



Proceedings of the 14th Non-native Species Local Action Group Workshop

Held on 31 January – 1 February 2023

At Preston Montford Field Studies Centre, Shrewsbury



Programme

On 31 January and 1 February 2023 the GB Non-native Species Secretariat organised the 14th Local Action Group Workshop, funded by Defra. The workshop was held at the Field Studies Centre, Preston Montford, Shrewsbury. We had 47 attendees.

Day 1

Registration

Welcome (Niall Moore, NNSS)

SESSION 1: Refreshed GB Strategy and role of LAGs

Defra update and GB Strategy refresh (Clare Watson, Defra)

The Scottish Invasive Species Initiative scheme (Callum Sinclair, Scottish Invasive Species Initiative)

Introduction to the LAG coordinator and breakout session (Ben Francis, APHA)

BREAKOUT SESSION A: LAG COORDINATION

LAG RAPID UPDATES

Biocontrol of invasive non-native species (BINNS) (Chloe Lawrence, Tees Rivers Trust)

The AQUA Biosecurity Accreditation project with BZS, SWL Trust, SW Water and APHA (Neil Green, Bristol Zoo)

Wye Invasive Species Project (Nickie Moore and Ellie Baggett, Wye Valley AONB)

SESSION 2: The GB Non-Native Species Inspectorate

Introduction to the NNSI (Iain Henderson, NNSI)

Talk with questions

Day 2

LAG RAPID UPDATES

ENNIS Project (Kate Lacey, Exmoor National Park Authority)

Update on GB biocontrol initiatives including new targets (Sonal Varia, CABI)

The use of artificial refuge traps to monitor signal crayfish in stillwaters (Nicky Green, Nicky Green Associates)

SESSION 3: Communications and Engagement

Comms update and introduction to session (Lucy Cornwell, GBNNSS)

Promoting Work and Recruiting Volunteers for Local Action Groups
(Jake Crone, British Canoeing and Ian Doyle, Angling Trust) (including a short video)

BREAKOUT SESSION B: Communications and Engagement

SESSION 4: INNS MAPPER RE-DEVELOPMENT

Introduction (Steph Bradbeer, Yorkshire Water and Tomos Jones, WaREN)

Demonstration session and feedback

LAG RAPID UPDATES

Post Japanese knotweed treatment restoration trial (Alex Green, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust)

Volunteer Monitoring Scheme - Site Guardians (James Fantom, South West Lakes Trust)

Closing comments

Close

Breakout session A: LAG Coordination

The group discussed potential activities for the Local Action Group Coordinator and issues around catchment wide coordination and establishing networks, based on the following prompts:

1. What are the main challenges facing you as a LAG?
1. How can the LAG Coordinator (and NNSS) help support your LAG?
2. Who are the key stakeholders in the area / region you work in?
3. Do you have any good examples of catchment wide / regional networks working well in partnership?
4. Do you work with Countryside Stewardship?

Main LAG challenges

Funding

- **Time limits.** Projects frequently limited to two years which does not reflect the true time taken to manage and control certain INNS and is insufficient for initial surveys to plan the work (usually one year) and monitoring time after work complete.
- **INNS specific pots difficult to find**, often project has to be adapted to funding pot requirements and funders not aware of importance of LAG work or not scoring for this in criteria.
- **Restrictions on funding.** Materials and (some) equipment often covered, but not staff time, mileage, or scoping surveys (this may be due to liability issues). Difficult to fund training required to use the equipment acquired through project.
- **Short application windows and lack of advance warning.**
- **Onerous reporting requirements**, even small pots. For example, some funding pots can require quarterly reporting to the funder. Should be proportionate to funding available.
- **Problems with eligibility for funds.** Wye Valley AONB spans English and Welsh borders – there are some projects that only cover one side of the river!

Research

- LAGs want to see ongoing research into new, effective control methods for INNS, including PhDs.

Mapping

- **High costs / lack of staff time.** One LAG said they were given a quote of £10,000 to map one project on one river. It would be much cheaper to use staff, but they don't have the staff time to do this or to train volunteers to do it.
- **Use of drones.** Trialled to record Himalayan balsam, but it wasn't successful. Possibly because the sun was very bright, so colour contrast was low. Or, pink flowers cannot be seen from above

Volunteers

- **Retaining volunteers.** Some INNS work is very repetitive or boring, so hard to keep volunteers engaged
- **Recruiting new volunteers.** There is often an established group of volunteers but expanding is difficult. One example: some local people who asked for help with Himalayan balsam, but on the volunteer day they weren't very engaged in the actual removal!
- **Timing of removal events.** Weekend parties can get much higher turnouts. Timing of volunteer work important but depends on staff availability.
- **Welfare issues.** The task has to suit the volunteers. Volunteers can often be retired population, and the work can be very physically demanding, so consideration for volunteer

capabilities must be taken into consideration e.g., carrying a heavy backpack of herbicide all day.

