



## PRESS RELEASE

### Aliens at Howth Head

### Invasive 'Hottentot Fig' Plant To Be Eradicted

Mention the words 'alien invasive plant' to people and you conjure up sci-fi images straight out of Doctor Who or Day of the Triffids. No need to get alarmed though, the Hottentot fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*) doesn't walk or want to do battle with the Doctor!

It is however, not a native Irish plant, and it is smothering and decimating the delicate ecosystems and natural biodiversity at Howth Head. This autumn, the National Botanic Gardens, supported by Fingal County Council, are embarking on a programme to eradicate it. *Carpobrotus edulis* is found naturally in South Africa, and is a very attractive pink flowering plant, which may be the reason avid gardeners introduced it to Europe, particularly along coastal areas such as Howth, Cornwall, the Channel Islands and Menorca.

The plant has escaped from these private gardens and is now a major threat to the naturally occurring native cliff species in Howth. The plant's seeds are eaten and distributed by rats, and any plant which encourages rats onto cliffs used as nesting sites by rare sea birds causes concern for Irish Biodiversity. The Hottentot Fig also poses a marked risk of erosion of the soft clay substrate at Howth due to the sheer weight of the stems.

The National Botanic Gardens' staff will be conducting Guided Tours of the invaded sites during Heritage Week (21<sup>st</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> August 2010), and information leaflets and posters are available at Howth, Malahide and Baldoyle libraries.

The first control actions are planned for September 2010, and volunteers are needed for the eradication efforts.

- For further information please contact Dr Noeleen Smyth, National Botanic Gardens at [noeleen.smyth@opw.ie](mailto:noeleen.smyth@opw.ie) or check online information at [www.botanicgardens.ie](http://www.botanicgardens.ie) and click on the link for Invasive Aliens.
- To volunteer, please contact Andy at [andy@conservationservices.ie](mailto:andy@conservationservices.ie)

**ENDS 10/08/2010**

A talk entitled 'The Great Escape' on *Carpobrotus edulis* and other ornamental plants escaping from gardens and causing damage to Irish species and habitats will take place at the National Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre in Glasnevin at 2pm on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2010, and will be followed by a tour to Howth at 3pm.