

New Forest Non-Native Plants Project



Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Lymington River newsletter *April 2020*

Welcome

The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project aims to stop the spread of invasive non-native plants in the New Forest area, particularly along river banks and in wetland habitats. The New Forest Non-Native Plants Officers, Jo Gore and Catherine Chatters, have been helping landowners along the Lymington River and its tributaries the Passford Water and Mill Lawn Brook to control Himalayan balsam and American skunk cabbage. This newsletter provides an update on progress we're making and looks ahead to the future.

Coronavirus

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is inevitably affecting the activities of the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project (NFNPP). Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust is taking the situation very seriously.

The NFNPP has secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund through the New Forest 'Our Past, Our Future' Landscape Partnership Scheme for Jo and Catherine to continue working on the Project until the end of September 2020. Jo had hoped to be leading volunteer work parties to pull Himalayan balsam along the Lymington River and its tributaries during Summer 2020 but these have had to be cancelled until 31 May 2020. The situation will be reviewed by the Wildlife Trust at the end of May.

In the meantime, Jo has been 'furloughed' from Monday 6 April 2020, so will be unable to contact you or respond to your queries. Thank you for your patience and understanding at this challenging time.



New Forest Non-Native Plants Officer Jo Gore pulling Himalayan balsam on a sunny day in 2019

Contractors have been commissioned to control the American skunk cabbage along the Mill Lawn Brook downstream of Burley and in the Wildlife Trust's Lymington Reedbeds Nature Reserve during 2020. Hopefully this will still go ahead in accordance with Government advice regarding the Coronavirus situation but we will have to respond to changing advice. The most important thing is that everyone keeps as safe as possible in these difficult and uncertain times.

Himalayan balsam

Himalayan balsam was introduced to the UK as an ornamental garden plant in the early nineteenth century but has become very invasive and can out-compete native vegetation. It has colonised river banks in the New Forest area. Luckily it has short roots and is easy to pull up.



Himalayan balsam (photo: Ashley Basil)

During 2019 Jo and Catherine led groups of enthusiastic volunteers to pull up the Himalayan balsam growing along the banks of the Lymington River and its tributaries. Excellent progress has been made and the balsam has almost been eradicated at some sites where we've been working for the past few years.

Thank you to all the landowners who've welcomed the volunteers on to your land. Your continued co-operation is so important to the success of the Project and is very much appreciated. Depending on the Coronavirus situation, we hope to be leading more volunteer work parties to pull up Himalayan balsam along the Lymington River, Passford Water and the Mill Lawn Brook during Summer 2020.



The photo above shows a keen volunteer pulling Himalayan balsam in the Lymington catchment in 2019.

The photo on the left shows Jo with two of her volunteers during a balsam pull at The Shallows along the Lymington River during Summer 2019.



American skunk cabbage

American skunk cabbage was introduced to the UK as a garden plant but has invaded the countryside and has colonised wet woodland along the Lymington River and the Mill Lawn Brook. American skunk cabbage has been banned from sale and it's illegal to plant it. Although it is the landowner's responsibility to stop it spreading, the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project recognises that help is needed for effective control at the catchment scale.

The Project Officers arranged for herbicide treatment by professional contractors to control American skunk cabbage along the Mill Lawn Brook and in the Wildlife Trust's Lymington Reedbeds Nature Reserve during 2019. We hope the treatment can be continued in 2020 but obviously this will depend on Government advice relating to the Coronavirus situation.



American skunk cabbage photographed in Lymington Reedbeds Nature Reserve during April 2011 (photo: Clive Chatters)



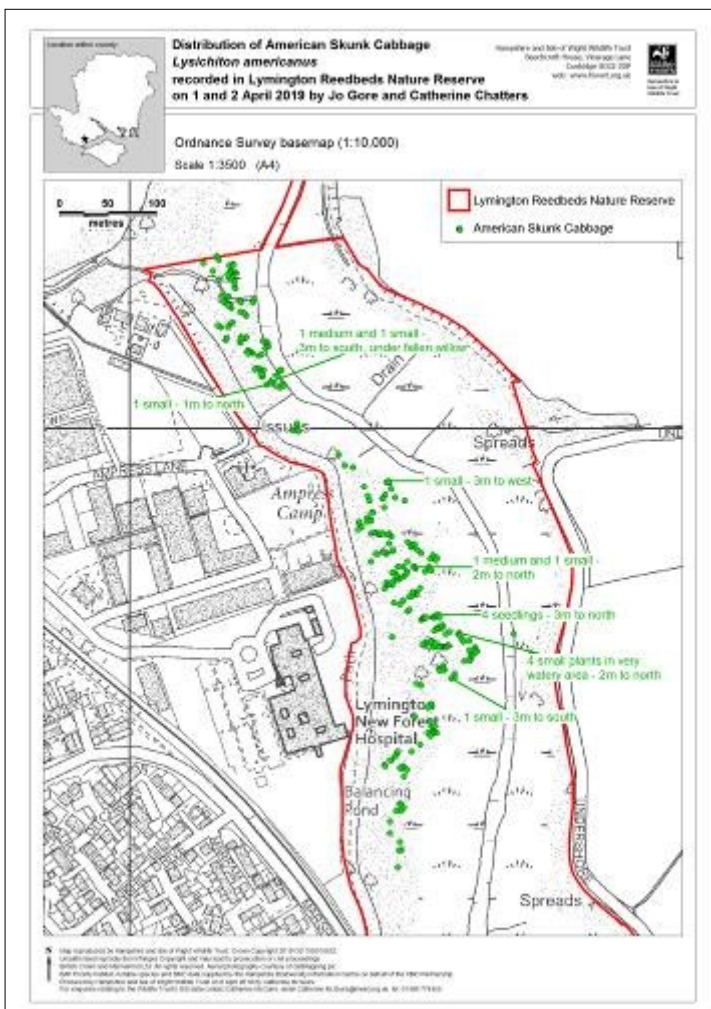
During 2019 Jo Gore and a group of intrepid volunteers helped a landowner to tackle the American skunk cabbage growing in wet woodland in the catchment of the Lymington River. These photos (above and left) show two of the volunteers who worked really hard and braved the wet, muddy conditions to dig up lots of large, mature skunk cabbage plants and small seedlings.