Stakeholders

- **Landowners.** Contacting and gaining access to sites.
- **Other stakeholders.** Finding and communicating with other organisations in catchment.
- **Lack of influence within catchment partnership** as partners more concerned about other environmental issues.

Management

- Carrying out work in areas with organic farming.

Advice from LAGs for other LAGs

Funding

- Work with other local groups to apply for multiple funding streams
- Contrast volunteer hours with other costs
- Have an up-to-date regional strategy
- Write project duties into job description if looking for funding for staff time.
- Building community is very important and can be another value / marker of success of a project.

Management - Working in areas with organic farming – could cordon off areas for chemical treatment, or use alternative treatment methods (e.g. grazing, hot foam).

Stakeholders – have a regional strategy / plan to help engage new stakeholders.

Tasks for LAG Coordinator

- **Gather sources of funding and share with LAGs***
 - Give plenty of notice
 - LIFE
 - Spending review 2025
- **Act as central stable contact** to help new LAGs / new members of staff in existing LAGs. Communicate with regional LAG coordinators.
- **Develop a LAG map***
 - Showing entire catchment (where LAGs carry out awareness raising).
 - Specific areas of treatment (INNS mapper?)
 - Where things are working.
 - Make this interactive - you can click on a catchment project area and see what the work of the LAG is, contact details etc.
 - An index was suggested e.g. you can click on project type 'biosecurity with anglers' so you can see work done on similar projects, to share what did and didn't work
 - LAGs should be able to update projects themselves to reduce burden on LAG coordinator.
- **Develop a template(s) for case studies of good practice and what didn't work** and work with LAGs to complete these, **share completed case studies with LAGs and publish on NNSS website***
 - Biosecurity kit for cars (talk to Steph Bradbeer)
 - INNS management techniques (including costs)
 - Guidance on communications (promoting LAG work on social media, writing a newsletter)
- Work with Callum Sinclair to **share his standardised method of recording useful information*** that LAGs can later use to justify their value for money in funding bids.

- Costs
- Volunteer hours
- **Gather data on volunteer effort across GB**
- **Create template for LAGs to share updates on their work through a regular newsletter.** Include LAG of the month.
- **Take queries from LAGs on issues and report back to all**
 - What happens to biological records, which is best recording system to use
- **Share useful metrics on impact costs** of individual INNS, cost benefit of management (if possible), and modelling to show impact of poor biosecurity. Publish on NNSS website.
- **Communicate with the following on behalf of LAGs:**
 - **Funders***
 - Develop a short (2 page max) guide for funders to help them assess INNS work in non-INNS specific funding bids.
 - Promote inclusion of staff time in funding criteria.
 - Promote external funding – use water companies as case studies to those.
 - Encourage funders to make it easier / simpler for LAGs to apply for funding and report back to funders on progress.
 - **Universities** – share ideas for research projects on management.
 - **Defra**
 - **Network Rail*** - make them aware of how / when to treat (or when to let contracts for treatment of) priority INNS, and the importance of INNS management and need to work with LAGs to do this.
 - **Internal drainage boards** – as above.
 - **Landowners** – as above.
 - **Highways** – as above.
 - **Waste services** – as above.
- **Connect LAGs based on area and / or project type*.**
 - Find a way for LAGs to easily communicate with each other (Facebook, LAG repository, slack channel).
 - Encourage groups of LAGs to develop regional plans / strategies for their work – these can be used in funding bids to demonstrate the wider impact of the funding and to engage new partners.
- **Develop a central calendar of volunteering events** sortable by region, date, etc.
- **Link with LAG work in Wales, Scotland.**
- **Stay focused**, don't visit LAGs for the sake of it, and prioritise LAGs over AQUA, biosecurity site monitoring.
- **Promote the good work of LAGs** e.g, educational work by SISI and SINNG.
- **Collate lists of useful resources / online tools for LAGs** (see below for examples)

Tasks for NNSS

- Provide more social media graphics for campaigns
- Promote CCD on buses, TV etc.

Key stakeholders in LAG area

- **Most common:** water companies, local councils, river trusts, private landowners
- **Local councils:** Very hard to find / get hold of the right person. Even if you do, they often don't have the funding to help in the way that is needed
- **Highways:** often controlled by local council. Communication issues. Examples of very bad practice e.g. mowing Himalayan balsam when it is in seed. Very hard to get the message across
- **Motorways:** Lots of problems. Very unresponsive or no action taken at all.

