The Cat Head (*Helianthemum caput-felis*) is a small shrub that grows in Northern Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Melilla), Sardinia, Italy, Balearic Islands and the coastline of the province of Alicante (municipalities of Teulada, Benissa, Calp, Torrevieja, Orihuela and Pilar de la Horadada). Its owns its peculiar name to the resemblance of its flower buds to a cat’s head.

The Cat Head grows in open coastal shrublands, with high insolation, on calcareous soils.

It’s a plant protected by European, Spanish and Valencian regulations. In fact, it is included in Spanish and Valencian catalogues of threatened species within the Vulnerable category. The most important Spanish population is found in the South of the Alicante province, with 20.400 specimens (Balearic Islands: 6.800, northeast of the Alicante province: 2.810, Melilla: 700).

There are 7 plant micro-reserves where the Cat Head grows in the Valencian Community. One of them is “Rambla de las Estacas”, declared in 1999. It is located in the municipality of Orihuela, and covers an area of 0,195 hectares. In 2001 this micro-reserve was declared Site of Community Interest (SCI) and thus forms part of the European network of protected areas NATURA 2000.
The environmental regional administration (Consejería de Infraestructuras, Territorio y Medio Ambiente), in collaboration with the municipality of Orihuela, the Confederación Hidrográfica del Segura and volunteer neighbours, will carry out restoration works in the plant micro-reserve and SIC Rambla de las Estacas, in order to remove invasive plants, rubble and debris and restore the natural vegetation of the area.

Both the micro-reserve and the SCI are located within the residential areas of the Plan Parcial C2 Playa Flamenca. Currently the natural vegetation is being displaced by invasive alien species (such as the giant cane, acacia, castor-oil plant...) and there are accumulations of garden waste, as well as debris and rubble of diverse origins. Wastewater and rainwater discharges to the ravine have modified habitat, favouring the presence of species with higher humidity requirements. The educational use of the micro-reserve and SCI is impeded by the walls and fences built by developers that prevent a convenient access to this site.

In addition to the Cat Head, other species of conservation interest live in the Rambla de las Estacas. For instance, a little snail whose scientific name is Tudorella mauritanica. This species is included in the Valencian catalogue of threatened fauna species under the Vulnerable category. It lives in the leaf litter beneath pines and palmettos.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PRESERVE THEM?

- Do not dump garden waste, rubble or debris in the ravine
- Replace invasive plants from your garden by indigeneous or exotic non-invasive plants (please find useful examples of how to do this by downloading free: Mediterranean gardening without invasive species. Download here.)