



Bid for fine fishing



A chance to land the dream catch

Royal-tour artist reveals work

THE artist who was invited to travel with The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall on a 10-day trip to Spain, Portugal and Morocco is exhibiting the results of this royal tour at James Harvey British Art, 15, Langton Street, London SW10, from February 29 to March 9 (www.jhba.co.uk). Alistair Erskine, who works at high speed to make his oil sketches *en plein air*, was fulfilling

a centuries-old tradition of artists travelling with the aristocracy to record their favourite views. Mr Erskine is best known as a decorative artist, who devises paint treatments, stencilling, *trompe l'oeil* schemes and murals for major houses, and as a landscape painter (www.alistairerskine.com).

Royal memory: Gardens of the Alcazar of Seville, spring

SOME fine international fishing is up for auction next week at a charity event at the Savile Club in Brook Street, London W1. Lots include salmon-fishing on the Dee, Naver and North Harris in Scotland, and in Norway, Iceland and Russia, plus sea-trout fishing in Argentina and Sweden. The auction on March 1 is in aid of the Upper Dee Riparian Scheme, a £2.4 million project to restore habitat.

To book a (free) place at the auction, or to place a sealed bid, telephone 01339 880411 or visit www.riverdee.org.uk

Drive to restore red squirrels to East Anglia

THE Countryside Restoration Trust has launched a red-squirrel breeding initiative that chairman Robin Page hopes will lead to them eventually returning to their former East Anglian strongholds. The trust has built two enclosures, with overhead runs into nearby hedgerow oak trees, on its smallholding at Themelthorpe, Norfolk, in the hope of

Red squirrels may be seen again in Norfolk

encouraging the resident reds to breed. Other breeding sites have been set up by the East Anglia Red Squirrel Group, and it's hoped that the severely endangered creature, once widespread in the region, will recover its numbers.

However, Mr Page argues that action needs to be taken against grey squirrels if his dream is to be fulfilled. 'Greys invaded Thetford Forest in the last century, where the Forestry Commission failed to take the necessary precautions. It and

Defra need to take urgent action to control the population if the red-squirrel schemes are to have any hope of lasting success,' he says. 'Greys and reds simply cannot mix without it meaning the total eradication of the latter. Sadly, no one has yet developed a protective vaccination, so the only way is population control.'

Mr Page says he's dismayed by the prevailing casual attitude to the plight of the red squirrel. 'The British seem to care more about the black rhinoceros and the Siberian tiger than they do about red squirrels, but they are just as important in my view, and their numbers are plummeting fast.' *Jack Watkins*





The new museum will display treasures from the Ashmolean's collection

The Ashmolean comes to Broadway

THE Cotswold village of Broadway, Worcestershire, is to have a new community museum supported by the Ashmolean in Oxford. This follows the gift of Tudor House to the community for 30 years by local benefactor John Keil. Three floors of the 17th-century wool-merchant's house on the High Street, once home to his father's business, H. W. Keil Antiques, will be transformed into a museum curated by the Ashmolean, with some of the latter's 1.2 million objects. 'It's a hugely exciting opportunity to display collections that aren't often seen,' says Victoria McGuinness of the Ashmolean. 'In particular, we will be able to hang some of the Tradescant paintings

inherited by Elias Ashmole, which were shown in the original museum. It will be a different concept to the Ashmolean—we used modern architecture for our new galleries, but each room here will reflect the building's 350-year history.' Mr Keil hopes it will boost the community by attracting tourism, offering employment and providing space for exhibitions of local artists. Worcestershire County Council has given £200,000, but the work, scheduled to be completed by the end of this year, still needs about £70,000. To help, or to volunteer as a guide, telephone Cllr Elizabeth Eyre on 01386 854807 or Miss McGuinness on 01865 288187. *Octavia Pollock*



North Front of Blenheim Palace by John Piper (1903–92), part of an exhibition at Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (until April 9), of the artist's William Blake-inspired depictions of the home of the Duke of Marlborough (www.blenheimpalace.com). The first exhibition to be held in the Palace's Long Library will also showcase Piper's writing, drawings and paintings of other country houses, plus some of his collaborative work, such as prints, books, stained glass, ceramics and tapestry.



Country Mouse

Mayhem of the chase

IT was the children's meet on Saturday, the day when any self-respecting adult steers well clear of the hunt, in the largely justified belief that a Thelwellian scene of unbridled mayhem is about to unfold. The potential for pony Armageddon is enormous: children out for the first time, some not very glued to their saddles; Shetland ponies, dragged out of a field, unable to believe what fun galloping with the herd can be. Only grown-ups shepherding children, or those who had forgotten, were there. The 1st Duke of Wellington might have said: 'I don't know if they frighten the fox, but, my God, they frighten me.'

In the event, it was more orderly than might have been expected. Yes, we had our moments of drama. Six-year-old George Evans came off at a log, but was straight back on, knowing the £5 prize for being the best turned out would now have to pay for the Tumblers' Club fine. Tom, five, was on a pony smaller than a large dog, but was still there at the end, largely thanks to his father, Henry, running beside, midair-refuelling him with sweets. The Junior Field Masters had performed with enthusiasm, others had been allowed to ride with the huntsman and I would say that, by the end, there were 50 mud-spattered converts to the joys of a day in the open following hounds. **RU**

Town Mouse

The genius of comedy



AT last, the day came. We were off to see *One Man, Two Gwnors* in one of its last performances at the Adelphi, shortly before its transfer to the Theatre Royal. We booked such an eternity ago that the boys were uncertain that I'd get the date right; even so, the only tickets going were a long way from the stage. I'm not sure it wasn't better, however, to be in the gods. Part of the joy of the evening is laughing with other people. It's more democratic in the cheap seats.

After the gales of laughter in the first half, it would have taken a monsoon of mirth to outdo them in the second. It was an impossible task. *Noises Off*, at the Old Vic before Christmas, was better constructed, with a climax that properly rounds off the whole thing. *One Man, Two Gwnors* isn't so much a play as a vehicle for the genius of the cast and its director. Suddenly, I understood all those Restoration comedies, which seemed so flat when I read them as an undergraduate. Great comic acting can bring anything alive. Would Carlo Goldoni, who wrote the 18th-century play on which *One Man, Two Gwnors* is based, have got all the jokes? Probably not, but Tom Edden as the decrepit waiter is universal. **CA**