The Invasive Species Project

*By Adam Walmsley and Charlie Poate*

Invasive non-native species (INNS) are thought to be the second most important threat to global biodiversity after habitat loss. A 2010 report estimated the cost of invasive species to the UK economy at £1.7 billion and their impact is rising. Invasive species may also reduce the ecological status of a river which will jeopardise our Water Framework Directive goals. In the Ribble Valley we have a variety of invasive species, some of which have been here for a long time, others are more recent. Each of these contributes to a reduction of native biodiversity and a degradation of the river environment.

![American mink](image)

**American mink**

*Mink were released from fur farms and have quickly spread across Britain. They eat fish and compete with native mammals but the biggest threat they pose is to the endangered water vole. Encouraging otters may help to reduce the impact of mink.*

![Himalayan balsam](image)

**Himalayan balsam**

*This fast-growing annual swamps out other plants and dies back in autumn leaving the bank bare and at risk of erosion. Balsam spreads by seeds which are flung up to 7 metres from explosive pods. It is best controlled by pulling it out before it flowers.*

To tackle this problem, the Ribble Rivers Trust has set up the Lancashire Invasive Species Project in partnership with the Environment Agency. We have two new invasive species officers working on the project. The first stage of the process is to map all the existing records of invasive species throughout the county. We will then fill in the gaps in these records within the Ribble Catchment by doing some surveying ourselves. There is also a website where people can record their own sightings of invasive species and see their records on the map.

**How you can help**

This project will rely heavily on involvement from volunteers and landowners. We need volunteers to help survey for invasive species, pull balsam and spray knotweed.

We would also like everyone to keep their eyes peeled for invasive species when out and about, and let us know of any possible sightings by recording them at;  

**www.lancashireinvasives.org**

If you are a landowner and have invasive species on your land, we would like to talk with you about how we can work together to control them. Again, please get in contact via the phone number or email below.

**Contact Adam or Charlie about invasives on 01200 444452 or email invasives@ribbletrust.com**