

Ambleside

2022

Himalayan Balsam



Summary

Himalayan Balsam in Ambleside took advantage of the lack of control during the lockdown and Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. A total of over 14,000 plants were removed in 2022. Known infestations were revisited several times during the summer but extensive infestations were also discovered. Activity on a total of 41 days reflects the scale of the problem. The Parish Council drafted a letter to send to land owners reminding them of their responsibilities under The Invasive Alien Species Order 2019.

A brush-cutter, clearing brambles, provided access to enable removal of over 4,200 Himalayan Balsam plants from the area behind the Primary School football pitch. The rapid growth of Himalayan Balsam in July and August meant regular return visits were essential in order to intervene before the plants set seed.

The scale of the problem and the widespread locations of the infestations mean that more control will be needed to prevent the increasingly widespread distribution of seeds, especially following flooding. The plants are capable of

growing up to 3 metres (10 feet) tall and explosively producing up to 800 seeds, throwing them up to 7 metres from the plant. Infestations can build up very quickly in unpredictable locations.

Dr Nigel Riley

Primary School Football Field

Brush-cutting access paths through the brambles and undergrowth behind the Primary School football pitch began in January. After waiting until the Blackcaps had nested, I returned in May and was shocked to find the Himalayan Balsam had surged back in an area I knew to be clear in 2019. This is an area that floods in winter. Storm Arwen felled a tree across Stock Ghyll. The Department of the Environment had cut it up, leaving the debris which shelters the plants and & creates an obstacle course for later “Balsam Bashing”. Three sessions with the brush cutter cleared a large area overgrown with brambles. This provided access and with help from Christine Riley & Jill Attenborough of Rydal WI, plus a further 10 visits, achieved removal of over 4,200 plants .



26 January 2022. Brush-cutting behind the Primary School Playing Field.



9 June 2022. Clearing the brambles behind the Primary School Football pitch.



26 January 2022. Grateful for Christine's help.



16 June 2022. Grateful for Jill's help Balsam bashing.

Lake Windermere

Ken Taylor alerted me to Himalayan Balsam growing on the lake foreshore that he had seen from the bus. When I visited in mid -June there was a ridge of gravel at the high water mark along which there was a “breadcrumb trail” of Himalayan Balsam. It extended from below the entrance to The Samling all the way across three streams to the Low Wood. I uprooted 629 plants here and emailed the Low Wood with a photograph of the infestation between their lawn and the lake. Knowing previously, I had had to remove plants from the roadside at their entrance. I also visited the Samling where they have infestations around their beehives and wooded area.



14 June 2022. Lake Windermere shoreline.



14 June 2022. Lake Windermere High Water Line.

Grove Farm

In early June I ventured to visit the stream that flows down the boundary between Roundhill and Grove Farms before it enters Stock Ghyll. Happily there were only 430 plants, duly removed & hung up to dry. This was gratifyingly fewer than expected.



7 June 2022. Grove Farm boundary with Roundhill Farm.



7 June 2022. Stream at Grove Farm where it enters Stock Ghyll.

Returning in August, I encountered two infestations at the top of the field beside the boundary wall with Roundhill Farm. 5 visits later I'd cleared over 1,000 plants, leaving the Roundhill Farm outcrops untouched.



13 August 2022. Grove Farm - just one of the infestations



14 August 2022. Grove Farm - another infestation.



22 August 2022. Grove Farm - Gauntlets to fend off head-high nettles were an essential but not entirely successful precaution.



14 August 2022 The intensity of seeds & seed pods collected for burning. Each pod contains up to 16 seeds (DEFRA) and each plant is capable of producing up to 800 seeds (RHS).

Stock Ghyll

Thanks to Roland Wicksteed, another volunteer. He and I swept up Stock Ghyll from Miller Bridge to Bridge House. I scrambled upstream to Stock Ghyll Force and also to the Grove Farm Stream (mentioned above). Over 770 plants were removed over the summer. Dried stalks were evidence of some one else uprooting plants. Unfortunately, I did not manage to meet them. Although I thought I'd cleared the Ghyll up to the Force, on 4 June 2022 I found over 60 mature plants on a very damp, steep slope below Stock Ghyll Court which were removed.



