

Position statement on Buddleia and its planting in the UK

Background

Buddleia is widely planted in gardens across the UK and is clearly a favoured nectar source for butterflies in gardens. It is always top of the list of most commonly used nectar sources in our Garden Butterfly Survey and lives up to its alternative name of the “Butterfly Bush”. The plants are also highly attractive to moths, bees and other insects.

There are around 100 different species of Buddleia, which were mainly introduced to the UK during the 20th century. The most popular species, *Buddleia davidii* was introduced at Kew in 1896. Apart from being planted widely in gardens, the plant has become widely naturalised in the countryside and towns where it colonises disturbed ground sites such as railway lines, quarries, roadsides and waste ground.

Concern has been growing in the last decade that the plant is spreading and causing problems by invading important wildlife habitats, notably brownfield sites which are important for invertebrates (Shardlow, 2010). It grows vigorously and can form dense stands that eliminate other plants.

In 2008, Defra and the country agencies for Wales and Scotland published a new strategy to control invasive species and listed Buddleia on their non-native species website www.nonnative species.org.

Defra has estimated that Buddleia control costs the British economy £961,000 pa, largely because it can germinate in crumbling brickwork and cause damage to old buildings and needs to be cleared from railway lines (Williams, 2010). There is a factsheet on Buddleia on the non-native species website but no risk assessment has been done to date (2012). However, Buddleia is not listed among the wild invasive non-native plants listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and is not listed by Plantlife as a plant that should be added (Plantlife website).

Butterfly Conservation’s position

Buddleia provides an important nectar source for adult butterflies, moths and other insects in townscapes and the countryside. This has become increasingly relevant because wildflowers have become so depleted following habitat loss and the general lack of nectar sources in the countryside. It also brings enjoyment to many people, both because of its heavy scented and beautiful blooms but also because of the butterflies and other insects it attracts. It therefore plays a role, alongside other non-native garden plants, in helping to maintain or restore the link between people and native UK wildlife such as butterflies. In gardens, Buddleia is often pruned annually thus removing seed-heads and reducing the potential for seeding.

Buddleia is not important as a caterpillar food-plant and cannot replace naturally occurring wildflowers, which are crucial to provide a variety of nectar through the year as well as being

food-plants for caterpillars. Buddleia can cause serious problems on some important conservation sites, especially brownfield sites. It needs to be controlled in these and other semi-natural sites to allow natural vegetation to develop. The cost of control can sometime be considerable.

In reaching a position on Buddleia it is important to weigh up the undoubted benefits it brings in garden situations against the possible risks to wildlife habitats. It is also important to recognise that Buddleia is already naturalised and well established across much of the UK.

Gardens

In view of its value as a nectar source, BC will continue to recommend its planting in gardens alongside other butterfly-friendly non-native plants, but will avoid giving it undue prominence and will give advice on its management and control.

Buddleia seeds do not ripen until dry weather during the following spring. We thus recommend that plants in gardens are dead-headed after flowering or cut back during the winter to prevent seed development and the risk of spreading into adjacent habitat.

Semi-natural habitats

BC will advise against planting of Buddleia in semi-natural habitat re-creation schemes or in positions where it may be unmanaged and pose a risk to nearby wildlife habitats. On sites where Buddleia has become a problem it should be controlled in the same way as other invasive plants (e.g. native and non-native scrub), by cutting and/or spraying. It is a relatively easy plant to control by cutting, so is in a different category to other invasive plants that are very difficult to control (e.g. Cotoneaster and Rhododendron). However, seedlings may continue to become established and cutting/removal may need to be repeated at regular intervals.

References

Defra et al. (2008). The Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain. Defra, London.

Plantlife (2012) Invasives and the law.

http://www.plantlife.org.uk/our_work/campaigns/inns/invasive_non-native_plants_and_the_law/

Shardlow, M. (2010). Buddleia and invertebrates. Letter to British Wildlife 21, p 301.

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