Himalayan Balsam Campaign Report 2025

Introduction

Invasive Non-Native invasive Species (INNS) are recognised as an increasing problem nationally and there are concerted attempts to control them (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/invasive-species-order-2019-consultation-opens).

INNS are usually defined as those species introduced by humans outside of their natural or native range. They are those which cause unwanted environmental or social impacts by spreading rapidly and becoming over abundant in the environment. It is not well understood why some non-native species become invasive and others do not.

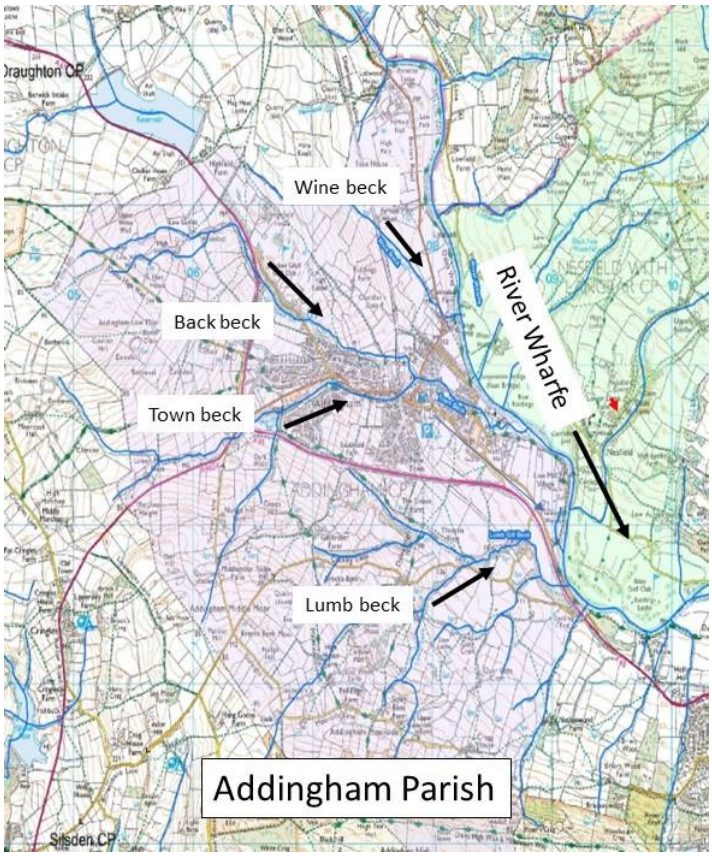
In Addingham we have problems with Japanese knotweed, Giant hogweed, Curly waterweed, and Himalayan balsam. Addingham Environment Group (AEG) is working with landowners to tackle them all. The main issue though is Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), which had spread extensively.

Himalayan balsam (balsam), with its showy pink flowers may look attractive but it is a troublesome 'invader'. Native to the foothills of the Himalayas, it was brought over by plant collectors in the 19th century. In recent years, in many parts of the country including Yorkshire, it has spread along roadsides, riverbanks, becks and in wet woodlands, out-competing native plants. If left unchecked, it rapidly forms dense stands.

As well as taking the place of native wildflowers, it also reduces the variety and abundance of invertebrates in the soil below and can draw pollinators away from native species. Balsam dies back in the autumn leaving bare ground which is then vulnerable to erosion especially along river and stream banks.

It is listed in Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) in England and Wales as an invasive species, making it an offence to plant or otherwise cause it to grow in the wild.

Our report published in March 2021, and updated annually since then, documented our experience, effort and progress since we began our campaign in the summer of 2017 to attempt to eradicate balsam from the parish.



For the first four seasons we focussed on the four main beck systems (Town Beck, Back Beck, Lumb Beck and Wine Beck) which rise on the moors above Addingham and flow into the River Wharfe (Fig 1).

Having made good progress controlling balsam along the becks within the parish, from 2021, while not losing our focus on the becks, we started to work with riparian landowners and communities upstream and downstream to address its removal along the River Wharfe and lower Town Beck where it joins the main river.

Here we report on the work we carried out in the summer of 2025. In total we organised 35 work parties, from the end of May until late August, on Tuesday evenings, Thursday mornings and Saturday mornings, a total of 325 volunteer hours (compared to 290 hours and 34 work parties in 2024).

