

The Himalayan Blackberry (*Rubus bifrons*) awakens in Kesputwitk

Hill, N.M.¹, Sollows, D.¹, Nickerson, S¹., and Blaney, S.C.²

¹*Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve Association*, ²*Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre*.

According to one story, the Himalayan Blackberry (*Rubus bifrons*) got its start in North America when California plantsman Luther Burbank found seeds of an Indian blackberry in a packet, bred the offspring and in 1894, then sold “Himalaya Giant” blackberries. The Himalayan Blackberry (more likely from Armenia) was then spread all over the USA but became a scourge throughout the Pacific Northwest. A hundred years later, we find that the lure of these magnificent berries has moved the Giant to the milder parts of Nova Scotia in Kesputwitk and the recent climate warming (increase of 1.7°C between two climate normal, 1961-1990 to 1991-2020) may have awakened a many armed plant Kraken from several decades of innocent slumber scarcely noticed in the corners of people’s gardens.

We first found the Himalayan Blackberry in waste areas, parking lots and along the rail trail in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, a range extension of more than 1000km over land from its nearest populations in Ontario and Massachusetts. Since advertising its threat in the Biosphere Times, we know it from several places in Digby County. It appears to have spent from 30 to 40 years in gardens in Yarmouth and Digby before becoming a rampant pest in each place. We have documented occasional seedlings under shade of parent plants. Annual growth of tendrils may be up to 12m long. Tendrils hang down from trees, cross dirt roads and become rooted at their tips. Apart from the bounty of its fruit, the 3m tall thickets of heavily armed canes can overwhelm gardeners and homeowners and greatly reduce access to parking lots, rail trails and shorelines. There is only a short window of time for the eradication of this costly pest.

Key Words: Invasive plant, climate change, biotic dispersal, garden plant

Presentation type: Poster