

# Wales Resilient Ecological Network (WaREN) Stakeholder Feedback Report

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North Wales Wildlife Trust

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# Introduction

## What are invasive species?

Invasive non-native species have been introduced by humans, intentionally or unintentionally, beyond their natural range. Their spread threatens native biological diversity and can cause damage to the environment, the economy, our health and the way we live.

Invasive non-native species (INNS) are also referred to as Invasive Alien Species (IAS). Here we refer to them as **invasive species**.

The Wales Resilient Ecological Network (WaREN) project aims to develop a sustainable approach to tackling invasive species across Wales through collaboration and engagement with the 'publics' and stakeholders such as Local Action Groups (LAGs). The WaREN I pilot project aimed to identify 'gaps and barriers' in the current knowledge and effective management of invasive species, in order to plan and make use of any present and future opportunities. Information on these gaps, barriers and opportunities was obtained through a stakeholder survey.

## WaREN I Stakeholder and LAG Survey 2020

In the winter of 2020/2021 colleagues from North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) and the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) conducted a survey to identify the 'gaps', 'barriers', and 'opportunities' in invasive species management. A total of 87 stakeholders, considered to be involved in invasive species management across Wales responded. Stakeholders contacted consisted of LAGs, invasive species projects, and local authorities.



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Stakeholders were asked, through a questionnaire or interview, 55-64 questions (depending on whether a group or local authority, see Appendix) revolving around two main themes: ‘how does your group/local authority tackle invasive species?’ and ‘what are the current barriers to invasive species management?’.

Here we present a summary of the survey results and the identified gaps, barriers, and opportunities for invasive species management across wales.



*Himalayan balsam, Impatiens glandulifera (A) and Japanese knotweed, Reynoutria japonica (B), ©Vaughn Matthews.*

# Results

## Which invasive species are managed and how are they managed?

A total of 45 species, taxa or 'groups of concern' were reported as being managed in Wales at the time of the survey, consisting of 23 terrestrial, 15 freshwater, and nine marine (Figure 1). 'Groups of concern' include 'garden escapes' and 'non-native trees'. The majority of stakeholders reported to manage Himalayan balsam, *Impatiens glandulifera* (86%) and Japanese knotweed, *Reynoutria japonica* (82%), with 72% of stakeholders managing two or more invasive species. Interestingly two local authorities reported to manage ragwort, *Senecio jacobaea*. However, this is a native species and is therefore out of the scope of this survey and analysis.