The Becks

Town Beck & Back Beck

Our Addingham 4 Becks Stewards kept a watching brief on the becks where they run through the village throughout the summer. Compared to 2024, stewards reported more plants and some small stands on **Town Beck** from Townhead down to Low Mill Lane.

The denser stands on the banks of Marchup Ghyll above the village (behind Townhead Mill and below the stepping stones) remain persistent where the balsam grows among nettle and bramble. In addition to the beck stewards' efforts, 14 volunteer hours were spent here.

For the first time, disappointingly the **Back Beck** stewards reported and pulled a small number of plants from this beck which in previous years had been Himalayan balsam free.

Lumb Beck catchment

Over much of the catchment balsam is confined to isolated plants, growing in and alongside the water courses. In these areas the recce and removal are done at the same time, with just two or three volunteers undertaking this work for the most part. The 2025 season was notable for an increase in the number of plants removed throughout the catchment compared to 2024.

There remain some areas of larger scale invasion, notably around Cuckoo's Nest and Ghyll House Farms, the Beever Pond wetland and on Throstle Nest Beck around and up stream of Cat Steps. On Hall Gill there were more plants to remove on the beck at Overgate Croft than in 2023 or 2024.

At Cuckoo's Nest a concentrated effort was still needed on the scarp slope behind the farmhouse, where some dense stands remain. Disappointingly there was more balsam beside and in the beck below the farmhouse this year. At Ghyll House balsam persists in the wet pasture but is gradually reducing year on year.

Balsam persists among the reedmace tall-herb fen at the Beever Pond wetland. Progress stalled during the very wet summer in 2023 when water levels were too high to get into the area safely. As in 2024, this year there was a substantial number of large strongly rooted plants, which were tackled over two work parties. In 2026 we hope to get into the fen earlier in the season if water levels allow.

We continued to work on the dense stands of balsam on Throstle Nest Beck above Cat Steps which were first spotted towards the end of the 2024 season.

Over the summer of 2025 we went out on 19 occasions from the end of May until mid-August, compared to 14 in 2024, 15 in 2023, 13 in 2022, 16 in 2021, and 24 in 2020. With more balsam in evidence across the catchment, in 2025 we spent 169 volunteer hours on Lumb Beck and its tributaries compared to 105 hours in 2024, but still substantially less than the 206 volunteer hours spent in 2020.

The River Wharfe

Lower Town Beck

With the co-operation of landowners along Low Mill Lane, for the fifth year running we tackled the substantial invasion of balsam along the channels of Town Beck where they join the River Wharfe and through the wet woodland habitat on the island between the beck and the main river. This floods in high water, depositing seed from higher up the river.

There was much more balsam this year than we had seen before in the beck channels and on the shore of the main river. We think the very warm spring and summer favoured balsam germination and growth. The lack of rain led to low river flows exposing banks that would in many years be under

water, providing more space for balsam to germinate. There was also still sufficient moisture in the soil especially, in the early part of the season after a wet winter, for the plants to grow well.

We spent 36 volunteer hours clearing balsam here, concentrating on keeping the island clear. Unfortunately, we ran out of time to clear all the banks where the main Town Beck channel meets the main river.

South bank from Addingham Suspension Bridge upstream to Farfield

Following our efforts in previous years, the wildflower rich riverbank at Olicana Park by the Dales Way, remained fairly clear. However, there was more balsam to remove along the riverbank at High Mill. A stand was also noted by the side of the river from Dawson Crossley Field to the Suspension Bridge. The steep slope wooded down to this made it difficult to reach safely.

After Olicana the river bank was balsam free upstream until the steep wooded bank above the river at Longfield. The effort needed elsewhere meant that we did not manage to get to this area again in 2025.

North bank from High Mill Weir to Nesfield

For the fifth year running we worked with the landowner at West Hall Farm, to help bring substantial amounts of balsam under control on the main river, as well as on the banks of West Hall Beck. We concentrated our larger work parties here, including a session with Addingham, Brownies, Guides and Scouts, as part of Climate Action Addingham Wildlife Week.

The section upstream of the suspension bridge to High Mill Weir and West Hall Beck required a similar volunteer effort to that in 2023 and 2024.

Most of our volunteer time was spent on the section downstream of the suspension bridge, where there are dense stands growing in amongst willow, along drains and in wet flushes where water drains from the hayfield, and this year on the more open river bank. In total we spent 58 volunteer hours along the stretch of the river bank (90 hours in 2024).

