

Invasive Species

Non-native invasive plant species are one of the greatest threats to the environment and biodiversity. They are often more vigorous than native species and lack natural pests and diseases to keep them in check. The smallest fragment, inadvertently spread, can cause an invasion. Invasive species can act as vectors for new diseases, alter ecosystem processes, change biodiversity, disrupt cultural landscapes, reduce the value of land and water for human activities and cause other socio-economic consequences.

Cornwall Knotweed forum formed in 1997 to co-ordinate policy on the control of Japanese knotweed in Cornwall. The Forum has produced a number of publications and guidance notes, organised conferences and co-ordinated research projects. It has developed a GIS survey recording system in conjunction with the Botanical Society of the British Isles. Cornwall is also currently pioneering work in the control of invasive alien weeds such as Japanese Knotweed where a top scientific research company has been contracted to examine the weed and potential natural control methods. Other terrestrial non native invasive species in the county include himalayan balsam, hottentot fig, montbretia and giant hogweed. Aquatic invasive plants in particular out-compete native plants and can form dense mats choking up watercourses, increasing the risk of flooding, deoxygenating water and limiting access. Substantial amounts of money are spent annually managing non-native invasive species on waterways, ponds and lakes. ERCCIS are currently running POND CHECK¹⁴, which is a free service to help pond owners identify potential problem plants and provide advice on how to remove and carefully dispose of them.

Rivers and river corridors are often a means of transport/ spread for terrestrial as well as aquatic invasive species, therefore river basin or catchment scales plans should be considered a minimum for control or monitoring.

ERCCIS and Cornwall Wildlife Trust are collaborating with associated organisations, including the Marine Biological Association, to uncover which invasive marine species have already arrived in Cornwall and establish the ones that pose a significant threat should they arrive. Dive surveys will be undertaken in 2010 and 2011 in the Fal estuary, along with monitoring of removable settlement panels situated in surrounding marinas. Both native marine life and marine based industries are under increasing pressure from the introduction of non-native invasive marine species. They find their way into our coastal waters through many pathways, once here, they compete for resources such as space, light and food. In some cases native wildlife can be prey for the new arrivals.

Lead organisations are Cornwall Council, ERCCIS and Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Westcountry Rivers Trust, and Cornwall Knotweed forum.

Key BAP habitats:

- Ponds
- Rivers
- Marine habitats
- Broad Leaved Mixed and Yew Woodlands
- Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh
- Saline Lagoons



Floating pennywort. Photo by Trevor Renals

¹⁴www.ercis.co.uk/projects/investigate_invasives/pondcheck/