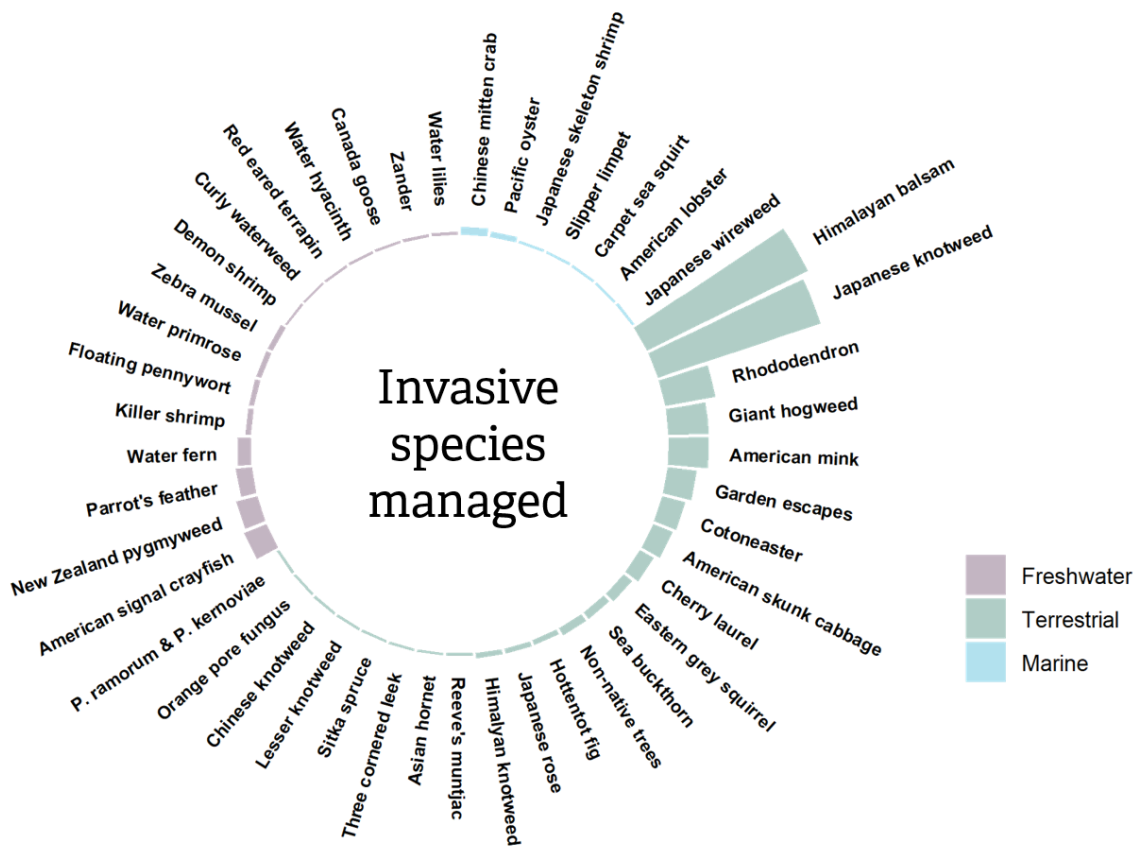


Figure 1. Species, taxa or 'groups of concern' managed by stakeholders (Local Action Groups and local authorities) in Wales, as identified by the WaREN I survey (©WaREN).

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A further 10 different control measures used to manage invasive species were identified (Figure 2). Many stakeholders used chemical or mechanical methods of control, likely reflecting the two main invasive species managed, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed. Two respondents also reported that they control invasive species through burning or livestock.

