

Himalayan Balsam

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Impatiens glandulifera*

AKA: Policeman's Helmet, Indian Balsam

Native to: West and central Himalayas

Habitat: Found mostly on river banks and in damp woodland, can grow in other damp habitat

A tall, attractive, annual herb with explosive seed heads. Although easy to identify as a mature plant with its pink-purple flowers, fleshy stem and characteristic leaves, the seedlings and last year's dead stems of this perennial are more difficult to spot.

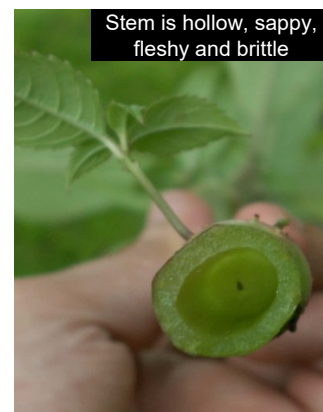
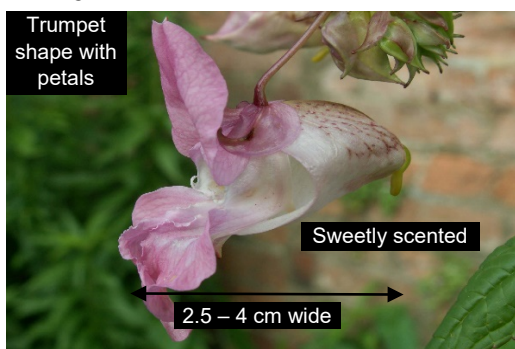
Originally brought into Ireland as a garden plant. Often favoured by the general public for its aesthetic appeal and is still deliberately planted on occasion. Now widespread throughout Northern Ireland, especially along urban rivers. Spreads solely by seeds, which are small and easily carried by wind or water.

Out-competes native species in ecologically sensitive areas, particularly river banks. Where it grows in dense stands along river banks it can impede flow at times of high rainfall, increasing the likelihood of flooding. Die back of extensive stands over winter can leave river banks bare and exposed to erosion.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; grow or cultivate; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Himalayan balsam; or to release it into the environment.



Key ID Features



Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

Can be identified at most times of the year: March-June by its seedlings, stem and leaf shape, from July to September by its stem, leaf shape and flowers. More difficult to identify over winter (October to February), look for hay like remains and distinctive root structure.

Hay like remains in winter



Root structure in winter

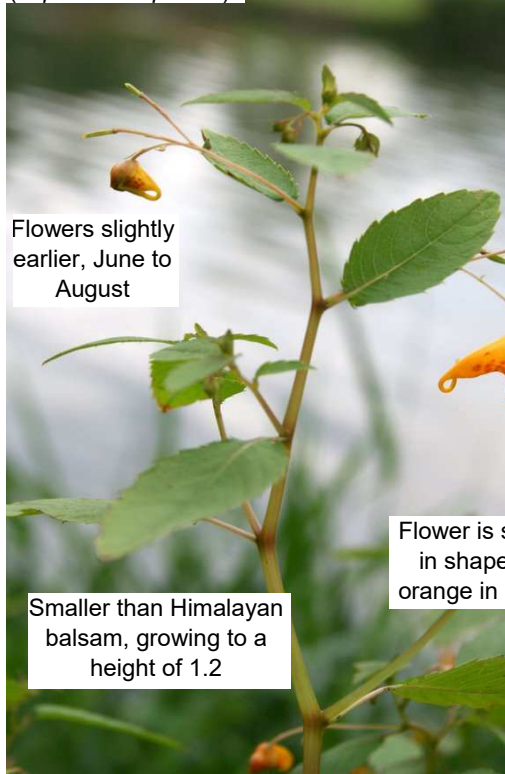


Similar Species

Orange balsam

Non-native

(*Impatiens capensis*)



Flowers slightly earlier, June to August

Smaller than Himalayan balsam, growing to a height of 1.2



Smaller leaves, with fewer serrations

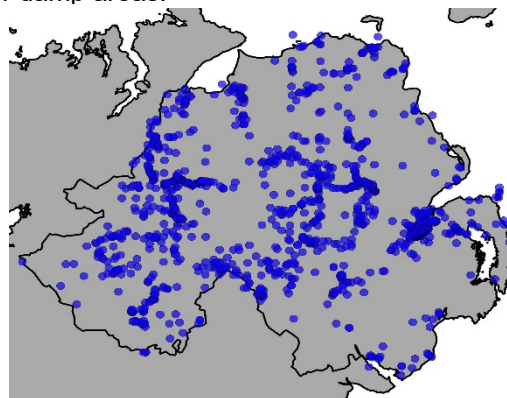
Orange balsam is much less aggressive than Himalayan balsam, forming smaller less dense stands

Flower is similar in shape but orange in colour



Distribution

Widespread and common across the whole of Northern Ireland. Primarily on riverbanks and in other damp areas.



Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland

<https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NBNSYS0000003189>

Check website for current distribution

References and further reading:

Blamey, M, Fitter, R and Fitter, A (2003) "The Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland. The Complete Guide to the British and Irish Flora". A & C Black

Preston, C D, Pearman, D A and Dines, T A (editors) (2002) "New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora". Oxford University Press

Stace, C (1999) "Field Flora of the British Isles". Cambridge University Press

Photos from: Olaf Booy, Mike Harris, Max Wade.

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.

Adapted for Northern Ireland
Environment Agency 2020