

Bourn Free Newsletter

June 2017

Project update

Issue 2

The Bourn Free project is currently led by the Wildlife Trust and the Countryside Restoration Trust. It aims to control non-native species on the Bourn Brook, but also to improve habitat and water quality and to look at opportunities to accommodate flood flows. We continue to control mink, Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed (assisted by the Environment Agency) and have benefitted from landowners and local people giving up their time to help. We are now looking at flows and flooding as well, and for ideas to reduce flood flows.

Can you help?

We need help to control Himalayan balsam on the brook. Most of the work involves wading, but it is a satisfying job, pulling the plants by hand. Work parties will be organised through the summer and there is usually a small amount of dry land work too.

Task dates, contact info and locations can be found here:

<http://www.wildlifebcn.org/bournbrook>

You are welcome to come to any of the balsam days without warning, but we appreciate knowing in advance that you're coming so we can make sure we have enough waders and can contact you if the task is changed or cancelled.

We also need people willing to walk a stretch of brook regularly to record and report giant hogweed or Himalayan balsam, even if you can't do anything about it at the time.

More details about these tasks can be found overleaf. If you can help out, please contact Ruth Hawksley (contact info overleaf).



Water vole

Himalayan balsam progress

The hard work of previous years seemed to be not quite enough to get on top of the Himalayan balsam, so in 2016 we focussed our efforts more at the top end of the brook, where some stretches were visited 3 times over the summer.

A total of 24 balsam-pulling events were held, comprising 532 volunteer hours and 40 hours of staff time. This was again an increase on last year's 353 volunteer hours.

Ideally this huge effort needs better co-ordination with more local "eyes on the ground" who can monitor where new plants appear and make sure they are dealt with.



Volunteers with a large pile of pulled Himalayan balsam

Bourn Brook flow project

The Wildlife Trust is looking at flows on the brook, particularly peak flows and flooding. We are particularly interested in where and how flooding occurs. If you see a flood (any time the brook comes out of its banks) we would be very grateful for a flood map. It would need to include:

- Date and time of flood event
- Extent of flooding
- Where the bank was breached
- Your name and contact details

If you would like a blank map to draw on, please contact Ruth Hawksley.

We are also keen to measure flow rate in the tributaries of the brook, particularly after rain. If you are willing to do this please get in touch for more details.

Bourn Brook Water Vole News

Results of our recent water vole survey will be available soon. The good news is that water voles are now present along most of the length of the brook, which is a significant increase since our initial survey in 2011 and since our second survey in 2014. This is an indication that mink control is having a beneficial effect on water vole numbers.

Have you seen this plant?

Giant hogweed is known to be present in the area. It can cause nasty burns to unprotected skin. This picture shows what it looks like when young. The leaves grow large and the stems are often hairy with red blotches. Later in the year, it can grow to 2m or more when in flower. If you see giant hogweed, or suspect you see it, please send us a photo with details of where it is. Please do not touch it yourself—we will remove it safely.



Balsam rust fungus:

Scientists at CABI have identified and released a fungus which attacks Himalayan balsam and should help control it. We are not near any of the release sites but the fungus may eventually reach Bourn Brook balsam. If you see an infected plant please do let us know, preferably with a photo and detailed location.

For more information, see

<https://himalayanbalsam.cabi.org/release-update/>



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