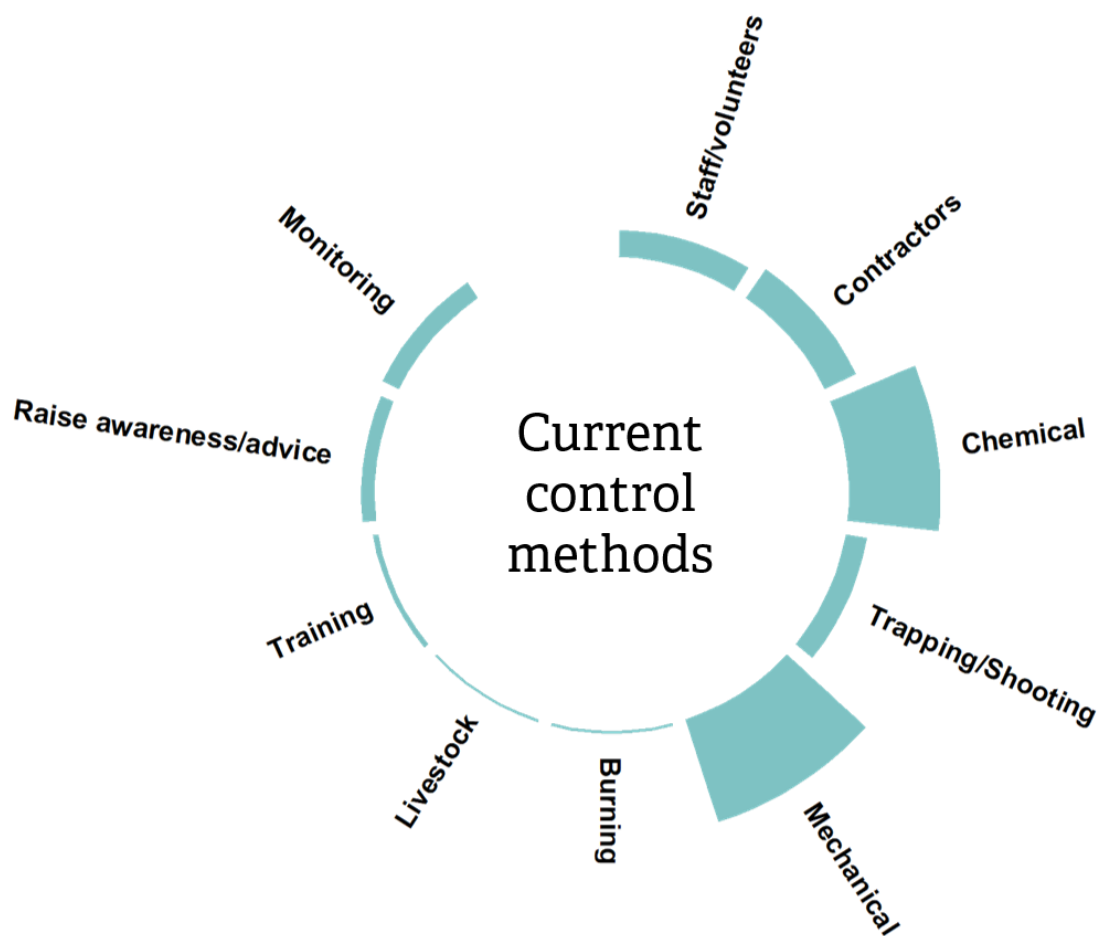


Figure 2. Current control/management methods used to tackle invasive species, as identified in the WaREN I survey (©WaREN).

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## What factors are preventing invasive species work, and what problems arise when undergoing work?

The survey identified that a lack of funding, resources and access to private land were considerable barriers to stakeholders attempting to manage invasive species (Figure 3a and b). A lack of coordination between groups and local authorities was also identified as a significant barrier, with stakeholders highlighting the need for a 'source-to-sea' approach to management. Interestingly, although stakeholders identified awareness of invasive species as an arising problem, only 6% of respondents reported that they actively provide advice, and make further attempts to raise awareness of invasive species, as a method of management (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

