



**Wales Environment LINK evidence to the Environment & Sustainability Committee of
the
National Assembly for Wales**

Inquiry into the Impact of Invasive Alien Species in Wales

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental and countryside Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales, most of whom have an all-Wales remit. WEL is officially designated the intermediary body between the government and the environmental NGO sector in Wales. Its vision is to increase the effectiveness of the environmental sector in its ability to protect and improve the environment through facilitating and articulating the voice of the sector.

Wales Environment Link values the opportunity to take part in this evidence session.

The Invasive Alien Species Problem in Wales

A National Assembly for Wales research note entitled Invasive Alien Species¹ published April 2013 provides a summary of the position in Wales and gives an estimated direct cost to the Welsh economy across sectors of £125.12 million per annum.

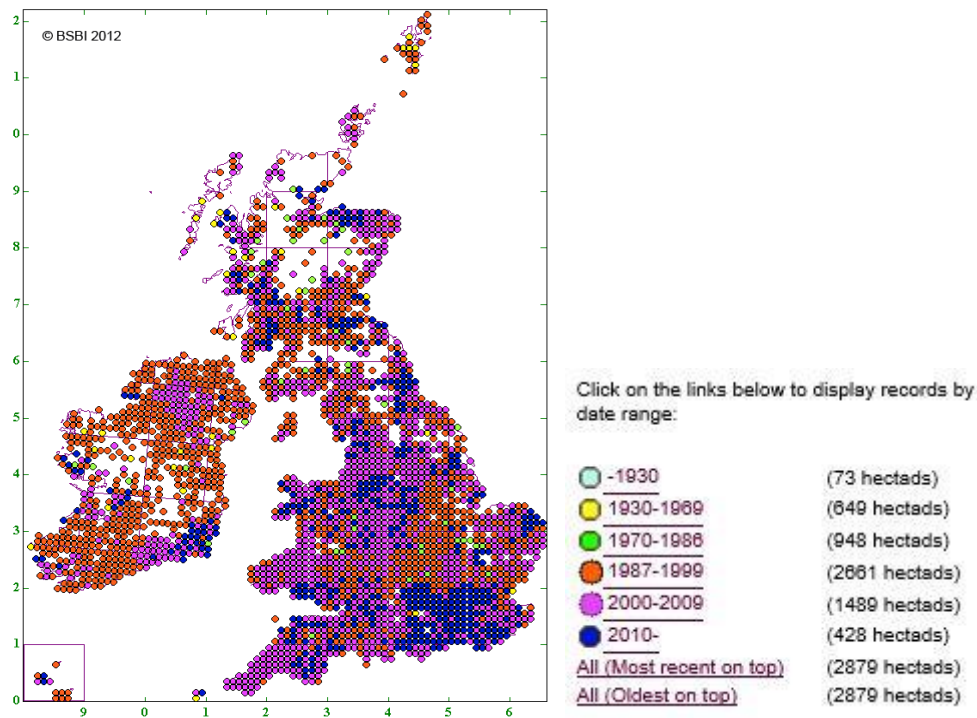
It also itemised the effects of Invasive Alien Species on Welsh biodiversity:

- Competition
- Predation
- Hybridisation
- Transfer of pathogens and parasites

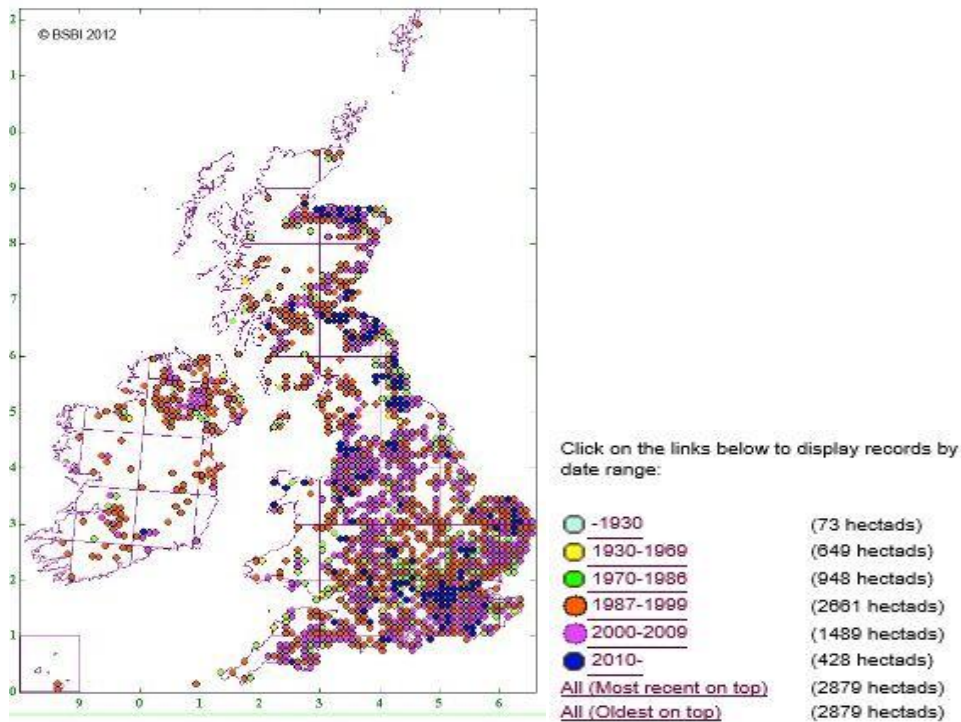
The adequacy of the data and information currently available on the extent of invasive alien species in Wales.

Data on the extent of invasive alien species in Wales is mixed dependent upon which type of species, the level of identification competence required, and the popularity of that species group for people to record it. Recording species is primarily a voluntary occupation with an estimated 75% of all species records being provided voluntarily within UK. Some datasets and recording schemes have been operating for more than a century such as the Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI) founded in 1836 who provide distribution mapping online

for vascular plants recorded in Britain (<http://www.bsbimaps.org.uk/atlas/main.php>). Each of these maps at 10 kilometre square (hectad) resolution are backed up by a multitude of individual records of the species concerned, two examples are given below.



Distribution of Japanese Knotweed in Great Britain & Ireland at 10 km sq resolution.



Distribution of Giant Hogweed in Great Britain & Ireland at 10 km sq resolution.

Also species records for UK are gathered into a central national database through the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and its gateway <http://data.nbn.org.uk/> which contains more than 80 million records and information on marine species and their distribution is also available through the Marine Life Information Network (MarLIN) <http://www.marlin.ac.uk/index.php>.

Wales has the benefit of four Local Record Centres <http://www.lrcwales.org.uk/> which cover the whole of Wales which are repositories for species records for their areas and provide centres for promoting biological recording, and gaining identification skills, and they feed their records into the NBN gateway. Between them their databases contain around 5 million records, but with the majority of recording being a voluntary activity their databases are entirely reliant upon the relationship between the individual recorder and the LRC.

Taxonomic expertise, the ability to identify species accurately, is at a premium in a small country like Wales, reliant upon experienced individuals, the universities, the NGOs, Natural Resources Wales, and the National Museum of Wales. It is unfortunate if it is being reported accurately that future financial plans for the National Museum of Wales will involve a major reduction in its taxonomic capacity.

Natural Resources Wales has an Outcome 21 database which identifies actions that require to be undertaken by the relevant authorities to bring designated sites into favourable conservation condition which include invasive alien species management.

In conclusion regarding the adequacy of the data and information currently available for invasive alien species, there is a great deal of data available and most of it is available if one knows where to look, but occasionally it is not necessarily easily obtainable if it remains in an individual recorder's notebook. By their very nature, invasive alien species are constantly on the move and attempting to establish themselves in new areas, so constant and repeated survey effort is required to identify new arrivals.

Action taken to date by the Welsh Government and relevant authorities to tackle this issue

Through the Wales Biodiversity Partnership's Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Group, the Welsh Government leads on Invasive Alien Species (IAS) management in Wales in partnership with other key stakeholders. A number of actions have been undertaken by relevant authorities over the years to eradicate non-native alien species in Wales, many of which are illustrated in evidence given by others today.

Success is most easily obtained in eradicating invasive alien species with limited distributions as can be illustrated by the BSBI giant hogweed map and the work being undertaken in the Usk catchment. Work to eradicate widespread species such as Japanese knotweed requires a different approach identifying populations in a defined area, such as a river catchment, and working to eradicate it from the top down in a systematic way. In the case of the river Taff catchment this would reduce and ultimately eliminate the necessity for Cardiff City Council to remove and dispose of huge amounts of Japanese knotweed rhizome and plant material from Cardiff Bay after the river has been in flood.