There was also substantially more balsam on West Hall Beck this year, especically on the banks where the beck flows into the main river. We spent more of our effort here (24 hours compared to 10 hours in 2024).



Downstream of Addingham

In early July, as part of Climate Action Addingham Water Week, we linked up with The Ilkley Clean River Group supported by Climate Action Ilkley for the fifth 'Big Balsam Bash' to help clear the substantial stands of balsam on the south bank. Seventeen AEG volunteers joined the work party on a very wet Saturday morning to clear balsam from along the Dalesway from Ilkley Old Road towards the Tennis Club. It is encouraging to see the diversity of native wildflowers recovering as the balsam becomes less dominent in the meadows on this section of the Dales Way.




Other invasives

While balsam has been the main task, we continued to work with landowners to control other invasive plant species. On the golf course we worked with Bracken Ghyll Golf Club staff to remove **curly waterweed** for the sixth year. There was very little to remove this year. Bur reed and water lily now dominate and aquatic life is returning to the pond.

The pond in 2020…..

…..and in 2025

We also continued to work with landowners to remove invasive **giant hogweed** growing in a small number of places in the Lumb Beck catchment. This is largely under control and for the most part we are now dealing with small patches appearing in the spring as dormant seed already in the soil germinates.

Conclusions & future plans

A changing climate is undoubtably making controlling Himalayan balsam more challenging. With a very warm spring and summer, germination and growing conditions in 2025 were near perfect. As beck levels fell during the drought the resilience and adaptivity of the plant was much in evidence, with examples of the lower balsam stems producing adventitious roots to help re-root stressed or damaged plants.

The tables in Annexe 1 summarise our work since 2020 within Addingham Parish, and our stretch of the River Wharfe. We use the traffic light system below to give an indication of progress in controlling Himalayan balsam on the becks, riverbank and adjoining land. The categories are as follows:

Green: under control, isolated plants only - watching brief

Amber: coming under control, continuous isolated plants & some stands

Red: not yet under control – larger stands & numerous individual plants.

Our aim is to year on year increase the ‘green’ length of beck and riverbank and reduce the area of other land invaded by balsam in the ‘red’ category.

We remain confident that Himalayan balsam is coming under control along the Addingham becks, but the 2025 season showed that continuing effort will be needed to reach our ambition of just needing to keep a watching brief each summer. In the Lumb Beck catchment it was disappointing that part of the Hall Gill tributary was back in the 'amber category' this year, and we have not succeeded in moving any more areas from the red or amber category.

In 2026 we will continue to concentrate our efforts along the becks and adjacent land where balsam is not yet under control, whilst remaining vigilant and removing isolated plants from those sections in the 'green' category.

Our experience working on the main river for a fifth year, suggests that it is extremely difficult to eradicate balsam from the main river entirely. Our priority for our stretch of the River Wharfe remains to control spread inland especially where it threatens valuable woodland ground flora and wildflower rich grassland habitat, as well as spread up the beck systems.

We are watching with interest the Yorkshire trials of a method of biological control, which involves the release of rust fungus – a natural enemy of the plant found across its native range in India and Pakistan. The fungus was released at several sites across Yorkshire in 2024 in collaboration with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, The National Trust and Yorkshire Water.

In 2026 as well as working on the Addingham stretch of the Wharfe, we will also continue to collaborate with Ilkley Clean River Group downstream.