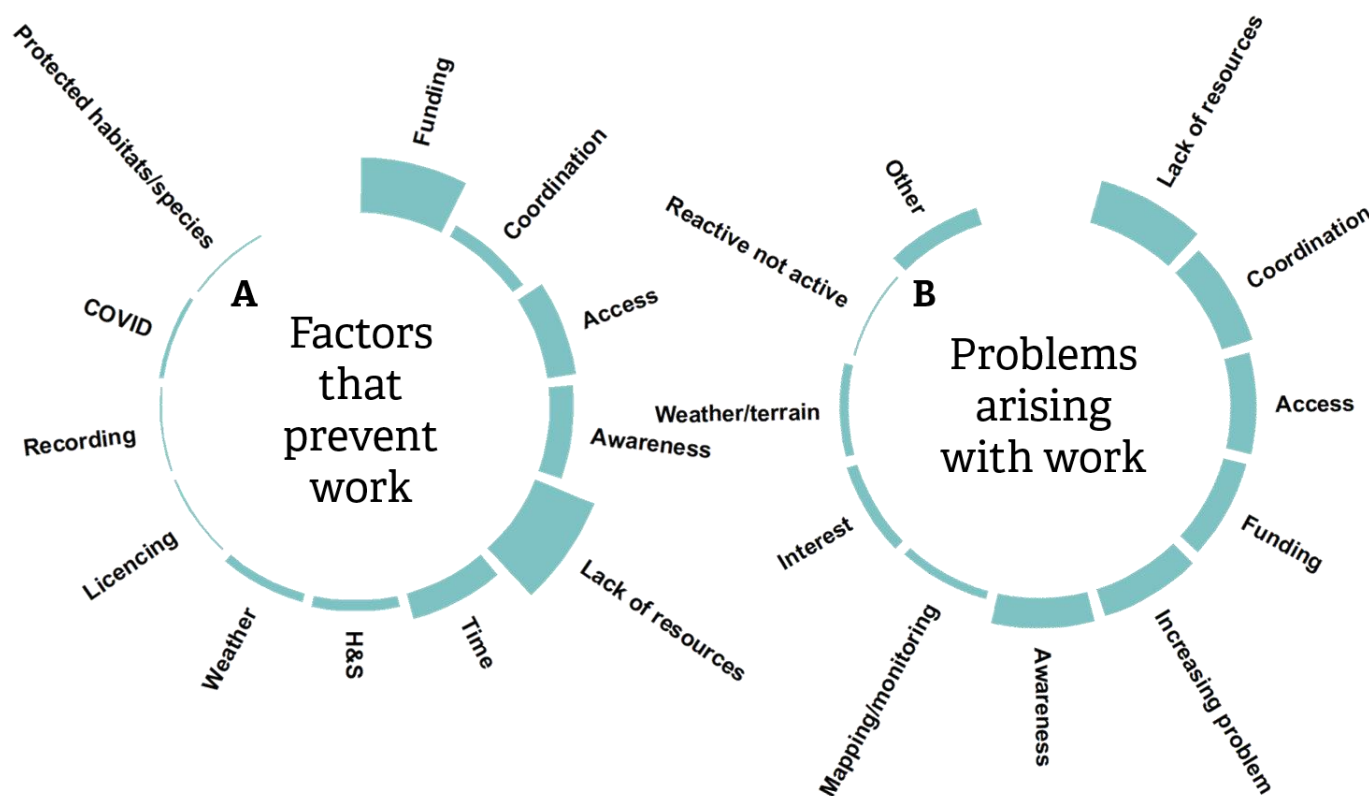


Figure 3. Factors that prevent (A) and problems that are arising with (B) invasive species work, as identified in the WaREN I survey (©WaREN).

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## Gaps and barriers

Three overarching gaps and barriers were identified from the survey, these were **Knowledge, Communication and Support**, and **Funding**.

### Knowledge

Stakeholders reported an overall lack of knowledge in identification, effective control measures/best practice management, all of which can have a knock-on effect to recording and managing invasive species. A lack of identification and management knowledge, particularly in contractors, could lead to species being left unmanaged, managed incorrectly, or being unintentionally spread, further exacerbating the problem of invasive species in Wales. The lack of knowledge seems to be attributed to advice not always being easy to find and access, and due to contradicting advice from available resources. In addition, stakeholders suggested that advice was not always appropriate for specific sites.

### Communication and support

Communication and support were also revealed to be major issues, with stakeholders reporting a lack of communication between experts, decision makers and contractors. In addition, over half of the LAGs surveyed had not shared their data with regional or national databases. A lack of data sharing between local groups managing invasive species on the ground is highly problematic, since this data is essential to improve our understanding of invasive species spread and the effect of control measures.

Many stakeholders were aware of either Welsh Government Policy, the Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP) INNS Group, or the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat (GB NNSS); however, only 28% were aware of all three. Only 33% of stakeholders found Welsh Government policy on invasive species fit for purpose, with 52% reporting that Welsh Government policy was either unfit for purpose or that they were unable to find the policy



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online. In comparison, of those aware of WBP INNS Group and GB NNSS, 33% and 64% found the group and resources useful, respectively.

Stakeholders reported that there was not enough legal support, or support from higher decision-making levels, with a third of LAGs wanting more support for their invasive species work. This was further reflected in the reasons why local authorities did not have an invasive species strategy, with some attributing this to a lack of legal requirement (Figure 4).

