

For Immediate Release

New Forest Fungi Picking Ban “unscientific” say fungi experts

New Forest, Hampshire, September 1st 2016

Leading foraging educators claim New Forest fungi picking ban is will undermine future fungi growth

A campaign by the Forestry Commission in England to ban the picking of all fungi in the New Forest has been heavily criticised by fungi experts and foraging educators.

The Association of Foragers, which represents the collective knowledge and experience of nearly one hundred writers, teachers and researchers, say the ban has no grounding in scientific evidence, and is more likely to undermine fungi populations in the long term.

“There are at least 2,700 species of fungi in the New Forest. Only a dozen are routinely collected as food - none of which are rare”, said John Wright, author of the bestselling River Cottage Mushroom Guide, and member of The Association of Foragers. “More fungi are kicked over and trampled by the uneducated than are picked for the pot. Foraging provides an important point of human connection with these otherwise mysterious organisms”, said Mr Wright.

Mark Williams, a member of The Association of Foragers who has taught about fungi in Scotland for 25 years, said: “The Forestry Commission has presented no scientific evidence to show why this ban is necessary. That’s because there simply isn’t any”.

“A 25 year study of the effects of picking mushrooms revealed no correlation whatsoever between picking and future growth, in the same way as picking a bramble does not impact the parent plant - in the case of mushrooms an invisible underground network called mycelium. The picking and movement of mushrooms is actually more likely to help spread fungi spores and expand populations”, said Mr Williams.

The Forestry Commission also cites “fungi-dependent invertebrates” as reason for the ban. Research herbalist Monica Wilde of The AoF says: “People don’t pick the mushrooms that are appealing to maggots! The most widely eaten species - chanterelles and hedgehog mushrooms - are almost entirely resistant to insects.”

The FC also cites anecdotal evidence of “teams of commercial fungi pickers”. “This is a mantra that has been so often repeated, mostly by the tabloid press, that it has entered the public consciousness”, says Mr Williams. “With collectively 1000’s of days spent teaching and recording in the New Forest, not one member of the AoF has ever seen any evidence of this - not even a photograph. 99% of mushrooms rot where they grow.”

The AoF is calling for the FC to rethink the ban. “It is unscientific, unenforceable, and will serve only to further disconnect people from the world of fungi. We urge the FC to use the collective knowledge of the AoF to help formulate evidence-based policy to support future populations of fungi”.

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