- **Network rail:** Very hard to reach, only generic emails are available.
- **Private landowners:** Example of a fishing pool. Known problem with spreading INNS, almost impossible to get a hold of the landowner. Had to go in person more than once.
 - **Ways to get landowners to pay for work on their land:** Ask for donation for work. Ask the landowner to get a quote for the work proposed, and they'll see the LAG is offering to do it for much cheaper! Use legislation to insist it is their responsibility. Need to hand the management over to landowner for exit strategy from project, can be tricky.
- **Land registry:** Don't know who owns land and it very time consuming to find out. EA helps

Catchment wide / regional networks

- **Ways to build network:** showcase event held in an upper catchment, everyone doing treatment could meet each other
- **North East Strategy works well** – helpful to bid for regional funding as a group rather than competing for small pots of funding as individual organisations

Countryside stewardship / other funding sources

- **Countryside stewardship**
 - One group has received funding through this but not for INNS projects.
 - Another aware of a couple of larger bids which have included INNS as an add-on, focus was tree planting.
 - Reasons for not applying for the funding are that there are bigger issues for farmers than INNS and easier ways for them to apply for funding (e.g. tree planting).
- **Farming in Protected Landscapes / ELM.** No INNS element in FPL even though farms will have INNS. Some success here, people funded through FRIP (?)
 - FRIP - one person funded as an individual to work on others land.
- **EA funding for water management**
- **Heritage Lottery Funding**
- **UK Sport** (for British Canoeing)
- **Corporate volunteering days**

Breakout Session B: Communications and Engagement

The groups discussed ways to promote LAG work and recruit / retain volunteers, based on the following prompts:

1. How do you promote the work of your Local Action Group (LAG)?
2. What are your reasons for promoting your work? (e.g. to attract volunteers, funding etc)
3. Could the LAG coordinator / NNSS help you promote your work? If so, how? (*added to list of LAG coordinator / NNSS tasks, above*).
4. What are the main methods you use to recruit new volunteers?
5. How do you retain volunteers?
6. Could the LAG coordinator / NNSS help you recruit and retain volunteers? If so, how? (*added to list of LAG coordinator / NNSS tasks, above*).

Ways LAGs promote their work

- Written reports on trials (for good practice sharing and supporting funding bids)
- Publish interactive maps on project website.
- Face to face communications.
- Regional newsletters.
- Yearly forum to showcase project progress.
- Social media, including infographics.
- Blogs.
- Videos.
- Good examples:
 - Ramblers Cymru – have a programme of works for the year, mailing list, Instagram etc.
 - Help us plant 3,000 trees – broken down overall goal into smaller ones on social media to keep people engaged.
- Some LAGs reported having no dedicated funding / staff time for comms (or issues with engaging their organisations comms officer).

Reasons LAGs promote their work

- To keep volunteers happy
- As evidence for funding
- To demonstrate that the work is making a difference to the environment.
- Protecting reputation of their organisation, shout about what you do well.
- LAG activities may seem ordinary to staff but are really interesting to the public / potential volunteers.
- Preventing negative backlash (i.e.) seeing removal of plants as negative.

Recruiting / retaining volunteers:

Reward volunteers

- Food (tea and cake, BBQs, Christmas meal)
- Training
- Guided walks.

- Combine with foraging events – forage for ingredients, then carry out INNS management while waiting for meal to be prepared. LAGs charge for these events and they are more popular than standard free INNS removal.
- Send personalised emails to make volunteers feel welcome
- Thank volunteers with thank you events and social media posts, WhatsApp messages.
- Don't overwork volunteers
- Show them 'the journey' – what they are working towards, what the project hopes to achieve, before and after photos etc. Involve them in the whole restoration process.

Give them interesting / relevant tasks

- Only take on the volunteers you need so there is enough work for them to do to avoid them getting bored
- Match volunteers to the type of work needed and target invitations according to task (e.g. with balsam removal, as numbers of plants decline fewer more agile volunteers needed)
- Combine with other tasks, e.g. habitat restoration.
- Offer other opportunities in winter, e.g. what3words mapping. One LAG shares volunteers with another organisation that does tree planting and birch control over winter.
- Plant removal volunteers may drop off over winter but this can be positive as they can rest before new season.

Be welcoming to all

- Make it clear that volunteers don't need to be experts, the project is open to people of all abilities.
- Highlight the benefits of volunteering, e.g. for health and wellbeing.
- Translate publicity materials into other languages to reach a wider audience.
- Reach out to a range of diverse communities.

Talk to your volunteers

- Ask why they are volunteering.
- Ask whether they feel that they are making a difference, and if not, what could change that.

Sources of volunteers:

- Volunteering fairs
- Scouts and girl guide groups
- Countryside jobs (advertise volunteering opportunities)
- Talks in schools
- Women's Institute (give a talk)
- Freshers fairs
- Community payback (but some authorities only work on publicly owned land. Some volunteers won't work with those on payback)
- Corporate groups (some LAGs contacted by companies regularly. Need to balance regular volunteers with one-off corporate days. Some LAGs charge for corporate groups.)
- Social prescribing (need to match volunteers recruited through these schemes with appropriate tasks based on any health considerations but building community is very important and can be another marker of success in a project).
- Asylum seeker network (staff have found this very rewarding).
- U3A.