Jan Hindle & Rick Battarbee, Addingham Environment Group, April 2026

Annexe 1

Lumb Beck Catchment – Addingham Moorside

YEAR			2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
	LENGTH OF BECK (M)	AREA OF ADJ. LAND (M^2)	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND
Lumb Beck: LG1 headwater to Moorside Lane														
No Himalayan balsam present														
Lumb Beck: LG2 Moorside Lane to field boundary north of Stegghouse FM (at GR SE07814810)														
	325		1		1		1		1		1		7	
Lumb Beck: LG3 Stegghouse Fm(at GR SE07814810) to the Stegholes to Gatecroft footpath														
	348		14		8		4		3		3		1	
		400		4		38		2		19		8		10
Lumb Beck: LG4 Stegholes to Gatecroft footpath to Cocking Lane														
	578		9		4		9		4		2		2	
Lumb Beck: LG5 Cocking Lane to Lumb Gill Lane														
	752		32		8		8		6		5		6	
Lumb Beck: LG6 Lumb Gill Lane to the A65														
	500		14		1		1		1		1		4	
Cuckoo's Nest Beck: CB1 Field boundary NW of School Wood Fm (GR SE07094809) to Cuckoo's Nest Farm bridge														
	318		14		8		4		14		6		1	
Cuckoo's Nest Beck: CB2 Cuckoo's Nest Farm bridge to confluence with Lumb Beck														
		600						20		26		33		38
	720		12		10		11		7		2		14	
Throstle Nest Beck: TNB1 Below Street Farm to Cat Steps														
	220										14		15	
Throstle Nest Beck: TNB2 Cat Steps to Lumb Beck														
	475		16		3		1		1		1		1	
Gatecroft Beck: Ghyll House Farm to woodland and wetland above Low Lathe to confluence with Hall Gill														
	968		22		14		16		20		13		25	
		2000		6		16		6				6		26
Hall Gill: HG1 Cragg Farm to Copping Lane														
	1,152		50		30		20		5		7		17	
		317		6		2		2		2		1		1
Hall Gill: HG2 Copping Lane to confluence with main Lumb Beck														
	236		6		2		2		2		2		1	
TOTAL	**2717**	**2917**	**190**	**16**	**89**	**56**	**77**	**30**	**64**	**47**	**57**	**48**	**94**	**75**

Marchup/Town Beck

YEAR			2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
	LENGTH OF BECK (M)	AREA OF ADJ. LAND (M^2)	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS BY BECK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND
MB1: Dark Wood Beck to Marchup Beck														
	173				4		4		2		2		4	
MB2: Marchup Beck stepping stones to Townhead Culvert														
	454		2		2		17		16		10		12	
TB1: Downstream from Townhead Culvert to Church Field														
	1900		4		4		4		6		4		12	
TB2: Lower Town Beck to River Wharfe														
		9000			52		33		24		52		36	
TOTAl	**2527**	**9000**	**6**		**62**		**58**		**48**		**68**		**64**	

River Wharfe – Addingham stretch

YEAR			2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
	LENGTH OF RIVER (M)	AREA OF ADJ. LAND (M^2)	VOL HOURS RIVER BANK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS RIVER BANK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS RIVER BANK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS RIVER BANK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS RIVER BANK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND	VOL HOURS RIVER BANK	VOL HOURS ADJ. LAND
North Bank - High Mill to Suspension Bridge														
	630				32		12		10		10		8	
West Hall Beck - to Nesfield Rd														
	493				24		10		8		10		24	
North Bank - Suspension Bridge to Low Mill														
	650				58		63		70		90		58	
South Bank - Farfield to Olicana Park														
	1902				10		8		0		0		0	
South Bank - Olicana Park														
	166						27		15		6		2	
South Bank - High Mill to Suspension Bridge														
	296				1		1		1		1		4	
TOTAL	**4137**				**125**		**121**		**104**		**117**		**96**	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Addingham Moorside Landowners

Judith Wallbank
Sally & Jonathan Priestley
Jill Feenan
Richard Solomons
Liz Merrick
Graham Lingard
Robert Lofthouse
Mrs Stapleton & Mark Stapleton
Ellis Bros.
Sue & Richard Hobson
David Hargreaves
Luke Winterburn
Jamie Crabtree
Michael Flesher
George Dawson

Lower Town Beck Landowners
Alan Jerome
Liz Clayton
Stacy Ormerod

River Wharfe Landowners
Chris & Nick Harker
Olicana Park
Ellis Bros.

Balsam Bashing Volunteer Team 2025
Peter Miller
Jessica Penrose
Jackie Olive
Maire O'Donnell
Jan Hindle
Richard Hindle
Rick Battarbee
Gill Battarbee
Christine Makowski
Ian Viner
John Fontana
Jane Shaw
Lesley Loughlin
Christine Smith
Rob Smith
Fran Valliant
Cherry Bartlett
David Bartlett
Judith Ellis
Trish Breen
Susan Penny
Chris Cobley
Lorraine Robinson
Sarah Ashelford
Sylvia Kenny
Andy Payling
Ian Thursford
Melanie Taylor
DofE Volunteer -Dougie Thistlethwaite
Jane Farnell
Michael Baldwin
Jackie Squire
Ian Squire