

## **WOODLAND ECOSYSTEM GROUP PRIORITY ACTION AREA**

### **WYE VALLEY WOODLANDS : HIMALAYAN BALSAM CONTROL**

#### **Summary**

The Wye Valley Woodlands SAC extends to over 916 hectares of woodland and in Wales comprises 9 individual component Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The Wye Valley Woodlands are widely regarded as one of the most important areas for woodland conservation within Britain.

In recent times (probably over the last 5 years or so), Himalayan balsam has spread into several woodland SSSIs that make up the Welsh part of the SAC. Sites that are particularly affected are Lower Hael Wood SSSI and Graig Wood SSSI to the south of Redbrook. At these sites, Himalayan balsam has spread rapidly along existing tracks and paths. Where trees have been removed or fallen naturally they are being replaced by dense stands of Himalayan balsam which is smothering the native flora and hindering tree regeneration.

This plant species has also been recorded at other SSSIs in the Wye Valley including Fiddlers Elbow north of Monmouth and Blackcliff-Wyndcliff near Tintern.

Ironically the spread of this non-native species has benefited from past Ravine Wood LIFE work within the SAC to improve their condition by increasing the amount of light reaching the woodland floor particularly in Graig Wood SSSI. To date attempts have been made to control the plant through volunteer work tasks with only limited success. Himalayan balsam is an annual with each plant capable of producing 1,000s of seeds. Whilst it is an easy plant to control (easy to uproot and prevent it from flowering), the amount of seed produce makes it a hard task.

Himalayan balsam is also a problem in the Non SSSI parts of the Wye Valley including areas of Colonel's Park outside



Volunteers hand pulling balsam at Graig Wood SSSI



Hand pulled balsam laid out to dry on forestry track

Without appropriate control, it is likely that this plant will continue to spread further into these woodlands and affect their condition.

#### **Action Required**

- Strategic plan for Himalayan Balsam Control in the Wye Valley

- Mechanical Control of Himalayan Balsam in Priority Areas

### **Priority Sites for Action**

- Lower Hael Wood SSSI
- Graig Wood SSSI
- Fiddlers Elbow
- Blackcliff-Wyndcliff
- Colonel's Park

### **Section 42 Species**

Asplenium trichomanes subsp. pachyrachis	A Maidenhair Spleenwort
Campanula patula	Spreading Bellflower
Monotropa hypopitys	Yellow Bird's-nest
Leptidea Sinapsis	Wood White
Sabra harpagula	Scarce hook-tip
Muscardinus avellanarius	Dormouse

### **Other key Species**

Stellaria nemorum subsp. montana	A Wood Stitchwort
Sorbus anglica	A Whitebeam
Salabriopsis albicilla	A Moth
Eupithecia egenaria	Pauper Bug