The recent Wales Government Ecosystem Resilience and Diversity Funding has allowed a number of projects to control invasive alien species in Wales to be progressed including the removal of grey squirrels from a genetically distinct native red squirrel population by the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project.

There is a clear need for reporting who is undertaking what invasive alien actions where to inform everybody. A mechanism, the Biodiversity Action Reporting System [BARS] is available but at present underused, <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/>.

How action to tackle invasive alien species in Wales could be improved

Our England based sister network Wildlife and Countryside LINK have published an analysis of the Invasive Non-native Species (INNS aka Invasive Alien Species IAS) Framework Strategy for Great Britain² whose relevant recommendations we endorse:

- Existing powers to control INNS need to be used more effectively (for example, greater enforcement against those who deliberately release INNS into the wild). This would be facilitated and complemented by greater communication between the various relevant bodies, and an additional provision right across the UK for species control orders and emergency listing.
- There should be greater alignment between INNS regulations across the different devolved countries, following the Scottish regulatory model.
- An appropriate balance must be struck between the use of voluntary action (e.g. codes of practice) vs. regulatory action (e.g. ban on sale), which is guided by clear evidence and feedback, and identifies a proportionate response which is fit for purpose.
- The new EU Invasive Alien Species Directive should be transposed as soon as technically feasible. The NGO community is deeply supportive of the need for EU legislation and is prepared to help create a supportive and enabling framework.
- Effective and continuous horizon scanning is key to developing, guiding and deploying a more preventative approach. It should be an on-going process that is resourced accordingly.
- The current programme of ‘plan development’ should be simplified and harmonised as far as possible to reduce bureaucracy, thereby providing a one-stop guide to evidence for the necessary action. This should be outcome-focused, with clear lines of responsibility outlined.
- Consideration should be given to the scope for the establishment of Local Action Groups (LAGs), and indeed the NGO community, to explore innovative solutions to INNS and to undertake field trials to test the efficacy of new solutions.
- Increasing public involvement in the monitoring of established and potential INNS is key to future success. Local Action Groups could play a vital role, and should receive committed long-term funding. We also welcome the increased role that technological advances can play – such as Apps for Smart phones that allow the public to report INNS – providing these are not regarded as a substitute for other key preventative measures, and that data captured in this way are harmonised.

- There should be an increased focus on research to support preventative measures, in line with the GB Strategy. A strategic approach to research will mean greater effectiveness and value for money. There also need to be stronger links with the academic community, to ensure that their research agendas align with the GB Strategy as far as possible. Liaison with INNS researchers overseas will also prevent duplication and maximise the value of research undertaken in Great Britain.
- There is substantial scope to exploit the public concern around Ash Dieback disease (*Chalara fraxinea*), which can provide a platform to increase awareness of risks from INNS to our natural and cultural heritage. Awareness could be developed through both media coverage and more structured approaches, such as the national curriculum. Simple resources could be developed which would support schools to promote understanding of INNS impacts, and create a route to link reported local observations of INNS to a national 'alien species' database.
- The work of the LAGs should be highlighted within and complemented by action through, for example, Local Biodiversity Action Plans and Partnerships.

The key to effective action against invasive alien species on the ground is authorised access to the site concerned. With land tenure information not easily available in many cases, a right of access to manage invasive alien species by a relevant authority would be a useful addition to forthcoming legislation in line with the Law Commission recommendations.

The European Commission's proposals to bring forward a Directive that would require Member States to take coordinated action to address this issue.

The driver behind this proposal is the identical target in the Convention on Biological Diversity Strategic Plan 2011-2020³ and Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020[†]:

"By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized, priority species are controlled or eradicated, and measures are in place to manage pathways to prevent their introduction and establishment".

With only seven years left, there is much for Wales to do contribute to this target.

References

¹ <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/research/bus-assembly-research-publications/enviro-sustainability/rn13-006.pdf?langoption=3&ttl= Invasive%20alien%20species%20-%20Research%20note>

² http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/link_analysis_on_inns_24jan13.pdf

³ <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets>

[†]http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/pdf/2020/1_EN_ACT_part1_v7%5b1%5d.pdf