LAND MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

Eastern Valleys Uplands Project - Local Wildlife Sites

The following information outlines the best practice guidelines for managing the habitat type listed below in a manner that is sympathetic to wildlife. It is part of a series relating to various habitat types and management issues that have been produced by your local Wildlife Trusts.

No.20 Rhododendron & Cherry Laurel Control

What are Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel?

- They are both non-native, invasive species.
- They have both escaped from horticultural cultivation and been deliberately planted in many locations.
- They both grow prolifically, particularly in woodlands.
- Both have thick waxy leaves and are evergreen. The Rhododendron can be readily recognised in spring by the large, showy pink/purple flowers. The Cherry Laurel has distinctive upright spikes of white flowers which are replaced by black cherry-like fruit in the autumn.

Rhododendron

Rhododendron invading valuable grassland habitat

Cherry Laurel in woodland

Cherry Laurel leaves

Why do Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel need to be controlled?

- The evergreen nature and dense tangled branches cast a heavy shadow on the woodland floor which over time eliminates much of the native ground flora.
- Additionally their thick, waxy, poisonous leaves mean that little eats them and they cannot be controlled by grazing.
- Furthermore their leaf litter breaks down very slowly and contains chemicals that alter the soil composition making it less suitable for native species.
- Both species can spread rapidly to take over much of the understory of a woodland, with Rhododendron being particularly prolific through vegetative spreading and particularly heavy seed production.
- Rhododendron is a significant host species for the plant pathogen *Phytophora ramorum* which is responsible for many tree deaths, particularly Larch.

Management Recommendations

Prevention

- **Prevention is better than cure. It is far better not to give opportunity for these undesired species to gain a foothold in the first place.**
- **To do this they should not be planted in the wild and if they occur on land adjacent to valuable ecological habitat, if possible, they should be treated/controlled before they spread into it.**

Control Measures

Even if it only small numbers of plants of these species are present on site, it is advisable to treat and eradicate them sooner rather than later, to prevent a much larger management problem in the future. If there is much Rhododendron/Cherry Laurel on site it is useful to prioritise areas to treat, with the larger seed-producing bushes being the priority for initial treatment as they have the potential to cause rapid spread of the species if left untreated.

For both species the initial treatment involves:

- Firstly cutting and removing stems by hand or chainsaw. The cuts should be as close to the ground as possible. The cut material is then chipped or removed to allow access for follow-up work and prevent regrowth. Flailing is an alternative to cutting if the growth is younger.

The cutting will not prevent regrowth however as cut stems/stumps will regenerate. This needs to be addressed and there are three main ways of achieving this as follows:

- Digging the stumps out. The effectiveness of this technique is increased by removing all viable roots. This can be done manually or with a tractor and plough. To avoid regrowth, stumps should be turned upside down and soil should be brushed off roots.
- Direct stump treatment by painting or spot spraying stumps with a herbicide immediately after being cut. This is best undertaken using a handheld applicator to avoid herbicide killing non-target species. This should only be undertaken during dry (for next 12 hours) and frost-free conditions.
- Alternatively stump treatment can be undertaken through stem injection, where the stem is drilled and herbicide poured into it.

In clearance operations, particularly over large areas, it is advisable to work in the direction the prevailing wind is blowing so that seed produced is not blown on to recently cleared areas.

Follow up treatment is also likely to be necessary to treat any further regrowth and particularly to treat/remove the growth of any seedlings which may be numerous in the case of Rhododendron. This can be achieved through spraying (although care needs to be taken to avoid damage to other vegetation) or hand-pulling whilst they are small.

Potential Constraints

- Initial cutting should be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (carried out September – February inc.) to avoid disturbance of breeding birds.
- These shrub species are not of particular value to Dormice but where Dormice are present in the woods they should be given due consideration and further advice should be sought as **licensing may be required**. If Dormice are known to be present then the work may need to be further limited to just the winter months with a two phase cutting regime.
- The use and method of application of herbicides needs to pay due attention to any potential adverse impacts on adjacent natural vegetation in relation to how ecologically valuable it is and how will it be affected.

Please Note

- **Due consideration should be given to Health & Safety when undertaking Scrub clearance, particularly in the use of cutting tools, machinery and chemicals.**
- **Care should be taken when using large machinery on steep slopes or wet ground as this can be dangerous.**

Follow up operations

Survey

Initial treatment is unlikely to kill all plants and can in certain circumstances lead to a flush of growth of newly germinated plants in cleared areas. To inform future treatment, surveys need to be undertaken to identify if this has occurred and where it is.

Treatment

Follow up treatment is also likely to be necessary to treat any further regrowth and particularly to treat/remove the growth of any seedlings which may be numerous in the case of Rhododendron.

This can be achieved through spraying of regrowth (although care needs to be taken to avoid damage to other vegetation) or hand-pulling whilst seedlings are small.

Should you require any further advice regarding the management of your Local Wildlife Site please do not hesitate to contact your local Wildlife Trust:

Gwent Wildlife Trust
Tel: 01600 740600
e-mail: info@gwentwildlife.org

Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales
Tel: 01656 724100
e-mail: info@welshwildlife.org

Other toolkits available are:

No.1Neutral Grassland (Hay Meadows)
No.2 Neutral Grassland (Pasture)
No.3 Acid Grassland
No.4 Calcareous Grassland
No.5 Marshy Grassland
No.6 Marsh Grassland (with Marsh Fritillary)
No.7 Heath
No.8 Hedgerows
No.9 Saltmarsh & Coastal Grazing Marsh
No.10 Ponds & Lakes
No.11 Scrub Control
No.12 Bracken control
No.13 Invasive weed control (natives – thistle, dock etc.)
No.14 Invasive weed control (aliens – Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam etc.)
No.15 Ffridd (Coedcae)
No.16 Blanket Bog
No.17 Upland Broad-leaved Woodland
No.18 Upland Flushes
No 19 Post Industrial

Further useful documents include:

- *Managing and Controlling invasive Rhododendron*
  http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcpg017.pdf/$FILE/fcpg017.pdf
- *Best Practice Management Guidelines - Rhododendron & Cherry Laurel*
  http://invasivespeciesireland.com/toolkit/invasive-plant-management/terrestrial-plants/rhododendron/

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