Monitoring the success of control work

These two photographs show the density of the American skunk cabbage population growing in wet woodland along the Lymington River prior to the control work initiated by the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project. The skunk cabbage plants out-competed the native vegetation as their large leaves blocked out the light.



To assess the effectiveness of the work undertaken to control American skunk cabbage in the Wildlife Trust's Lymington Reedbeds Nature Reserve, the Project Officers have visited the site during the Spring to map the location of remaining skunk cabbage plants and to record the vegetation growing in six quadrats. The monitoring since 2013 has revealed a substantial decrease in the skunk cabbage population and very few now grow mature enough to produce flowers.



Jo Gore during monitoring visit to Lymington Reedbeds Nature Reserve on 1 April 2019

Monitoring the success of control work (cont)

The photo on the right is a reminder of how dense the Himalayan balsam was in some places prior to the start of the co-ordinated programme of balsam pulling by the New Forest Non-Native Plants Officers and our wonderful band of volunteers.

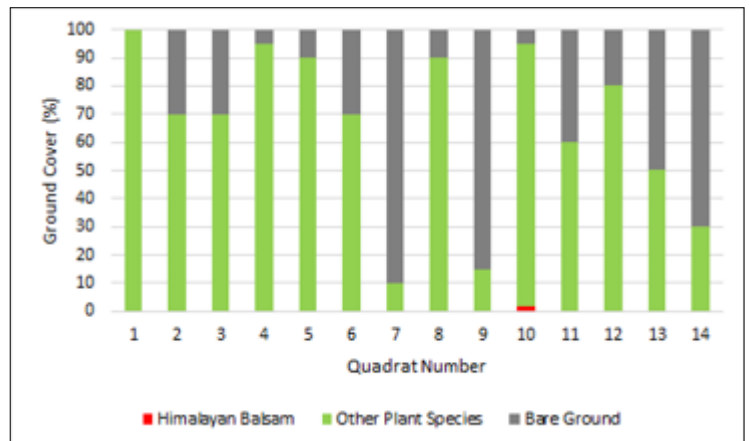
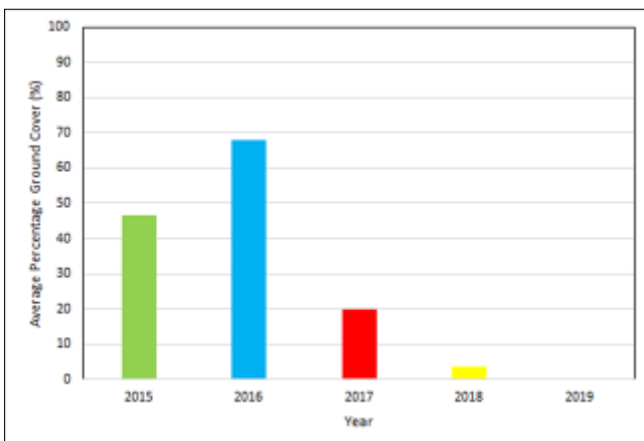


To assess the effectiveness of the work undertaken by the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project using Lottery funding, students from the University of Southampton carried out a baseline survey of Himalayan balsam at three sample sites during 2015 and these sites have been monitored by students each summer in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. One of the sample sites is the Lymington Reedbeds Nature Reserve. The photo below shows Dominika and Rebecca who undertook the baseline survey during 2015.



The monitoring has revealed a dramatic decrease in Himalayan balsam within the nature reserve. The graph on the left below reveals the decrease in average percentage ground cover of Himalayan balsam recorded in the quadrats between 2015 and 2019 (please note that the apparent increase during 2016 is probably due to the monitoring being undertaken prior to the start of the balsam pulling season that year).

The graph on the right shows the percentage ground cover of Himalayan balsam (red), other plant species (green) and bare ground (grey) in the 14 quadrats surveyed during 2019. By 2019 balsam occurred in only one of the quadrats.



