

INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES

River Wandle Action Plan



INTRODUCTION

Invasive non-native species (INNS) are globally recognised as a major threat to biodiversity, second only to habitat loss. Economically, their impact is also highly significant. A recent study in the UK concluded that the direct cost of controlling these species is at least £1.7 billion per annum, with researchers admitting that this is likely to be a gross underestimate.

INNS: Any non-native species that is causing damage to our environment, health or economy.

With these consequences in mind, it is imperative that action is taken, both locally and nationally, to prevent new invasive species from establishing and to control and eradicate those that are already present.

This **Invasive Species Action Plan** for the River Wandle outlines a single, coordinated approach to the prevention, control and eradication of invasive non-native species on the river. The plan was started by the Wandle Landscape and Biodiversity Group in 2012, and has since been updated through the **Wandle Invasive Species Project**, part of the **Living Wandle Landscape Partnership Scheme**.

WHAT IS AN INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES?

A **non-native species** is any species (terrestrial, freshwater and/or marine) that did not naturally occur within the United Kingdom before people first arrived.

In some cases, these non-native species thrive in their new, introduced range. Free from the conditions that limited their growth in their natural range (such as climate, predators, disease), these species become so successful that they start to have a negative impact on our native species, environment, health or economy. This is what is known as an **invasive non-native species** (INNS).



Floating pennywort on the Wandle in Watermeads Nature Reserve

There are some native species which display invasive behaviours, but these are to be considered **pests** and dealt with outside the remit of this report.

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WHY ARE INNS A PROBLEM?

Ecologically, INNS can affect our native species through predation, competition and the transmission of disease; alone or in combination these can cause significant damage to the ecosystem and environment.

Predation: The American mink was introduced to the UK as part of the fur trade but quickly escaped and established in the wild. Mink have a varied diet, feeding on fish, birds, invertebrates, amphibians and small mammals. The iconic water vole has suffered severe declines since the introduction of mink.



Competition: Floating pennywort (left) is a highly invasive aquatic plant, originally introduced to the UK as an ornamental plant for ponds. Following introduction, the plant quickly escaped and is now well established. The plant is a highly effective competitor, excluding native plants and quickly dominating entire waterbodies thanks to its rapid growth rate.

Disease: The signal crayfish (right) was first introduced to be farmed for food in the 1970s, but quickly escaped and is now well established across the UK. This species is driving our native white-clawed crayfish towards extinction through competition, for food and refuges, but also through the transmission of the crayfish plague. Having evolved with the disease in its native range, the signal crayfish is able to live as a carrier whereas our native crayfish has no evolutionary defence against the disease.