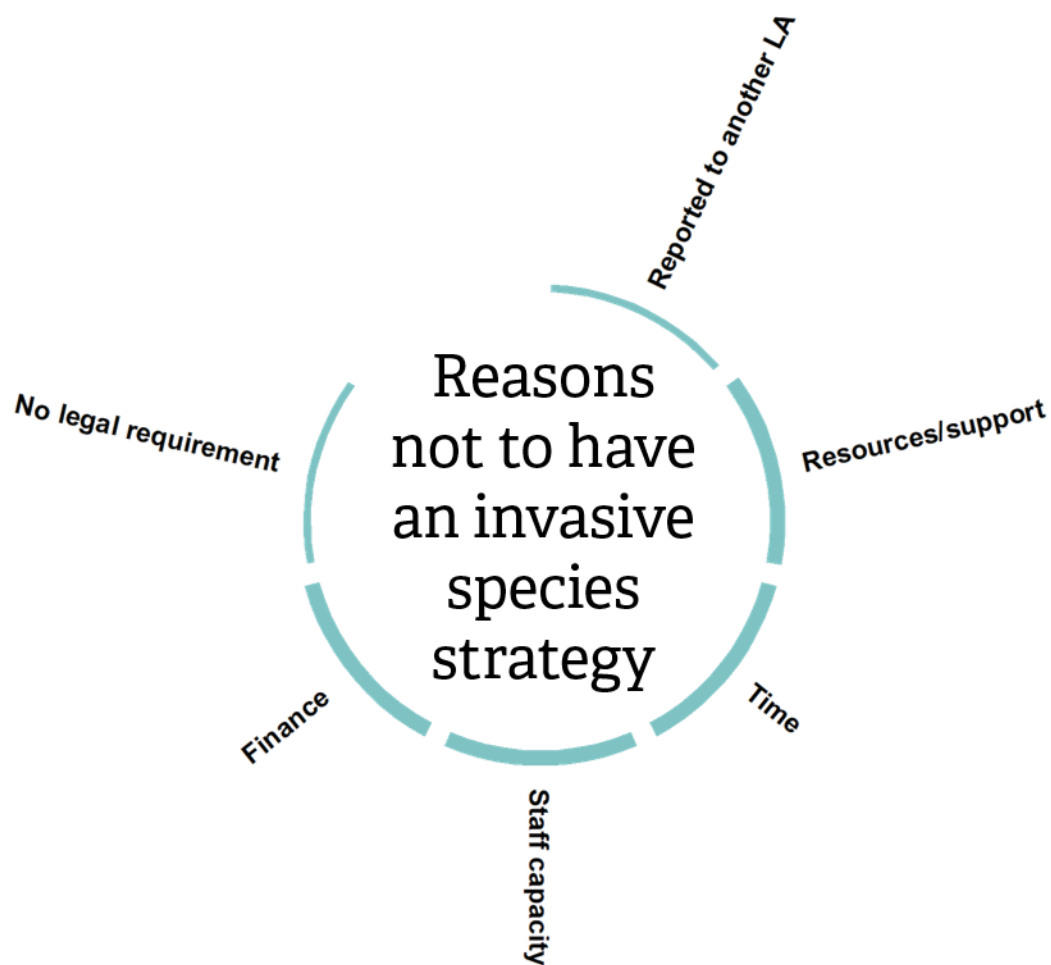


Figure 4. Reasons why local authorities do not have an invasive species strategy, as identified in the WaREN I survey (©WaREN).

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## Funding

The final major barrier identified was funding. Stakeholders reported that invasive species work was often only funded as part of a project with a wider scope, i.e. not focusing on invasive species. Funding was also often hard to obtain due to the negative perception of some control measures. In addition, due to a lack of knowledge and awareness from funding bodies about the impact and consequences of invasive species, their management was often not considered a priority. Successful projects were typically only funded for one to three years, which is often not enough time to fully control or eradicate an invasive species. Funders were also reported to not fund the same project or organisation following a successful funding application.

Although 65% of projects had applied for funding, this was often limited to site surveying with no guarantee of follow-up funding for important control measures. In such cases, the information obtained can quickly become out of date.



