

Himalayan Balsam on the Pocklington Canal

An amateur guide to the plant and “Balsam bashing”

There is so much balsam at some places along the canal it will be a multi-year project to control it. 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 pulled up fairly easily, depending on the soil it's growing in, but easily breaks 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:



To try to prevent the plant regrowing try to break or crush the lower end of the stem.

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.

Steve Ashby, PCAS

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