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FEATURE

Squirrels



Once caught

An opportunity to diversify?

Paul Parker has built-up an unexpected success story for the captured grey squirrels with Hexham-based Ridley's Fish and Game since it was added to their product list at the end of 2007.

David Ridley said: "It was toward the end of the winter flush of the pheasant season that one of our people said why not try grey squirrels and knew a supplier. Since then we have sold more and more.

"The taste is somewhere between duck and lamb as the squirrel is a forager eating nuts and berries rather than grazing like a rabbit. People like grey squirrel as a novelty and it is of interest on our market stall. Now we can take a couple of dozen squirrels to a market and will have sold them all within two hours. We can now sell every squirrel we can get."

Ridley's give Paul Parker £0.75 per squirrel. Each squirrel is skinned - not an easy operation, as unlike rabbits, squirrels take considerable time and skill to skin. They are then sold oven-ready at £2.25 wholesale or £3.25 over the counter.

Demand for squirrel far outstrips supply. There is considerable mail-order interest, mainly from fashionable restaurants in London. Alternatively, entrepreneurial pest controllers may well be able to find for themselves local top class restaurants or game dealers keen to find a local source. Certainly a novel form of diversification!

Fancy trying squirrel, then here's your opportunity.

Squirrel stew

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 3 squirrels jointed up | 1 onion chopped |
| 25g (1oz) flour | 1 heaped tablespoon brown sugar |
| 1 teaspoon salt | 2 large potatoes peeled and cut into ½ in cubes |
| ½ teaspoon pepper | 1 x 400g can butter beans |
| 2 slices bacon chopped | 1 x 325g can sweet corn |
| 25g (1oz) butter | 3 tablespoons flour |
| 600ml (1 pint) water | |
| 2 x 400g cans tomatoes | |

Method

Combine 25g flour with the salt and pepper and coat the squirrel pieces. In a large saucepan combine the bacon and butter over a medium heat until the butter melts. Add squirrel and brown. Add water, tomatoes, onion and brown sugar and bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 1½ to 2hrs, stirring occasionally. Remove squirrel pieces and cool then remove meat from bones.

Add meat, potatoes, beans and sweet corn to the pan. Bring back to the boil and simmer until the potatoes are tender. Mix 3 tablespoons of flour with 3 tablespoons cold water and stir into the stew. Bring to the boil stirring constantly and cook over a medium heat until the sauce has thickened and serve.

Unify & Lead is CEPA message

Representatives of the pest management industry from 12 countries across Europe gathered in Brussels, Belgium on 27 & 28 November 2008 to attend the second annual European Pest Management Day. Organised by CEPA (the European Pest Management Industry Association). Delegates were updated on the latest CEPA initiatives and also had the opportunity to explore the increasingly international role of pest management in the food industry.

Opening the event, Rob Fryatt, CEPA director general, set the tone by welcoming delegates and declaring that the over-arching goals for CEPA were to be open and receptive to delegates and ideas, to represent the industry as a whole, to seek-out best practice and to enable its integration into the European market. Rob concluded by saying: "Only then does CEPA earn the right to lead the European pest control industry."

These words were most appropriate and, probably scripted to reflect the presence in the audience of two UK delegates at a CEPA meeting for the first time. Representing NPTA were John Davison (sponsored by Killgerm Group) and Julie Gillies. Their attendance was in response to an invitation made at the Pest Control News workshop, held during PestTech 2008, when the Rome Protocol was debated.

The constitution of CEPA is such that only one national industry association can be the official country representative. However, if initiatives which affect each and every UK pest controller (such as the Rome Protocol) are in reality to become industry standards, the whole industry should be consulted prior to their formal adoption and implementation.

This lack of representation, compounded somewhat by poor communication, is the crux of NPTA's disquiet. And they are not alone. Similar issues are apparent, to a greater or lesser extent, in several other CEPA constituent countries. If CEPA is to live up to its "Unify and lead" goal, this flaw, real or perceived needs attention.

Reflecting on his two days in Brussels with CEPA, John was delighted by the warmth of the reception and somewhat taken aback by the genuine desire to stand-by the industry and by the thought processes and activities required to push forward any pan-European initiative. As is often the case in life - it is the not knowing that brings 'fear and doubt' rather than the reality, once discovered.

For the future, NPTA has been given assurances that it will be kept informed and consulted. The invitation to attend further CEPA meetings remains. Hopefully, this will foster an attitude that allows the two associations to work together more closely. Being the eternal optimist, let's hope so - but only time will tell.



Happy families? Left to right: Oliver Madge (BPCA), Julie Gillies and John Davison (NPTA) with Rob Fryatt (CEPA)

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