*New Local Action Group 'Friends of Diamond Park' progress tackling Himalayan balsam in Ystradgynlais in 2021 (©Andrew Gilbey).*

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## Opportunities

Despite the gaps and barriers identified in the survey, several **opportunities** for managing invasive species across Wales were also highlighted. Local Action Groups across Wales applied for between £300-£1.5 million worth of funding, and from the 65% of groups that applied almost half were successful. Although the length of funding opportunities was shown to be a barrier to invasive species management, there are some funders identified with longer, more realistic time frames of five or more years. The success of funding applications is also believed to be increased by including photographs to illustrate the problem of invasive species.

Almost all of the groups surveyed were interested in any training that WaREN could provide and there were already signs of the much-needed communication and collaboration in Wales, with many stakeholders either aware of, or had previously engaged with, other stakeholders. Collaboration between groups and local authorities and the implementation of a 'source-to-sea' approach, is essential for management to be successful. It was also noted that there is an opportunity to increase the awareness of invasive species amongst the 'publics'.

Additional opportunities, outside the scope of WaREN, were adding the issue of invasive species to the school curriculum, and producing stronger legislation to mandate access and management of invasive species on private land. Although WaREN cannot implement such changes, we can feedback these concerns and suggestions to Welsh Government.

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## What's next for the WaREN project?

WaREN is now funded until April 2023 through the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 – Sustainable Management Scheme which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

WaREN has a number of objectives that will help aid invasive species management in Wales, including:

- Online toolkit: ID guides, best practice management, biosecurity and legislation information for LAGs.
- Online portal: user friendly interface for reporting invasive species sightings and management actions.
- Invasive Species Campaign 2022: to raise awareness of the impacts of invasive species across Wales.
- Training and topical surgeries: training on biosecurity and WaREN resources.
- Compile list of funders for LAGs.
- Support the formation and collaboration between LAGs throughout Wales.

You can view the WaREN stakeholder feedback webinar [here](#).



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# Appendix

## Group questions

1. Group name
2. Name and position of person filling out questionnaire
3. Phone number and email of contact
4. Phone number and email of group if different
5. How long has group been active?
6. How many people?
7. How many different organisations or interested parties make up your group?
8. Has your group engaged with other parties such as adjacent landowners or local volunteer group to help manage the problem?
9. Is your group aware of any other action groups working in your area or adjacent areas?
10. Is it important to have insurance and vary out risk assessments?
11. What location does you group operate in? Grid reference and What3Words
12. What defines your group boundary/working area?
13. What species of non-native invasives does you group deal with?
14. How does your group currently control INNS?
15. Have your group members undertaken any training in order to control INNS your group manage?
16. Is your group aware of any training required, pa1 and pa6w being examples?
17. Is first aid training important?
18. Would your group be interested in any future training activities if they were made available?
19. Has your group applied for any licences (AqHerb01 for example) to control INNS and if so how difficult did you find the process?
20. Has your group received advice about licences for INNS control?
21. If so, from whom?
22. Is your group aware of any licence requirements for species control, this could apply to both flora and fauna?
23. Has your group undertaken any work on SSSI, SAC, Ramsar sites or ANOB for example and are you aware of the significance of these citations?
24. Is your group aware of biosecurity?
25. Have you or your group heard of the Check-Clean-Dry or Be Plant Wise campaigns?
26. What biosecurity measures, if any, does you group undertake?
27. Would your group be interested in free biosecurity training if available?
28. Has your group applied for funding?
29. If so was your grant application successful?
30. Who did you apply to?



