

Leisure

Rugby

Green and Whites bounce back

THE last two weeks have seen contrasting fortunes for Nottingham Rugby.

Their game at Doncaster a fortnight ago saw them struggle in the first half only to establish a healthy advantage in the second, and then throw it all away in the dying minutes.

With just three minutes on the clock, plus a couple of minutes of injury time, they led by fifteen points.

That should have been an unassailable position, but somehow they managed to ship three tries to gift Doncaster a 46-42 win.

And so the Green and Whites were determined to prove a point when they

took on Moseley at Meadow Lane last weekend.

A much-improved performance, particularly in defence, provided plenty of entertainment for the crowd of just over 1,500 as they overwhelmed their Midlands rivals to record a comfortable 40-15 win.

Local hero David Jackson led the way with a hat trick of tries, with Ben Johnston and David Marshall also crossing.

Outside half James Arlidge was again in fine kicking form to maintain his position at the head of the Championship points scorers table.

"It was good to bounce

back on Sunday," he said. "Now we need to take that belief away from home.

"We worked hard in training and on Sunday the performance of our defence was brilliant. There was so much disappointment after Doncaster and a massive drive to put things right."

The Green and Whites travel to Bristol this weekend without Sione Kalamafoni. The big Tongan international, who has made quite an impression since joining Nottingham, received a five week ban from the RFU earlier this week following an incident at Rotherham last month.

Wildlife Watching

Local news and views of the natural world

ALTHOUGH recent days have given us something of an 'Indian Summer' some of the usual signs that autumn is upon us can currently be seen. Whilst most plant growth is now over, this is a time when the results of this growth provide something of a bonanza for wildlife preparing for winter, in the form of seeds, nuts, fruit and berries. This year has again yielded a bumper crop of berries, particularly on hawthorn, which means that the birds that feed on them will be well provided for but could also mean, if the folklore is to be believed, that we are in for another hard winter.

There is still one plant that is flowering – the often-maligned ivy. The last burst of pollen that it provides is just one of its many uses for

wildlife. Earlier in the year it may have provided a habitat for a variety of wildlife and later it will provide a rich crop of berries. Right now a patch of flowering ivy in a sunny spot is just about the best place to spot insects.

One organism particularly associated with autumn is fungi and its fruiting bodies that we recognise as mushrooms and toadstools. The processes of decay that are part of the recycling of the nutrients in plants invariably involve fungi in some form, but many of the mushrooms and toadstools that we see are produced by species that live in a symbiotic relationship with plants, especially trees. This is a relationship which aids the growth and survival of both parties.

Television chefs are fond of extolling the culinary

virtues of wild mushrooms and claiming that they are a 'free feast'. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall is a recent and repeat offender but he is far from the only culprit. This encourages people to go out and pick them despite the fact that a good deal of knowledge is required to distinguish the edible from the inedible, the poisonous and the deadly. It also encourages a demand from those who want to eat wild mushrooms but are not prepared to forage in a damp, cold woodland to find them. This demand has led to incidents involving gangs of commercial pickers clearing areas of woodland of all fungi – edible or not – to be selected or discarded away from the site which may have local bylaws prohibiting over-picking.

This type of picking can pose a threat to the survival of trees. The fruit bodies of fungi produce spores which are essential for the reproduction, expansion and survival of the symbiotic fungi. If they die out then it can lead to the death of the trees with which they are associated, particularly when they are under drought stress. One of the

benefits to trees of their relationship with fungi is that they can supply water via the 'fungus roots' in these conditions.

Perhaps it is time to ignore Hugh and his ilk and restrict our use of exotic mushrooms to those that can be cultivated rather than those gathered from the wild. There may even be a case for providing a similar level of legal protection as is afforded to wild flowers and other plants, or at least a nationwide restriction on the numbers that can be picked similar to that which already exists in a few areas

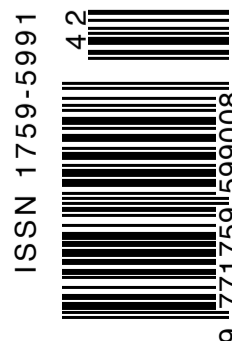
where commercial picking is a problem.

Wild mushrooms may appear to be a free feast but the effects of over picking are invisible, below ground in the 'fungus roots' which make up their living body and which can, in some cases, stretch over huge areas. Leaving them to perform their vital ecological role is preferable to using them as an 'adventure food' for would be hunter-gatherers.

This is certainly a good time of year to spot mushrooms and toadstools but identifying what you

have spotted may be more difficult. There are a number of field guides which will help with the more common species but none can hope to cover all the fungi found in Britain, the numbers of which run into thousands. Further assistance can be found at the Ispot website (www.ispot.org.uk) which is specialising in fungi identification at this time of their abundance. You may even find that some thing you were thinking of eating is, in fact, quite a rarity!

Jack Smith
Local ecologist



Thought for the Fortnight

Doctors prescribe medicines of which they know little, to cure diseases of which they know less, in human beings of which they know nothing.

Voltaire

