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Joint Press Release Issued by Natural England and the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership

No Embargo

Volunteers tackle invasive alien

Volunteers and the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve team have been mapping and removing pirri-pirri bur, an invasive alien plant species, from the dunes of the Northumberland Coast this week.

The long summer evenings have been ideal for volunteers from Berwick Wildlife Group to survey the dunes of the Northumberland Coast AONB for an invasive alien plant, the pirri-pirri bur. Using GPS units the group are mapping the plant wherever they find it. The information will then be used to control the plant.

One member of Berwick Wildlife Group said: "We have surveyed the coast between Holy Island and Berwick, looking for Pirri-pirri bur. When we find it we can pin-point the location using GPS and it can then be dug out. There are a few patches away from the coast, in Berwick itself, by the river Tweed and no doubt elsewhere, spread by dogs or walkers carrying the hooked seeds. It would be helpful if these plants could be found and removed before they grow any bigger"

Pirri-pirri bur is native to New Zealand, thought to have been introduced to Northumberland through the wool industry on the River Tweed. The species is now found throughout the dunes of Holy Island, part of Lindisfarne NNR, where the first confirmed records date back to 1939. It is not confined to the Reserve however and can be found along the whole Northumberland coast and at several other sites inland. The plant is also found in other locations across UK, with the first UK record found in Dorset in 1901.

Andrew Craggs, Reserve Manager at the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve explained why the plant is such a problem saying "Pirri-pirri bur has colonised large areas of the dunes on Holy Island and in places it dominates to the detriment of our native plants. From June to November, seeds with spiny burs are produced that get stuck in shoes, clothing and dog fur.

“If you look at a distribution map of the plant in Northumberland, it relates to the County’s other tourist attractions as the seeds are picked up and transported on the socks and boot-laces of visitors. We ask that visitors to the coast are careful not to transport pirri-pirri bur seeds to other sites”.

Reserve staff and volunteers hand-pull the plants and remove the prickly seeds from the major paths among the dunes on Holy Island – this is why it is important to stay to the main paths, reducing the chance of coming into contact with the burs and spreading them to other areas

Staff from the Environment Agency, on an environmental leave scheme, were in the dunes at Bamburgh on Friday, digging up clumps of pirri-pirri where they found it. Alys Evans from the Environment Agency said “Areas like Bamburgh have recently been colonised by pirri-pirri and it is important to stop its further spread. Digging it with garden forks and then burning it is a good way of removing the plant at this stage. It has been hard but rewarding work for the staff”.

Iain Robson from the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership said “Members of the public can help prevent the further spread of pirri-pirri bur by keeping to paths through the dunes between June and November. Visitors should also check their shoes, clothing and dogs for seeds, removing them and putting them into a bin.”

Ends – editors note over page

Image: Pirri-pirri Bur

Notes to the editor

About National Nature Reserves

[National Nature Reserves](#) are some of the very finest sites in England for wildlife and geology, and provide great opportunities for people to experience nature. They have been established to protect and manage the special wildlife habitats, species and geological features that occur there. These features are of national and often international importance, and many NNRs are important for study and research. Almost all NNRs have some form of access provision – many are fully open throughout the year. There are 224 throughout England. Please visit our web site for more information about NNRs.

About Natural England

[Natural England](#) is the government's independent advisor on the natural environment. Established in 2006 our work is focused on enhancing England's wildlife and landscapes and maximising the benefits they bring to the public.

The Northumberland Coast AONB

The Northumberland Coast has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) since 1958 in recognition of the quality of the landscape. AONBs are a national landscape designation and together with National Parks they make up our finest landscapes. The Northumberland Coast AONB covers 135 sq.kms, between Berwick and the Coquet estuary. The area is best known for its sweeping sandy beaches and open views, rolling dunes and rocky cliffs, isolated islands, dramatic castles, ancient relics and rich wildlife.

The Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership

The Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership is a broad partnership of representatives from local authorities, statutory organisations, interest groups and the local community. The Partnership guides management of the AONB, offers advice to land managers and the local community and takes action to improve the well being of the AONB for all those who value it, now and in the future.

The Northumberland Coast AONB Management Plan

In autumn 2004 the AONB Partnership launched the first statutory Management Plan for the AONB (2004-2009). This document sets out the main issues relating to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the AONB, and prescribes a series of policies and actions to address these issues. The Management Plan was developed through consultation with people living and working in the AONB.

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