Heracleum mantegazzianum

[Synonyms : *Heracleum caucasicum*, *Heracleum giganteum*, *Heracleum palmatum*, *Heracleum persicum*, *Heracleum pubescens*, *Heracleum panaces*, *Heracleum speciosum*, *Heracleum tauricum*, *Pastinaca pubescens*, *Sphondylium pubescens*]

GIANT HOGWEED is a biennial or perennial. Native to the Caucasus it has small white flowers.

It is also known as *Bärenklau* (German), *Berce du Caucase* (French), *Boľševník obrovský* (Slovak), *Bolševník velkolepý* (Czech), Cartwheel flower, Giant cow parsnip, Giant hogbrake weed, *Herkuleskraut* (German), *Herkulesstaude* (German), *Jättebjörnfloka* (Swedish), *Jättebjörnloka* (Swedish), *Jättefloka* (Swedish), *Jätteloka* (Swedish), *Kaukaasianjättiputki* (Finnish), *Kaukaasianputki* (Finnish), *Kaukasisk björnloka* (Swedish), *Kaukasisk jätteloka* (Swedish), *Kaukasisk jättefloka* (Swedish), *Kungsholmsbjörnloka* (Swedish), *Kungsholmsloka* (Swedish), *Mantegazzis* (German), *Persianputki* (Finnish), *Reuzenberenklauw* (Dutch), *Riesen-Bärenklau* (German), *Russenkraut* (German), *Sibirisk jättebjörnfloka* (Swedish), Tree parsnip, *Tromsöloka* (Swedish), and *Tromsöpalm* (Swedish).

Warning – exposed skin touched by the plant can blister and become photosensitive.

It is not allowed to be planted or encouraged in the wild either in Northern Ireland under the Wildlife (Northern Irleand) Order 1985 or the British mainland (the latter under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mantegazzianum commemorates an Italian physician, anthropologist, politician and writer, Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910) who was not only the first to isolate cocaine from coca leaves (*Erythroxylum coca*) and then investigate the effects of the drug on himself but also supported the theories of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) with whom he corresponded. He practised medicine briefly in Argentina and Paraguay before becoming a surgeon in Milan (Italy) in 1858, as well as professor of pathology at Pavia. He was involved in Italian politics controversially (primarily because of his vivisectional practices) from 1865-1876. In 1869 he became professor of anthropology in Florence where the same year he also founded the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology. He established the Italian Anthropological Society too. In addition to his books on physiology and travelling he also wrote novels. Among his published academic works are *Sulle Virtù Igieniche e Medicinali della Coca e sugli Alimenti Nervosi in Generale*, and *Quadri della Natura Umana. Feste ed Ebbrezze*, and of his novels two tend to be highlighted *Un Giorno a Madera*, and *L'Anno 3000*.

According to one noted authority there can be as many as 10,000 flowers in any one flower head. Apparently somebody has counted them.

Locally the seeds have provided a condiment that has been an ingredient for pickles.

It is thought by some authorities that giant hogweed was probably introduced to Britain in 1893 although others believe it was earlier in 1828.

©Sue Eland 2008