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News Release

Page 1 of 2

Aliens invade our natural areas

Following the theme of this year's International Day of Biological Diversity - invasive alien species, Nottinghamshire's Biodiversity Action Group (BAG) has chosen to raise awareness of Japanese Knotweed, one of the most invasive plants known in Britain today.

Invasive alien species can be plants, animals, pathogens and other organisms that are non-native to an ecosystem, and which cause great environmental harm. They choke our native species and disrupt our local ecosystems. Rivers, hedges, roadsides and railways provide corridors for native plants and animals to migrate and as large infestations of non-native weeds build up they can block these routes for wildlife.

During 2009 the BAG partnership will undertake a survey to identify the distribution of this troublesome non-native invasive species. Anyone is welcome to get involved in this survey and records will be accepted that cover anywhere both in the county of Nottinghamshire and the City of Nottingham. However, when undertaking surveys the landowner's permission must be given. Once records are received and mapped, the information will be disseminated widely, encouraging landowners to take action once alerted to the problems Japanese Knotweed can bring, by sharing good practice for removal.

Spotting Japanese Knotweed is relatively easy due to its hollow bamboo like stems covered by purple speckles and the large size of plants that can often reach 2-3 metres in height. The plant flowers late in the year in August to October and has small creamy-white flowers hanging in clusters from where the leaf joins the stem. During winter, the leaves die back to reveal orange brown coloured woody stems. During March to April, the plant sends up new purple coloured shoots with rolled back leaves.

Chris Jackson, Biodiversity Officer for Nottinghamshire said "by getting involved in this survey the public will be helping the BAG partnership to establish the distribution of this plant across both the county and city and as a result we will be able to identify the scale of the problem that Nottinghamshire and the city of Nottingham face in controlling the spread of this non-native species"

To download an electronic version of the survey form please visit www.nottsbag.org. Completed forms can be sent in their electronic form to biodiversity@nottsc.gov.uk or for a paper copy contact 0115 9774213. These can be returned to the Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group, c/o Conservation Group, NCC, Trent Bridge House, Fox Road, West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire, NG2 6BJ.

Photo of Japanese Knotweed attached

Notes on Japanese Knotweed

Japanese Knotweed originated in Japan and was introduced to the UK in the early 19th Century as an ornamental plant. It forms dense clusters up to 3m (10ft) in height and can grow at a rate of 10cm per day. Japanese Knotweed can be spread both naturally and by people. A new plant can propagate from only a very small fingernail sized fragment. The plant forms an extensive network of underground rhizomes (underground stems) and these make removal of the plant extremely difficult. Small sections of knotweed rhizomes can also break off and be carried by water downstream to start new infestations or alternatively movements of soil contaminated by plant fragments can spread the plant at a rapid rate.

It is commonly found on previously developed land, post-industrial sites and along railway lines. It is also commonly seen on roadsides and along watercourses such as canals, rivers, streams and ditches.

Weed control is not effective and specialist treatment is needed to identify and treat outbreaks and to ensure safe removal. All parts of the plant are considered as controlled waste under Waste Regulations.

Burying contaminated soil and plants to a depth of at least 5 metres is recommended. Site trials for eradication have so far shown good results.

Notes on the Biodiversity Action Group

The Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group is a partnership of over 50 organisations including voluntary, statutory and community groups working together to conserve and enhance the wildlife of Nottinghamshire for the benefit of people and wildlife.