

[News story: Invasive Species Week: American skunk cabbage creates a stink](#)

American skunk cabbage is a colourful plant posing a difficult challenge at [Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest](#), where it is now blocking drainage channels.

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner visited the area today (Tuesday, 14 May) to see first-hand how this plant has had an impact on the woodlands. He then assisted [Forestry England](#) and volunteers in digging out this invasive non-native plant.

Woodlands are a crucial part of our landscape and cultural heritage and home to some of the country's rarest wildlife, but the biodiversity they support is threatened by a number of invasive species.

Recent reports on international nature have put the issue of species loss high on the nation's agenda. Last week, the [UN's Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services report](#) showed nearly a million species are in danger of extinction and tackling invasive non-native species can make a difference for the UK's native fauna and flora.

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner said:

The government is taking strong measures to ensure non-native invasive species are not allowed to become established in the UK and stopping the spread of those already here – this is critical to tackling wider environmental threats such as biodiversity loss, climate change, food security and our resilience to flooding.

Tackling invasive non-native species is important for protecting our country's native plants and animals and is vital for safeguarding our environment, economy and health. Meeting this threat will help us to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

The work here at Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest by Forestry England staff and volunteers is making a vital difference to remove a non-native invasive species. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved.

American skunk cabbage was first recorded in the wild in 1947 in Surrey and was originally introduced to the UK from Western North America as an ornamental plant in 1901. Since then it has spread across Britain, particularly in southern and western areas.

Once established the plant can spread quickly. Infestations can dominate large areas and crowd out native species in important habitats such as wet

woodlands. Its name is fitting as this plant has a characteristic pungent scent.

In 2016, American skunk cabbage was banned from sale in the UK. Now gardeners are being urged to make sure that they [Be Plant Wise](#), dispose of plants correctly and ensure they do not discard this species in the natural environment.

Forestry England have been working hard to remove the plant from Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest over the last few years, and the Kent High Weald Partnership have volunteered to lend a hand during Invasive Species Week.

Dr Niall Moore, Head of the [GB Non-Native Secretariat](#), said:

Invasive Species Week highlights the importance of this issue and the role of the Be Plant Wise and [Check, Clean, Dry](#) campaigns that help boaters, anglers, gardeners and those travelling abroad to ensure they take the right biosecurity action and prevent any visitors from hitching a lift to the UK.

Advice to gardeners is to [Be Plant Wise](#) when planning a clear out of your garden, pond or aquarium, dispose of plants responsibly and don't dump them in the wild.

If you're an angler, canoeist, boater or similar, [Check Clean Dry](#) your kit after leaving the water to avoid spreading invasive species between waterbodies. It's even more important if you're abroad as you could bring back new plants and animals.

Take care of pets, never release them or allow them to escape into the wild. It's cruel and could harm other wildlife.

Asian hornet

Last year there were nine confirmed sightings of Asian hornets – an individual hornet in Lancashire (April) and Hull, three in Cornwall, two in Hampshire, one in Surrey (all September) and the latest in Kent (October).

It is important to remember: The Asian hornet is smaller than our native hornet and poses no greater risk to human health than a bee. However, they do pose a risk to honey bees.

These incursions to the UK were successfully contained by government action. However Defra remains vigilant, working closely with the National Bee Unit and their nationwide network of bee inspectors, as well as partners APHA and Fera, to monitor the situation.

[The latest updates about Asian hornet sightings in the UK can be found here on Gov.uk](#)

Government has launched an innovative free app – called Asian hornet watch –

to enable people to quickly and easily report possible sightings of the invasive species and send pictures of suspect insects to experts at the National Bee Unit.

If you suspect you have seen an Asian hornet you should report this using the 'Asian Hornet Watch' app:

Lord Gardiner's visit comes as part of a wider push by government to promote Invasive Species Week, an annual awareness-raising campaign led by the GB Non-Native

Species Secretariat (NNS) and Defra to get members of the public thinking about simple steps they can take to stop the spread of invasive species which threaten Britain's plants and animals. Find out more on the website: [Invasive Species Week](#).

Background

Invasive Species – Why it matters for the UK?

- Biodiversity loss: Invasive species are one of the biggest causes of global nature loss and species extinctions. For example, floating pennywort, originally introduced as a pond plant, rapidly forms dense mats which reduce oxygen levels in the water, crowd out and kill off native wildlife and damage habitats.
- Climate change: Through warmer temperatures, climate change may allow the spread of invasive species and turn previously benign plants and animals into invasive species. For example, Argentine ant is occasionally recorded in warmer parts of UK cities but climate change could help it establish more widely, disrupting ecosystems of plants and insects, and cause problems in households.
- Food security: Invasive species are estimated to cost British agriculture and horticulture over £1 billion per year. For example, the most destructive species of slug pests to UK agriculture are three non-native: Spanish slug, Sicilian slug and Budapest slug.
- Resilience to flooding: Invasive species can increase the risk of flooding by clogging waterways, undermining flood defences and impeding drainage. For example, Signal crayfish erodes banks by digging burrows which can be up to two metres deep, with interconnecting tunnels.
- What can I do? [Be Plant Wise](#) when planning a clear out of your garden, pond or aquarium, dispose of plants responsibly and don't dump them in the wild. If you're an angler, canoeist, boater or similar, [Check Clean Dry](#) your kit after leaving the water to avoid spreading invasive species between waterbodies.