

ROBBIE MOFFAT'S
THE
URBAN HAGGIS

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DEDICATION

This booklet is dedicated to the Haggis - but not only to that noble Highland variety of the creature that roams the mists of the north and west of Scotland eating the white heather. In main, my dedication is to the lesser known Lowland Haggis - a breed of haggis that has until recently been viewed as an aggressive and temperamental beastie.

*Is ther the like of oor wee haggis?
Is ther wan Scot wan'ts tae eat it?
Oor hairy Heilan' heather-beastie -
Or oor shy wee Lowlan' creecture?*

NOTE TO THIRD EDITION

I am delighted that the publisher has decided to bring forth a third edition of this booklet. Consequently, I have promised, in time for a fourth edition, to include further information on the life and history of the urban Haggis.

Robbie Moffat
Glasgow 1997

NOTE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

Once again I am happy to put this story in front of new readers. I have not added any new information at all and I am ashamed to admit that I have been neglecting my study of the urban Haggis as I no longer live in Scotland. Yet my fondness for this ugly creature is immeasurable. I have found nothing like it anywhere else on the planet. The uniqueness of this little beastie is in its charm and rareness and I will continue until I am carried to the grave to save this noble creature from extinction.

Robbie Moffat
London 2010

HIGHLAND & LOWLAND HAGGIS

The *Hagginasus Pictavia* is undoubtedly one of nature's most wondrous creatures. Yet despite the species being a Scottish phenomenon - its origin traced to the **Outer Hebrides** - it has not prevented many historians of zoology from speculating that the haggis was introduced to **Scotland** by pastoral immigrants some time after the last **Ice Age**.

There is no evidence to support this whatever, though many zendics (doubters) are keen to point out that **Tamberlaine's** army also played the bagpipes. As bagpipes are not animals, a serious researcher must dismiss these vain attempts by skeptics to deny that Scotland is the rightful home of the haggis. Although the wild **Haggis Hound** is now extinct (a breed of hunting dog with characteristics that are still retained by the West Highland white-terrier) the haggis has no near or distant relatives in the animal kingdom.

There are two species of haggis - the common country Highland Haggis (*Hagginasus Popularis*), and the complex urban Lowland Haggis (*Hagginasus Vulgaris*).

There are numerous books on the Highland haggis. One cannot enter a small cafe or post-office store in the back and beyond of the glens without gleaning some new knowledge about the Highland haggis from a small booklet - so recently published that the ink comes off on the fingers. When one reads these informative booklets, one never learns a single iota about the Lowland haggis.

In truth, up until now, the Lowland Vulgaris has been viewed with some contempt by the lovers of the Popularis. This is because there is no general information about the urban haggis.

Scotland is a country that prides itself in its consumption of facts and knowledge, yet it is a disgrace that the existence of the Lowland haggis has not been recognized by the vociferous lovers of peace and green living. At present the Lowland haggis is a neglected animal.

It is a curious fact that the Vulgar Haggis lives totally within the City of **Glasgow** environs. Until the start of the **Industrial Revolution**, there were no recorded sightings of the species. **Robert Adams**, the distinguished architect, was the first to put a sighting on record in **1748**. He was working on the construction of **Pollok House** and was a guest of **Sir John Maxwell** who was an avid sportsman.

'Today Sir John and I toured the pastures taking in the golf. Sir John's lands here at Pollok have an abundance of exotic creatures that have been imported from unheard of lands - imported in part for sport, in part for domestic consumption - but the native beastie I saw near the Haggis Cassell is the strangest of all. I had chased the sheep from my ball, when by chance, the fore of my club struck the ball wryly and sent it flying in a wild arc into a thicket of shrubbery of oriental

origin. What a wailing ensued! Only those who give credence to tales of fairies and goblins would believe me if I tried to relate the nature of the noises that came from the thicket into which I had driven my ball.

In all manner of perplexity, I sought the comfort of Sir John's eyes, but he took me by the lace of my cuff and forced me to crouch in a pit of Troon sand. "Keep down, Robert" he uttered "or we'll have the creature at our golf bags." I thought that Sir John had lost his wits, for he suffers terrible nightmares from a fear that the Jacobites might rise again and his lands be lost; but he signaled me to focus my eye upon the thicket, which I did with great fortitude - for the damp sand was discolouring my new blue stockings that the ladies so admired. "There he is!" cried Sir John. "Look at him, Robert. Have you ever seen such a creature!" "He?" quoth I.

It was so indescribably hairy that I must assume that this is how Sir John so quickly determined its gender. "Look at his speed" he said "he's a young one for sure." I have since come to understand that the speed of the young make them impossible to hunt on foot; it is necessary to have a full company of horse and a pack of terriers. The creature is considered a great delicacy, but the young are not as prized for taste as the old.

I tried to find out what the creature was called in case I had heard mention of it in polite Edinburgh or London society. "Och, man, we call it a Haggis-thing. As far as I know, there's are no others of their likes outside of the Highlands. The Gaels have a name for them but no educated man can pronounce it. When we caught up with Charlie Stuart at Culloden, the things were flying out the heather in all directions." Well, in short, I was astounded. According to Sir John, the Highland animal looks different from its Lowland cousins. "What do they live on?" I queried. "Golf balls" he answered "they have a taste for the leather."

This was the most astonishing revelation of all. Yet, as in token of confirmation, the Haggis-thing emerged from the thicket with my ball in its mouth. It appeared to be playing with it, but Sir John insisted that the animal was trying to eat it. Suddenly the Haggis-thing saw us, dropped the ball and vanished into the thicket.

"Damn! The beastie's not hungry" exclaimed Sir John. "He's left your ball in a perfect lie."

