

Himalayan Balsam Pull 2010 - report by Lynne Wood

The plant has had a good year in 2010! It, like many others, likes a period of cold to aid germination and the winter of 2009/10 seems to have been much to its liking. We have, over the pulling period, experienced plants some 14 feet tall, with flowering branches coming from the nodes. Website information suggests that there can be 800 seeds per plant!

Our Official Season took off on Saturday 19th June, when we were joined by some members from Friends of Allestree Park (FoAP). Our first foray was into the Council Depot off the Mundy Play Centre Car Park and we pulled some big clusters of large plants in there, with help from FoAP and also Kath Stapley and family from the Mercaston and Markeaton Brook Project. When we were down to three stalwarts on that day, we pulled along the left bank of the brook (left and right depending on the direction of flow) to the left of the Red Bridge in Markeaton Park.

Our pulling has been on Saturdays and on Thursday evenings through to September, when it started to become too dark to see each other by 8.00pm

We have also pulled along the left bank of the brook to the right of the Red Bridge and have 'pulled and pulled with all our might' and cleared the 'stilling pond' in the Council Depot, a previously neglected area. Thanks to the Smart Car Owners Club, who were involved by Annie Withnall, we also cleared a dense area by Markeaton Lane accessed from the depot. Another Thursday evening project saw us clear an area of 'pink' below the bridge across Markeaton Lane where the brook enters the park from Markeaton Stones Farm.

Two intrepid pullers tackled the banks (from within the water!) from the Mundy Rec off Mackworth Road and cleared both banks by the allotments up to the footbridge.

Three of us went to Mount Farm on Saturday 7th August and met up with farmer Brian Adams. We started in Brian's furthest field and worked as far as we could up stream. We found one or two places where the balsam was starting to take hold and it was good to destroy those plants before they seeded. It was awkward to access the brook and most of the pulling was done by the group's Secretary, Penny, who had the height and was limber enough to climb over barbed wire, handicapped though she was with stiff chest waders. The brook was inaccessible in the last field as it is overgrown with nettles, blocked by a fallen tree and the substantial fence was well reinforced by brambles, so again not really accessible from the bank. Fortunately this area is very shady and it is unlikely that much balsam has germinated here and if it has, it is unlikely to flower.

Not all of the Balsam upstream stems from Mount Farm. We are making enquiries through Kath Stapley of the MMB project to see if we can have permission to access a farm higher up the catchment with plans to tackle it there next year.

The amount of Balsam this year has given real cause for concern. We have plans for next year to start pulling in May (starting the season with a picnic for our doughty pullers) and continue through to September (finishing with a celebratory barbecue), to try to bring about some measure of control.