

The BRWA Fights an Alien Invasion

Star Wars? Invasion of the Body Snatchers? Well, not exactly.... The wicked looking object with its four sharply projecting horns may look like something not of this world, but it actually came from Eurasia in 1877. And although its invasion may not come from outer space, it is nevertheless an extremely destructive entity.

It is the Asian Water Chestnut. Not the kind you might enjoy in your favorite Chinese restaurant, but the seed pod of an aquatic disaster. The plant that germinates from this pod or nut has two different kinds of leaves: the weird, wraithlike appendages that grow from the submerged stem and the triple layered rosettes with diamond shaped surface leaves. Each plant produces approximately 20 of these rosettes and each rosette can produce 20 seeds. Since it is unhindered by the predators of its native land, it does not take a mathematical genius to figure out how quickly this plant's explosive expansion can form a virtually impenetrable mat that clogs our rivers, lakes and ponds.

Swimming? Boating? Fishing? Well, you can just forget all about those pleasurable activities. Are you are thinking of selling your waterfront home or land? The proliferation of this weed along the shoreline may cause the value of your property to plummet. The Asian Water Chestnut also has a devastating impact on the ecosystem of the host water body. It monopolizes the habitat, crowding out native species and eliminating biodiversity. Not to mention the fact that when the plants decay, they rob the water of life giving oxygen.

If you can imagine twelve acres of this noxious weed stretching from shore to shore, you have an idea of what it looked like on the West River in Uxbridge. However, thanks to the efforts of the Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA), these waters now flow free and clear. Forty volunteers worked on both the 8th and 22nd of July to hand pick the water chestnuts along the shore. A machine that looked like a giant water borne hay baler spent four weeks scooping up the deeper water infestations before the seeds could mature, and the Uxbridge DPW toted the 50 to 60 truckloads away.

Making this possible were generous grants from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the New England Grassroots Environmental Foundation, and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. In addition, The BRWA would like to express sincere gratitude to The Friends of the Blackstone in R.I. for assisting with the project, the Wild Bird Gardens of Linwood, MA for donating the use of canoes, and the Uxbridge Italian American Club for allowing the use of their space.

The Asian Water Chestnut, however, is the focus of only one battle in an ongoing war to protect the Blackstone River and its tributaries. It is only one battle in an ongoing war to make our Blackstone Valley a better place to live. The BRWA needs your help to fight the threats to these rivers. If you are one of the many who enjoys our rivers for recreational boating or fishing, you can stop the spread of this and other invasive species by thoroughly rinsing boats, motors and equipment before going from one water body to another.

There is one other very important thing you can do. Become a member of the BRWA! Your support can make a critical difference. Whether it is the first step or the only step, please join us.

An Individual Membership is only \$10.00 and a Family Membership is \$25.00. Don't have an official entry form? Visit our web site at www.thebrwa.org , call the office at 508-278-5200, or email brwa@verizon.net. As a member, you will receive newsletters and notices about our activities and accomplishments.



Asian Water Chestnuts on the West River in Uxbridge, MA