

# Balsam 2023

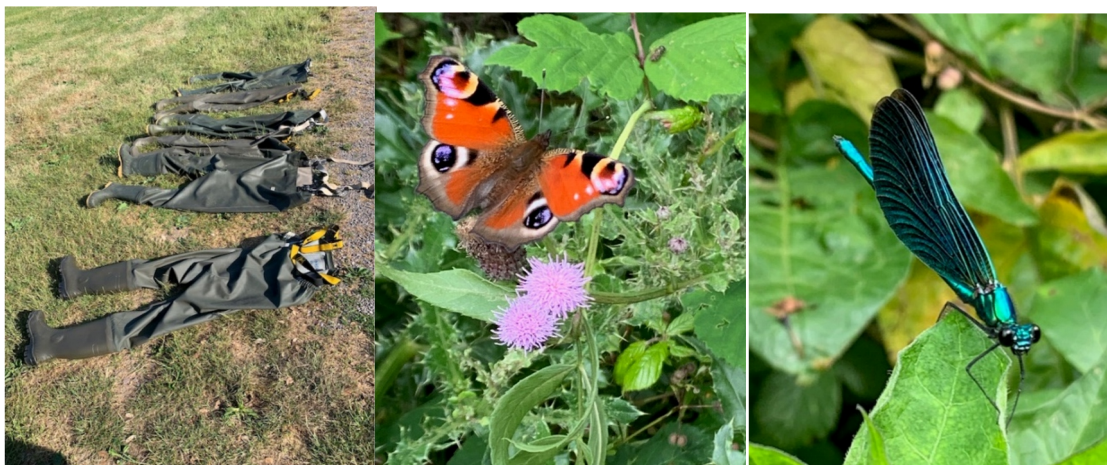
June 22

TVT are fortunate that there has been growing interest in commercial company staff charity volunteering days. Simpkins Edwards accountants supported us with 11 intrepid alien invasive plant pullers – from 8.30am to past 5pm! In addition, one of the director's teenage sons was there for most of the day, although 'there by choice' might be stretching it! We were also delighted to welcome a local who has more free time on her hands having retired from a busy career in nursing. Hopefully she will become a regular – she certainly homed in on the balsam with only a brief id introduction!

Since May 8<sup>th</sup> the Tale Valley saw almost no rain at all apart from some overnight on June 19. The river level is holding up remarkably well, helped in part by a series of beaver dams in the Danes to Tuck mills stretch. These dams are also contributing to the healthy growth of a variety of fish by filtering out at least a percentage of the harmful trace elements & chemicals unfortunately present in the river. The patches of river weed noted in previous years' reports however, have completely disappeared. Something to investigate!

From Danes to Tuck Mill was relatively clear of balsam – further down stream it got steadily worse – Talewater, Escot and below were bad considering our sustained efforts. 5% was already in flower. Nevertheless our stalwart volunteers did not waver and a fantastic team effort will hopefully result in the July team finding considerably less.

There were butterflies throughout, notably Commas, Skippers, Tortoiseshell and Meadow Browns, but the damselflies – the 'Beautiful Demoiselles' stole the show, being in pockets of abundance throughout the river corridor.



July 20

A wonderful turnout of 19 volunteers. Particular thanks to Simpkins Edwards and Thompson Jenner Chartered Accountants for encouraging volunteer days for their workforces. The day was overcast but July has been on and off rain, with very little sunshine – so overcast was fine. Groups were distributed throughout the 8 mile target area. The managing partner of SE was delegated to drop 3 volunteers at the confluence at Cadhay Bridge to work upstream until they met the team coming towards them. They climbed over the gate – saw a river, and started pulling balsam – a few hours later they reached Gosford Bridge – which is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile upstream, over the river Otter! At the other end of the catchment volunteers were enjoying seeing beaver dams, a kingfisher, assorted butterflies and damselflies, and one group of four watched a carefree otter on the Rydon stretch for about two minutes! The same group then set off a burglar alarm on a property at Talewater having seen balsam within their boundary! The owners were there in moments having seen them on cctv but were very understanding and kind about the trespass!

The balsam was less than last time upstream of Talewater but still disappointingly prolific downstream from there. However, there was very little by the end of the day! One team even had time to clean off the ever creeping grasses that smother the exquisite brickwork of the Clapperentale water meadows – restored over a decade ago but now on the biannual maintenance list.



August 24

2023 is proving to be an exceptional year for plant growth, and fruits and berries. Hedgerows and orchards are heavy with crop. Himalayan balsam too has burgeoned this year. I don't remember it being this prolific on the river Tale for almost two decades. We had the most volunteers in June and July that we have ever had and yet the balsam from Talewater to the confluence was

abundant. The 200m stretch between the Clapperentale bridges was even cleared in a separate outing between July and August by one volunteer and yet it was as bad as ever two weeks later.

Unfortunately, 12 cooperate volunteers who came last year and were keen to repeat, cancelled a few days before due to a business crisis. This left us with 6 volunteers for the morning and two for the afternoon. Nevertheless, we comprehensively cleared 3 miles of river. The river itself was in good shape – between us we saw a kingfisher, a kingfisher's vacated nest burrow, a dipper and several recently used dipper's nests under bridges, prolific beaver activity, an orb weaver spider – and a frog. River weed of at least 2 varieties was noted in several locations. We even discovered a mature, 30-40ft elm tree on the riverbank protected from the beetle carrying Dutch elm disease by dense hazel bushes surrounding the trunk.

The TVT is very grateful to all our volunteers and to DWT and WCRT for their continuing support – and to the parish councils and private donors who value our work and support us. Thank you All!