



Himalayan balsam invading a river's banks

BCK CISMA

December 2019

BEAUTIFUL BUT DANGEROUS!

Himalayan balsam has large attractive pink flowers reminiscent of an orchid, but don't let this plant fool you. It can be a serious danger to our natural ecosystems in many ways.

Native to the Himalayas, Himalayan balsam escaped from cultivated gardens and grows from three to six feet tall. The leaves at the base of the plant grow directly across from each other (opposite) on the stem. As you go up the stem, the leaves become whorled, meaning more than two grow across from each other. The leaves are shiny, sharply toothed, and taper to a point. The leaves' petioles, or stalks that join the leaf to the stem, have large glands that secrete a sticky, sweet smelling nectar. Himalayan balsam stems are six sided, hollow, and have a red tint. In July Himalayan balsam produces flowers that are pink to purple in color, with light colored markings on the inside and are clustered in groups of five to twelve. Himalayan balsam has green fruit capsules that will explode when touched, similar to that of jewelweed. These seed capsules can propel seeds up to 23 feet away from the plant and can help the plant quickly spread throughout an area. The plant releases chemicals from its

roots making it difficult for other plants to grow in an area creating thick stands of just itself.

Himalayan balsam prefers river and stream banks, where it will change the water flow, leading to flooding and erosion. Its exploding seeds will also invade wetlands, gardens and roadsides. Himalayan balsam's sweet nectar attracts more pollinators than natives. Although it sounds like a positive, this only causes more problems. With so many pollinators, production of Himalayan balsam takes over all native plant production, making it more difficult for native and specialized pollinators to find the plants they need to survive.

Unlike most invasive species, Himalayan balsam has shallow roots making management techniques like hand pulling, cutting, and mowing very effective.

Himalayan balsam is commonly mistaken for many species, including jewelweed, pale touch-me-not, purple false-foxglove, and Joe pye-weed. It is important to verify the plant of concern is Himalayan balsam before taking further action.

BCK CISMA this month in numbers

- 15** acres surveyed
- 12** passive outreach efforts
- 100** impressions
- 3** publications with articles
- 90,000** impressions

Meeting Updates

The next BCK CISMA Meeting is Monday, February 3rd from 1-3pm at the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary Auditorium.

Grant Updates

MISGP funding that will allow the BCK CISMA to have a coordinator and a red swamp crayfish technician for the year 2020 has been awarded.!

BCK CISMA is applying for USFS-GLRI-CWMA funding. Our proposed two year project will include treatment and restoration of invasive phragmites at four properties of high public traffic and high ecological value.



Himalayan balsam flowers

BCK CISMA is dedicated to combating the threat of invasive species in Barry, Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties. If you have invasive species concerns within those counties, please contact Fallon Januska at fallon.januska@macd.org or 269-908-4136.



Barry • Calhoun • Kalamazoo

BCKCISMA
Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area