- Youth council (sends volunteers and the agreement is they only need to stay an hour. Pick appropriate work sites / tasks).
- Youth offenders (enjoyed the hard physical work of removal).
- Muslim Women's Group

Where to advertise for volunteers

- Facebook pages for local villages, towns etc.
- Local notice boards (supermarket, pub etc)
- Window display in a vacant shop (contact local council)
- Stalls in supermarkets
- Large offices in local city

Advice from LAGs for other LAGs

Social media / communicating your work

- Tell the whole story. Time lapses are useful to show positive impact (e.g. INNS coverage, removal, and recovery of native wildlife).
- Explain the value of what you are doing before posting photos (particularly when talking about INNS management).
- Discuss positive impact, species you are working to protect.
- Always post photos / videos with people in before photos of plants, engagement is better.
- Use quotes from volunteers.

Useful resources for LAGs

- Eventbrite – online database of events. Can send out risk assessment to attendees ahead of event. Easy to use, can create templates of events to reuse. Can bring in new volunteers as people can search for events.
- Cervis – volunteer management system. Can track volunteer hours, volunteer information, contact details etc. Costs £100 a month.
- Better Impact – volunteer management system. Price increases the more volunteers sign up. People can register their interest as a volunteer.
- Mailchimp – tool for creating mailing lists
- WhatsApp – for communicating with volunteers
- Canva – free online tool for creating social media graphics

FEEDBACK

Attendees: 47

Returned number of feedback forms: 25

Are you directly involved in a local action project on non-native species?

Yes: 24

No: 1

Do you think the workshop was a worthwhile exercise? If yes please state which parts were most useful and if no, please suggest improvements.

Yes: 25

No: 0

Collaborating on ideas is very helpful.

Sharing knowledge and discussing your experience is useful.

New contacts made, new ideas, a very inspiring event.

Useful to have informal discussions with other LAG groups, outside the workshop, to see what they are doing and to meet other like-minded LAG members.

Good to meet the NNSS and to see what they are doing.

CABI update useful.

Nice to see the information and resources available from NNSS.

Good to meet someone from Defra and hear their update.

The INNS Mapper session was interesting and good to be 'hands on' with their app.

Presentations and case studies all helpful and relevant.

A very upbeat and practical workshop.

Could we have a larger venue?

Do you have any suggestions for improvements to the NNSS website, in particular the Local Action Groups section?

Could we have a case studies section?

More colour annotations, illustrations as the appearance is a bit 'dry'.

Could we show horizon species images?

I find some of the species information lacking.

A section on funding and applications would be helpful.

An interactive map showing where the LAG groups are located, click on that point to take you to that particular LAG website.

Like to see more on management of species.

An interactive map of projects would be really useful.

Create a forum for information sharing between LAGs to see what we are doing.

It would be good if we could update the details of what our LAG is doing.

Any other comments:

Missed Environment Agency presence.

Some of the accommodation was cold and food not as good as previous years.

Allow time for over-runs instead of running late.

Leave more time on the last day to travel home, perhaps start earlier on the first day?

Very well run and enjoyable workshop.

All the speakers were excellent with a broad range of INNS topics.

A great 2 days and a really nice way to be introduced into the world of INNS and LAGS.

Always a positive and friendly atmosphere and so supportive.

A good mix of familiar faces and 'new' people.

Why don't you try a couple of webinars, like Rivers Trust.

Attended by:

Animal and Plant Health Agency

Avon Invasive Weeds Forum / Bristol Zoological Society

BEACON (Bollin Environmental Action and Conservation)

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

British Canoeing

CABI

Chelmer Canal Trust

Defra

Dwr Cymru Welsh Water

Exmoor National Park Authority

GB Non-native Species Inspectorate

GB Non-native Species Secretariat

Isle of Wight LAG

Mersey Rivers Trust

Natural Resources Wales

NatureScot – Scottish Invasive Species Initiative

New Forest Non-Native Plants Project

Newcastle University/Northumbrian Water

Nicky Green Associates

North Wales Wildlife Trust

Peel Ports

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Shropshire Wildlife Trust - SINNSI

South West Lakes Trust
South West Water
Tees Rivers Trust
The Angling Trust
Tyne Rivers Trust
University of Leeds and Yorkshire Dales INNS
Wales Resilient Ecological Network (WaREN)
West Cumbria Rivers Trust
Wildlife Trust BCN
Wye Valley AONB – Wye Invasive Species Project (WISP)
Yorkshire Invasive Species Forum
Yorkshire Water
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust