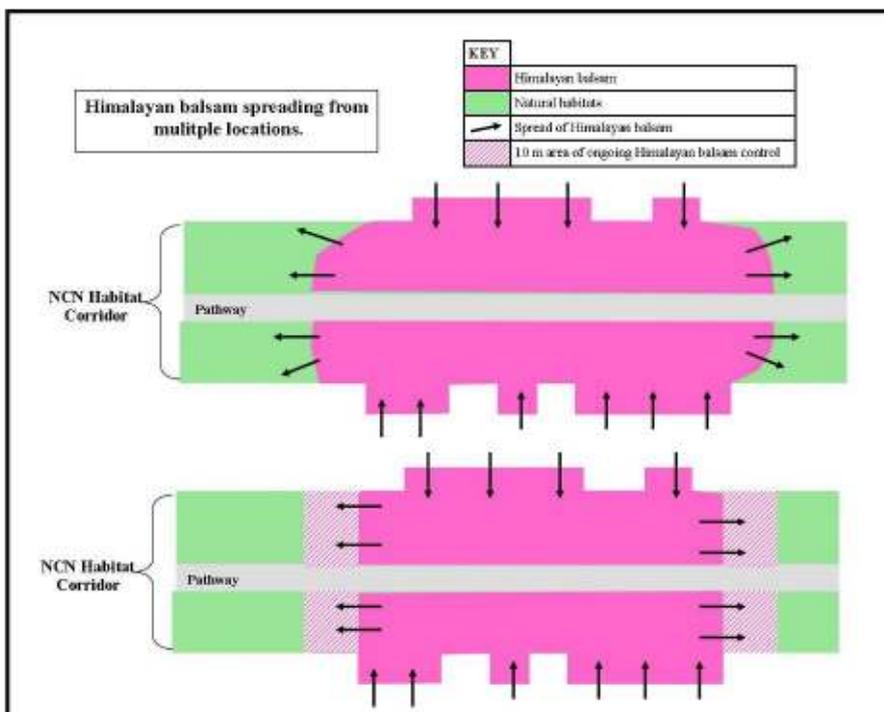
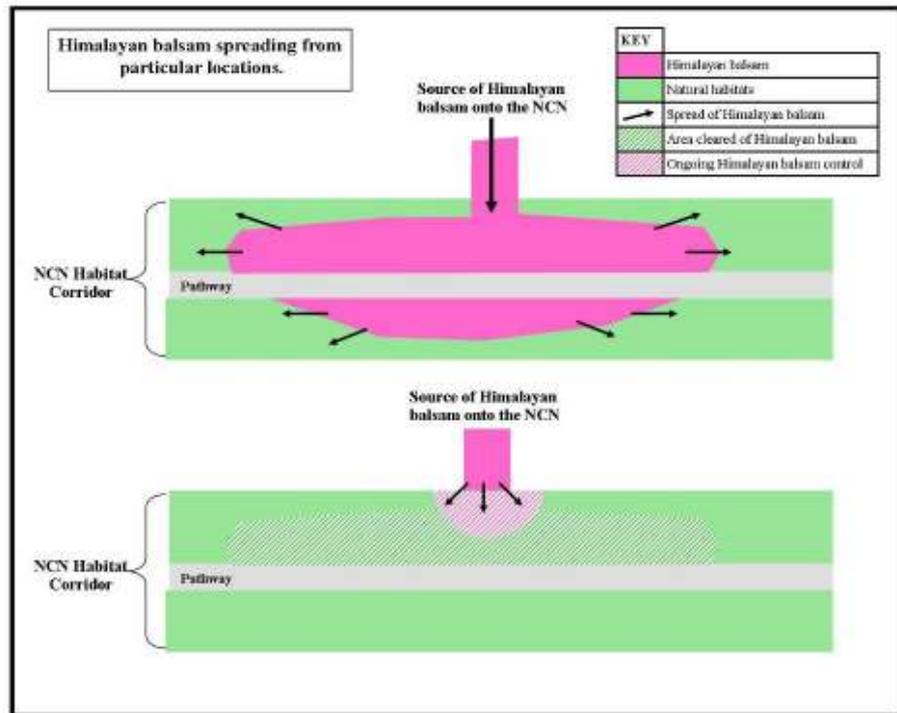
If seed is continuously entering the site from adjacent land or in watercourses, permanent eradication will not be possible. The goals of management are therefore to;

- Reduce the area of this species; and,
- Prevent its spread along the path verges to new areas of the landscape

This will be an ongoing task but the scale of work may reduce over time.

The seed pods explode and spread seed for a 7 m radius around the plant.

If the species is spreading in from one location, it can be knocked back to the source of the infection and then the 10 m radius around this source managed annually to prevent the species re-entering the network.



If the species is entering the site at many places, it may be worth focussing only on preventing its spread along the route; particularly if it joins designated wildlife conservation sites.

The peripheral 10 m of the Himalayan balsam should be controlled annually to keep it in its current area only.

## How to Control Himalayan Balsam

To control the spread of Himalayan balsam, management aims to prevent the plant setting seed by uprooting, cutting or strimming it before it flowers. The method used depends on the extent of the area to be managed and the resources available.

Himalayan balsam is shallow rooted and easily pulled up by hand. On sites with extensive areas of this species it is labour intensive but is the simplest and most reliable management technique.

If cutting the plant; the stem must be cut below the lowest node. If the stem is cut above this, it will send out more stems from that point and produce more flowers, and therefore more seeds, than it would without cutting.

Strimming will not accurately cut the stem below the first node as it is often very close to the ground. To prevent the increased flowering effect described above it must be conducted on a very regular basis throughout the two-three years to prevent the plant ever reaching the stage whereby it sets seed.

For all manual control measures, please note;

- Management must be before the plant sets seed, disturbing the plant once it has seeds will spread the seeds over a wider area.
- The cut/uprooted plant, if left on the ground, may send out new roots at every node point along its length, producing more plants and more seeds than without management. The cut/uprooted plants should be left off the ground, burned or removed from site or piled up in a single location – depending on the number of plants cut/ uprooted.
- It is recommended that after wholesale clearance, brief site visit are conducted to remove any stray plants that were missed or have grown since the management occurred. These could be conducted by the Sustrans rangers.

## Himalayan Balsam and Route Development

Construction work can cause Himalayan balsam to spread by moving infected soil around or disturbing the plant whilst in seed, causing its distribution over a greater area. As such, a method statement must be prepared prior to any works being conducted in the vicinity of Himalayan balsam. This is likely to include elements to reduce soil movement, clean vehicles when leaving the infected areas, prevent disturbance to plants in seed and post-construction control of the species.

*For more information please see the Environment Agency publication: Managing Invasive Non-native Plants*

***<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/pdf/GEHO0410BSBR-e-e.pdf>***