

Wild Food to Govan

Writer Alastair McIntosh thanks an urban SGA Deer Manager for a volunteer feast.

It was the feeding of the 5,000 that was on our minds, and that's why I contacted the Scottish Gamekeepers. The GalGael Trust is located just round the corner from where COP 26, the UN's climate change conference was taking place.



Davie Quarrell (second from right) drops off the roe deer at GalGael.

Sometimes it's deserved. Every profession gets its rogues, or folks come under employer pressure. Most of the time it's ignorance about the countryside. People love trees. They want more trees. But don't realise that in many parts, where fencing is impractical, you'll only get the trees if you control the deer.

As a youth on Lewis, I'd get summer jobs as a ghillie on the loch or stalker's pony boy out on the hill. I'd saddle up at 8, meet the gun and stalker around 9 out the end of the track, and with luck we'd be done 12 hours later, skinned and in the larder. I'd be left to do the skinning as Tommy Macrae, the Eishken keeper, bedded down the pony and the livestock. A seasoned stalker

picks the weaker beasts and tries to not disrupt the family groups. If there's not a cull, it's them and not the tourists who witness the starvation in the winter.

It was Kenneth at the Scottish Gamekeepers who got back to me. "Leave it with us," said a message on Twitter. I was expecting something from the Highlands. But it was Davie Quarrell of East Kilbride that we were put in touch with.

At GalGael, we get folks out onto the water in our boats and bridge the town and country gap. Davie's into



Rowan hones his butchery skills, watched on by Alastair.

We'd be trying to feed well over 100 people at a time some days. Tribal leaders from the Amazon. Zapatistas from Mexico. And our own members, mostly from the Greater Govan area, many of whom you'd sooner meet at a food bank than in a restaurant.

Our mission statement – www.GalGael.org – speaks of "carving out ways of living with more humanity". We carve out boats from wood, over 20 have been built in our Fairley Street workshop. We welcome carving what might come into our kitchen. The past decade has seen our volunteers serve nearly 30,000 meals. And with COP 26, we yearned to offer what we could from Scotland's land and sea.

That's why myself and Alan, one of our other founding trustees, put out a call for food. He had it easy. His son works on an estate, and a hind found its way down. I put out a call to the Scottish Gamekeepers.

I'm well aware that Gamekeepers can get a bad press in urban areas.



The community enjoy the feast and the lively discussion.

doing that, bigtime, an expert in the field of urban deer management.

The roe that he dropped round to us was shot – would you believe it? – at the back of the Easterhouse shopping centre. His task is to keep the numbers low around the M8. According to NatureScot, there's up to 9,000 road accidents involving deer each year and up to 100 human injuries.

We raised the deer up in our workshops. I began the task of slipping off the skin. I'd not tried my hand since 1977, but soon the skill came back and within minutes, I was showing our volunteers.

Rowan got so enthusiastic that he ran home for his knife and carried out most of the work. What should have been a 10-minute job lasted more than an hour, but what an hour! What confidence-building! It was filled with learning and discussion about ecological balance, animal welfare, and about how the diet of Scottish school children could be improved.

Alan's wife is a school dinner lady. She has to feed the kids on about 50p per head per day. "Imagine," he said, "if we had this sort of wild food on the menu for them!"

Imagine indeed. We made about 70 meals from that one roe. It was a gift, an education, and a feast, and the GalGael warmly thanks those who made it possible.

Davie Quarrell, who sourced the roe deer, hopes to help further.

"I love the idea of quality, fresh food helping community causes in the local area. Our urban green spaces are just as important for mental health as the open spaces of the highlands. Deer need to be managed here, too, to encourage new growth."



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