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31. How much was applied for?
  32. What was the finding for? For example, equipment, training or contractors
  33. How difficult was the process?
  34. Are you aware of any other funding sources?
  35. Does your group have a funding 'wish list', equipment or training for example?
  36. Do you feel that your group have received enough support from other parties? This could be NRW, Rivers Trusts, Wildlife Trusts or other sources
  37. Who does your group consult for advice if required?
  38. What support has been most useful to your group?
  39. How does your group record the INNS in your area?
  40. Is your group aware of your Local Record Centre and their role in the control of INNS? (Cofnod for North Wales, BIS for East mid Wales, and West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre (WWBIC) for Aberystwyth/Carmarthen
  41. Does your group send records to your Local Record Centre?
  42. Has your group shared any information with any internet recording sites or apps?
  43. Is your group aware of any internet reporting web sites or mobile phone application? For example INNS mapper, NBN gateway, Plant tracker, Asian hornet watch
  44. If you have used any such websites or apps how would you rate the experience?
  45. Do any factors (blockers) prevent INNS work?
  46. How long have you been working with INNS and why?
  47. Can you identify any problems arising from your time working with INNS?
  48. How would you rate your personal knowledge of invasive species?
  49. Are you aware of the Welsh Government Policy on INNS?
  50. If so do you think that it is fit for purpose?
  51. Do you have a view on how you would like Welsh Governments policy with non-native invasive species to progress?
  52. Are you aware of the Welsh Biodiversity INNS group?
  53. If so do you find this group useful?
  54. Do you feel enough information is readily available with regards to the control of INNS?
  55. If you have answered no where would you like to see any additional information?
  56. Are you aware of the GB non-native species secretariat?
  57. If yes, do you find the resources (website, meetings for example) to be useful?
  58. Are you retired? Yes/No or rather not comment
  59. Employed part time? Yes/No or rather not comment
  60. Employed full time? Yes/No or rather not comment
  61. Unemployed? Yes/No or rather not comment
  62. Age group. 16-25, 25-50, 50+? Or again would rather not comment
  63. Do you enjoy any outdoor recreational pursuits or activities? If so please state what
  64. Notes

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## Local authority questions

1. Local authority name
2. Name of team if different
3. Name and position of person filling out questionnaire
4. Phone number and email of contact
5. Phone number and email of LA
6. Does your authority have an overall INNS strategy?
7. If not, please detail the reason
8. Which departments within you authority deal with INNS?
9. Has your authority engaged with other parties such as adjacent landowners or local volunteer groups to help manage the problem?
10. Is your authority aware of any other action groups working in your area or adjacent areas?
11. Do you consider INNS as part of your project planning/risk assessments?
12. What species of INNS does you authority deal with?
13. How does your authority currently address INNS issues?
14. How does your group currently control INNS?
15. Have your officers undertaken any training on INNS and their management?
16. Would your authority be interested in any future training activities if they were made available?
17. Has your authority applied for any licences (AqHerb01 for example) to control INNS and if so how difficult did you find the process?
18. Has your authority received advice about licences for INNS control? If so, from whom?
19. Is your authority aware of any licence requirements for species control, this could apply to both flora and fauna?
20. Has your authority undertaken any work on SSSI, SAC, Ramsar sites or ANOB for example and are you aware of the significance of these citations?
21. Is your authority aware of biosecurity?
22. Have you or your authority heard of the Check-Clean-Dry or Be Plant Wise campaigns?
23. What biosecurity measures, if any, does you authority undertake?
24. Would your authority be interested in free biosecurity training if available?
25. Has your authority applied for funding for INNS control? Provide brief details
26. If so was your grant application successful?
27. Who did you apply to?
28. How much was applied for?
29. What was the finding for? For example, equipment, training or contractors
30. How difficult was the process?
31. Are you aware of any other funding sources?
32. Does your authority have a funding 'wish list', equipment or training for example?
33. Do you feel that your authority have received enough support from other parties? This could be NRW, Rivers Trusts, Wildlife Trusts or other sources
34. Who does you authority consult for advice if required?

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35. What support has been most useful to your authority?
  36. How does your authority record the INNS in your area?
  37. Is your authority aware of your Local Record Centre and their role in the control of INNS?  
(Cofnod for North Wales, BIS for East mid Wales, and West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre (WWBIC) for Aberystwyth/Carmarthen)
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