

Can e-learning help stem the threat of invasive alien species such as Japanese Knotweed?

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E-learning could be a crucial tool in the biosecurity fight against invasive alien species such as Japanese Knotweed, Zebra Mussels and Signal Crayfish according to a new study published in the academic journal *Biological Invasions*.

According to previous studies, the cost of invasive alien species is estimated to be £1.7billion per annum. Governments across the UK have launched regular public awareness campaigns aimed such as 'Check Clean Dry' which was aimed at increasing awareness of [biosecurity](#) measures among people such as anglers and recreational boaters.

In the study, led by Cranfield University's Dr. Caitriona Shannon, over 600 field workers and researcher were surveyed before, and six months after undertaking an e-learning course on invasive alien species and biosecurity practices. The study was carried out at the University of Leeds and funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

After following the 'Better Biosecurity' e-Learning course, the participants showed not only a much greater knowledge of the risk of accidentally spreading [invasive species](#) through their work, but they also demonstrated an increase in biosecurity behaviour and cleaning practices.

The paper is the first to evaluate the effectiveness of e-learning as a tool to increase awareness, risk perception and biosecurity behaviour in relation to [invasive alien species](#) among individuals conducting work activities or research (fieldwork) in the field.

Dr. Caitriona Shannon, Research Fellow in Perceptions & Behaviour at Cranfield University, said: "Invasive alien species do tremendous damage to the UK's natural environment and costs the economy billions of pounds a year. Often the spread of these species is accidental and caused by a low level of biosecurity knowledge and poor cleaning practices. This study shows the effectiveness of the role e-learning can play in improving the nation's biosecurity levels and safeguarding our indigenous [species](#)."

"As we all adapt to new ways of working, such as delivering teaching online, this study also illustrates just how effective e-learning can be as an educational tool."

More information: Caitriona Shannon et al, The effectiveness of e-Learning on biosecurity practice to slow the spread of invasive alien species, *Biological Invasions* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s10530-020-02271-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10530-020-02271-z)

Provided by Cranfield University

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