Plant common name: **Giant Hogweed**

Latin name: *Heraculum mantegazzianum*

Common family name: Carrot/Parsley

Scientific family name: **Apiaceae**

Plant height: massively tall and up to 5m

Flowering period: June – August

Provides: nectar and pollen

Honey: no

Utilised by: short tongued bees like the buff-tailed bumble bee and the white-tailed bumble bees. Flies love this plant. Honey bees also visit and, although it is not a great honey plant, it is always a good standby if there is nothing much to forage on in June.

**Giant Hogweed**

The carrot family is quite large and mostly they are easy to recognise as compound umbels from the way all the stems of the flowers radiate from a single point at the end of the stalk closely resembling the spokes of an umbrella.

Many of the common herbs around our garden such as: fennel; angelica; anise; caraway; cumin and dill belong to this family. The leaves are arranged in rows along the stem but are not opposite each other so are alternate leaves. Each of the small flowers clustered on the conspicuous umbels have 5 sepals and 5 petals and are bisexual so self-pollinate. The hollow stems make easy-to-construct bumble bee and bug hotels.

And so, to the giant hogweed. I love this bad boy of the plant world, that should have stayed in its native Caucasus, because of its intimidating size and the feeling of being in a primordial forest when walking along the banks of The River Nairn and seeing it loom up in thickets with lacy blue skies behind. Of course, I avoid contact with this “listed” invasive non-native species the sap of which is toxic and may cause severe skin reactions. But I watch to see the action amongst the myriad tiny white flowers held together in compound umbels resembling the spokes of a giant’s umbrella.

The oval seeds are flattened and easily disperse in the wind to fall into the river and be carried downstream to populate other areas.

It is quite hard to identify the various other umbellifers out in the wild, many of which are poisonous, and hemlock, *Conium maculatum,* must be avoided. The carrot-like roots fooled a family of foreign campers with fatal results during my childhood, and I have never forgotten the horror of their simple mistake.

I find the lozenge shaped pollen of giant hogweed quite intriguing and fascinating to study closely.

**Pollen** under the microscope (x600 magnification)

Colour: pale yellow

Shape: long and lozenge-shaped like a paracetamol caplet

Size: large 50-100µm, this specimen 51 µm x 24 µm wide

Exine features: thick exine with beading

Surface: net surface resembling the coat of a dappled grey horse

Apertures: 3 but difficult to find

Aperture type 2 furrows seen

Other features: none noted