

# New smartphone app to track problem plants in UK

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A flower on a Himalayan Balsam plant. Image by Dave Kilbey

The University of Bristol is using technology to help protect the UK's wildlife thanks to the launch of a new mobile phone app which enables the public to track the spread of invasive plants.

The PlantTracker [app](#) helps people to record where they have spotted Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Floating Pennywort - three particularly problematic Invasive, Non-Native Species (INNS) that are causing untold problems in the UK.

They pose a threat to biodiversity, increase flood risk and affect the state of our water environment, costing the British economy a minimum of £1.7 billion per annum.

Tackling the problem in such a high-tech fashion is The Environment Agency who has teamed up with the Nature Locator project at Bristol

University and the NERC Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH).

The project is being piloted in the Midlands initially, where residents are being urged to download the PlantTracker app which shows them how to identify each species and enables users to easily submit geo-located photos whenever they find one.

Dave Kilbey, Nature Locator Project Manager, said: “Engaging members of the public with scientific research is an exciting and expanding area with benefits both to science and the individuals involved. Smartphone apps are ideally suited to projects of this kind and the Nature Locator team aims to build a portfolio of apps to tackle some of our many environmental problems.”

The project team work in the research and development division of IT Services, which explores how the internet and other technologies can aid research, future learning and management processes.

Nature Locator’s award-winning inaugural project ‘Leaf Watch’ was an app designed to collect information on an invasive moth which is threatening horse chestnut trees in the UK. A total of 5,500 records were collected from across the country in a four month recording period.

The PlantTracker app is available free from the iTunes App Store and Google Play Store by searching for planttracker (one word), or from the website [plantracker.naturelocator.org/](http://plantracker.naturelocator.org/)

It is hoped that in subsequent years the project will be expanded to cover the whole of the UK. Records can be submitted from outside the Midlands but they may not be analysed straight away.

You download the app and then follow the progress of the project and the reports that are coming in via a blog on the project website

[plantracker.naturelocator.org/](http://plantracker.naturelocator.org/), on twitter using #plantracker and @envagencymids, or at [www.facebook.com/naturelocator](http://www.facebook.com/naturelocator) ;

Further information is available from the Environment Agency's [website](#)

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Provided by University of Bristol

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