The Project Officers are very grateful to the students. The surveys they have carried out have given them valuable field work experience and the monitoring has demonstrated to the National Lottery Heritage Fund that excellent progress has been made with the control of the balsam.

Network Rail

During 2019 Jo made very good progress with the control of Himalayan balsam along the railway embankments in the vicinity of the Lymington River and the Passford Water.

Having established an effective working relationship with a key manager at Network Rail, she led a number of balsam pulls with Network Rail staff and helped them to identify balsam more confidently.



The photos on this page were all taken by Jo during balsam pulls with Network Rail last summer.

Hopefully Jo will be able to lead further balsam pulls on the railway embankments during 2020 but this will, of course, be dependent on the Coronavirus situation.

Jo and Catherine held a training session in March 2019 for Network Rail staff and their contractors to raise awareness about invasive non-native plants growing on Network Rail property. Advice was provided on how to recognise plants such as Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed, on control methods and relevant legislation.

See photo on page 8 of this newsletter.



Invasive Species Week

The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project helped to promote Invasive Species Week during May 2019. This national initiative, organised by the Great Britain Non-Native Species Secretariat, aims to raise awareness about invasive non-native species and the problems they cause.

During Invasive Species Week Catherine visited garden centres and spoke to staff and customers to promote 'Be Plant Wise', a government campaign to encourage people to garden responsibly and ensure they don't dump garden waste in the countryside.



Photos above and right show staff at Southern Aquatics in Cadnam and at Everton Water Garden. Photo below shows customers at Romsey World of Water.



Invasive Species Week provided an opportunity to raise awareness about the invasive non-native plants which are now banned from sale.

Catherine also gave a talk at Redcliffe Garden Centre to alert gardeners to the problems caused by invasive non-native plants.

Awareness-raising events

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, which hosts the New Forest Non-Native Plants Project (NFNPP), is one of the partners in the New Forest 'Our Past, Our Future' Landscape Partnership Scheme. This is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and aims to conserve and restore landscapes and habitats and inspire a new generation to champion the area. In addition to providing resources for practical work, the NLHF provides funding which enables the NFNPP to raise awareness about invasive non-native plants.

Last year the NFNPP hosted awareness-raising sessions for Network Rail staff and contractors, Young Commoners and volunteers to help people recognise invasive non-native plants, understand the problems they can cause and find out how to control them.



The photograph above shows New Forest Non-Native Plants Officer Jo Gore with some of the participants identifying pictures of invasive non-native plants during the training session for Network Rail staff and contractors in March 2019.



Photo above: volunteers during the awareness-raising session on 6 November 2019. Some of these people helped to control Himalayan balsam on the Lymington River and its tributaries during Summer and Autumn 2019.

Photo on right: three of the Young Commoners at the awareness-raising session held in Lyndhurst on 10 May 2019.



Awareness –raising events (continued)

The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project attended the Wood Fair at Roydon Woods in June last year and had a display at a nature reserve open day at Lymington in September.



Photos show visitors to the NFNNPP displays at the Wood Fair (left) and nature reserve open day at Lymington (below).



Project shortlisted for CPRE Award

The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project was selected as a finalist in the Community and Voluntary category of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England's Hampshire Countryside Awards 2019.

Photograph shows Nigel Atkinson, Lord Lieutenant for Hampshire, presenting a certificate to the Project Officers and volunteers Patsy Baverstock and Brian Matthews at the CPRE Hampshire Countryside Awards ceremony on 17 September 2019.



Photo credit: Jason Allen Photography

New Forest Non-Native Plants Project Forum

The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project annual Forum meeting, held on Wednesday 4 March 2020, was attended by over 50 people. Patrick Heneghan introduced the event on behalf of the New Forest National Park Authority. Trevor Renals, the Environment Agency's national specialist on invasive non-native species, gave a fascinating presentation on the control of Creeping Water Primrose, putting the work of the Project into a national and international context. Jo Gore and Catherine Chatters then summarised the activities of the Project since its launch over a decade ago in May 2009. Thanks were expressed to everyone who has supported the Project.

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Please note that Jo Gore is currently furloughed so is unable to receive or respond to any e-mail messages or 'phone calls. Whilst Jo is furloughed her e-mail messages will be monitored occasionally by her Manager, Martin de Retuerto, Director of Projects and Services at HIWWT. Thank you for your patience and understanding.



Jo Gore, New Forest Non-Native Plants Officer, with three keen volunteers during a Himalayan balsam pull in Summer 2019



**Hampshire &
Isle of Wight**

Wildlife Trust

The New Forest Non-Native Plants Project is a partnership project hosted by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and supported by a number of organisations



Our Past, Our Future
Working together for the New Forest



All advice given by HIWWT is done so in good faith and every effort is made to ensure that it is accurate and appropriate however it is the sole responsibility of the landowner to ensure that any actions they take are both legally and contractually compliant. Therefore, HIWWT does not accept responsibility or liability for any losses incurred or arising from the advice we give.

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