4 June 2022. Stock Ghyll.



13 August 2022. A large mature plant beside Stock Ghyll. Our native Touch-me-not Balsam (*Impatiens noli-tangere*) in the background.

Rookery Cottages

There is quite a drop down the steep, unstable, slippery bank below the wall behind these cottages to Stock Ghyll. I was relieved to find there were only 72 plants on 7th July but after clearing them, I returned on 22 August to find a further 20 very mature plants which were also removed.



22 August 2022. Rookery Cottages. Here looking up the steep drop from Stock Ghyll.



22 August 2022. Rookery Cottages. (It is handy being a climber in order to deal with the plants - one hand for them and one for me for security!)

Rydal Farm

A final total of over 1,000 plants, duly removed, reflected the extent to which reinfestation can surge back in the absence of control.



9 June 2022. Rydal Farm just upstream from Miller Bridge.



13 June 2022. Rydal Farm closer to Miller Bridge.

Rothay Park

Park maintenance still does not extend to controlling the Himalayan Balsam despite SLDC having been made aware of the problem.



7 July 2022. A group adjacent to and easily accessible from the path.



21 September 2022. A mature plant that had shed seeds into the ditch that runs down beside the access to the Park football ground and ultimately the River Rothay. I had to use secateurs to cut back brambles to reach it.

Rydal Road Car Park

Again, maintenance does not extend to controlling the Himalayan Balsam.



5 July 2022. Plants in the corner of Rydal Road carpark where the wall and football ground fence meet.



20 September 2022. Within sight of the payment machine. This one had shed seeds in the undergrowth beside the SLDC car park.

Rydal Road Car Park



20 September 2022. Plants overtopping the boundary fence around the primary school football pitch. They had shed seeds into an area cleared of Balsam by the year 6 pupils a couple of years ago.



20 September 2022. After burrowing into the bramble patch these plants were removed & destroyed.

SLDC were requested to remove the bramble patch where the seeds germinate before next year. To date no response has been received from SDLC.

Hayes



9 July 2022. A stream emerges on the surface in Hayes staff car park. Martin Hayes tells me maintenance is the responsibility of Sainsburys due to a condition in their planning permission. Unfortunately, Covid -19 intervened and disrupted a group “Balsam Bash” I had arranged. Instead I had to self-isolate for 13 days.



9 July 2022. The Fisher Beck flows out of its channel in a field belonging to Hayes, to the west of Hayes Garden World. Himalayan Balsam has surged back having been cleared previously.

Waterhead

The stream from Hayes staff car park continues on the surface adjacent to the boundary of the Cook & Lakin site and unregistered land at Waterhead Close belonging to the builder of the houses.

Cook & Lakin



11 July 2022.. Cook & Lakin site. Plants were cleared.

33kV Substation Waterhead Close



8 July 2022. In an area adjacent to the 33 kV substation. 800 plus plants were removed. Himalayan Balsam can even climb trees -so can I! 4 plants were removed from 10 ft. up.

Waterhead Lodge

Before the houses were built at Lakes Gardens, the site was known to be heavily infested. The owner of Waterhead Lodge gave permission for me to uproot over 2,000 plants. Seeds from this site, overlooking Mclver Lane, would be washed down into Lake Windermere.



4 July 2022. Waterhead Lodge garden.



11 July 2022. Waterhead Lodge. Some of the over 2000 plants separated from their roots.

Future Activity

Fields above Lake Road

During a “Balsam bash” at Rydal, I was alerted to the presence of what turned out to be an extensive area of Himalayan Balsam in the fields above Lake Road. **It** was too late in the season to deal effectively with such intense infestations. A stream flows from here to Low Brow Farm, a holiday home and then under Lake Road to Hayes Car Park. The owners of the fields have been approached for permission to start on these swathes of Himalayan Balsam in 2023.



25 September 2022 Field behind Braeside



23 August 2022 Field above the driveway to The Moorings

