

Children at risk from march of giant hogweed

Invasive species spreads through parks

By Victoria Allen

A PLANT that can cause enormous blisters and third-degree burns has been found across Scotland in play parks, on beaches and even beside a nursery school.

Giant hogweed left ten-year-old Lauren Fuller in agony and facing skin-graft surgery after a family fishing trip near Loch Lomond.

But the toxic plant is invading family areas across the country, coming frighteningly close to young children.

If someone brushes against it and the sap touches their flesh, it removes the skin's ability to protect itself from UV light, causing extreme sunburn. Rubbed into the eyes, it can cause blindness.

A Scottish Daily Mail investigation found giant hogweed is flourishing in

'People need to put up signs'

Glasgow's Kelvingrove Park, where thousands of families take their children every weekend.

It is close to the beach in St Andrews, as golf fans descend on the town for the Open Championship, and it threatens cricketers at McKane Park in Dunfermline, Fife.

In Moray, where it thrives by the River Lossie, it can be found yards from a children's outdoor nursery due to open in Elgin next month.

Despite efforts by professionals and volunteers to clear the plant, it can take 20 years to eradicate fully.

A single plant can hold 20,000 seeds, which easily spread along rivers and water courses, and there is no legal obligation for councils and landowners to remove it.

George Parsonage, of the Glasgow Humane Society, who patrols the riverside in Kelvingrove Park, said: 'It is extremely concerning that this plant is emerging in the places where families and children are most likely to go.'

'Something needs to be done to stop its spread.'

'In Glasgow Green, it is right up at a viewing platform where children can touch it. It is getting far too close to us and youngsters are going to end up badly burned.'

Glasgow City Council said hogweed is treated every year before it flowers and especially where it is near schools and play areas.

The danger of the giant weed – an invasive species introduced to



GLASGOW

Flourishing: Hogweed growing in the city's Kelvingrove Park



ST ANDREWS

Cliff-top danger: The weed growing beside a public footpath



ABERDEEN

Thriving: Hogweed next to path at Donmouth

Britain by Victorian plant-hunters – became clear last month when Lauren Fuller picked up the plant to make a den on the banks of the River Endrick, near Loch Lomond.

Within two days her hands were covered in blisters the size of golf balls and her skin had burned. Lauren's father Russell, of Shotts,

Lanarkshire, said: 'She was in a lot of pain. We are really worried about someone else getting burned.'

The menace has been reported at Dighty Burn in Dundee and the Donmouth Local Nature Reserve in Aberdeen.

A local volunteer, Terence O'Byrne, has sprayed the poison-



FORRES

On the rise: Hogweed is spreading by the riverside

ous weed from Laighills Park in Dunblane, where he said it had encroached on a children's play park and football area.

In Elgin, where outdoor nursery organisation Stramash is to open next month, a fence may be built to protect children from hogweed.

Graham Rudd, of the Invasive

Weeds Agency in Edinburgh, which removes the plant, said: 'It shouldn't be the case that children have to be injured before we hear about hogweed.'

'People need to put up signs to keep people out of areas with hogweed, or pictures to let them know what the plant looks like. Land owners need to take responsibility for the plants on their land.'

A Scottish Government spokesman said: 'There is no requirement for people to eradicate any non-native species on their land, including giant hogweed.'

'We would however encourage land managers to remove giant hogweed from areas where the public can come into contact with it or spread its seeds.'

● *Have you or a member of your family suffered an injury caused by giant hogweed? If so, call the Scottish Daily Mail news desk on 0141 331 4703.*

victoria@dailymail.co.uk



Left in agony: Ten-year-old Lauren Fuller was burned by the weed

It's a monster result as kayak pair set a loch record



Done it: James, front, and Ted celebrate

THERE was barely a ripple on Loch Ness, the sun shining and the air cool and still.

Conditions for childhood friends James Reilly and Ted Simpson could hardly have been better as they paddled their way to a new world record yesterday.

The pair, both 21, became the fastest humans to travel in a tandem kayak from one end of the loch to the other.

Their planned 9am start was delayed for 90 minutes after the exhaust fell off an official witness's car, causing him to be late.

But once the airhorn blasted three times to start them, off they went like the clappers, soon becoming a dot on the horizon.

For four hours, 43 minutes and 43 seconds

By David Wilkes

they paddled non-stop for 23 miles, munching on chocolate to keep their energy up.

Excited relatives, bemused locals and, eventually, two witnesses and two time keepers officiating for Guinness World Records looked on. Thankfully, the Loch Ness monster did not show.

The record comes as a reward for nine months of intensive training, including regular four-hour gym sessions and running half marathons.

Their feat is all the more remarkable because Ted, who is studying history at Edinburgh University, was two years ago

diagnosed with bronchiectasis, a long-term condition in which the airways of the lungs are abnormally widened, leading to a build-up of mucus that can make the lungs more vulnerable to infection.

Ted, from Manchester, said: 'I'm very lucky, they found it early.'

'I can still do all my sports and stay on top of it through exercise.'

It was partly because of Ted's condition that they chose to raise funds for the Cystic Fibrosis Trust – raising a monster £1,110 from their efforts.

James, who is studying medicine at Bristol University, said: 'I don't think I could have done this with anyone else.'