We continued with our game. Sir John added a stroke to my score, and still lost the hole

The greatest men of the eighteenth century were ignorant to the ways of the haggis. In the **Highlands** it was well known that the haggis fed on white heather and changed sex every seven years. The great turmoil's of 1715 and 1745-46 and the **Highland Clearances** that followed made droves of crofters (refugees) flock to the Lowlands before emigrating to **America**. Many of these clans people had with them their animals and pets, and it can only be surmised that the occasional domestically-farmed haggis was smuggled aboard the ships for the **New World**.

There is no evidence to suggest that the haggis was ever successfully domesticated before the late nineteenth century, but it is reasonable to suppose that the period between the **Jacobite Uprising** of 1715 and the **Stuart Rebellion** of 1745 brought about the need for the Highlander to domesticate the hitherto wild haggis for food. It is almost certain that a few of these domesticated *Hagginasus Popularis* were

brought to the Lowlands by migrating **Highlanders** during the years of **1725-30** and that a number of these were left behind when their owners set sail. All of these haggis would have been seized upon by the local citizenry and devoured.

However, there is dispute over the existence of a colony (tribe) of haggis on the Maxwell lands of **Pollok Estate** as recorded by Adams in **1748**. Adams, as a highly reliable source, should not be discounted. Some researchers, in an attempt to demonstrate that the Lowland haggis is a variety of the Highland haggis cite the **MacLean Theory**.

The MacLean Theory is plausible, but it is not wholly convincing. In May **1729**, a merchantman bound for **Nova Scotia** with a cargo of whisky and a compliment of male **Highland emigrants** grounded on sand banks at **Renfrew** at the point where the **White Cart** river joins the **Clyde**. This was not an uncommon occurrence, but by a twist of fortune, one of the whisky barrels burst open. This was seen as an act of **God** by the Highlanders who began helping themselves to a dram. The master of the ship ordered all those drunk to be put ashore, but the inebriated Highlands took over the ship and put the master and crew ashore. The tide turned, and the Highlanders raised anchor, but as none of them were seamen, the current carried the ship up the White Cart and on to some rocks where it foundered and began taking in water. One of the Highlanders spotted a troop of **Campbell redcoats** heading their way. The mutineers threw their belongings into the river and jumped in after them.

Those who could not swim - which was most of them - clung to barrels of whiskey and thrashed the short distance to shore. The troop of Campbell's pursued the fleeing Highlanders, and most were caught. A few escaped - noticeable one **John MacLean**, a haggis breeder from the **Isle of Skye** who made his way up the White Cart to the Maxwell estate and settled in the old village of **Pollokshaws**.

Very little else is known about MacLean, but there is strong local belief in Pollokshaws that the urban haggis found its first home in the blue-bell woods of Pollok Park where the **Burrell Collection Museum** now stands.

The building of the art gallery (completed 1983) on the site of the first haggis vulgaris settlement has been viewed as a philistine act by fundamental haggis-lovers. Many MacLean Theorists think that the City of Glasgow in its grandiose self-publicising bid to promote itself as a bastion of world culture - an effort worthy of recognition, but a dream unattainable while urban deprivation and slum housing exists - has turned its back on the haggis. It saddens them to think that on the spot where the Highland haggis was quietly acclimatized to urban life, now stands a display of Egyptian artifacts, Chinese cerastes, Persian textiles, and European art. And worse - in the very earth where the haggis adapted itself to its new heather-less habitat by foraging for bluebell and daffodil bulbs - a nuclear underground shelter (designed

to accommodate the high-office bearers of the City in the advent of war) desecrates the only known breeding ground of the Lowland haggis.

The MacLean Theorists, and I with them, indict the City of Glasgow for its scant regard for the habitat of the native beasties of Scotland. Perhaps a settlement date of 1729 makes the urban haggis a late arrival to **Glasgow** which was founded by **Saint Mungo** in **542**. Certainly, many academics point to the long scholarly tradition in **Glasgow** and establishment of the **University** in **1451**, but we must not forget that the haggis has been in Scotland thousands of years.

THE LOWLAND HAGGIS

The Lowland haggis has evolved into an animal of entirely different psychic temperament to its Highland cousin. The Highland haggis shows strong signs towards being independent, self-sufficient, hard working, brawny, unpretentious, and down-right dull. The Highland haggis still changes sex every seven years, and that just as it's about to change sex, it suffers agonising bouts of itching. The animals have known to be seen rubbing themselves on rocks, trees and remote telephone boxes.

The duo-sexual nature of the Highland haggis seems to be unique in the animal kingdom. Evidence from the **Western Isles** indicates that the haggis was once a creature of the seas and lochs. This has led to speculation that it was once the primary food source of the **Loch Ness** beasties (*Bestia Fabulosus*) and their likes in other Scottish waters.

The sudden inexplicable reduction in numbers of these beasties seems to coincide with the evolution of the haggis into a land animal. We cannot rule out the possibility of interference by another animal (such as *Troll Nordicus*) which permanently destroyed the ecological balance between the haggis and the loch beasties. The last sighting of a marine haggis was in **1936** at **Loch Ness** shortly before it was devoured by the Fabulous Beastie that lives there.

Today it is well established that the *Hagginasus Popularis* (Highland) and its less robust cousin *Hagginasus Vulgaris* (Lowland) are varieties of the *Hagginasus Marinus*. Both enjoy taking to the water, though it is to be noted that effluence is rapidly making the haggis anti-aquatic. A small percentage of the Highland haggis are still born with the mark of a dorsal fin on their backs, but no such mark ever appears on the Lowland haggis. This would support the theory that the stock of haggis introduced to the Lowlands by MacLean were the Mull type - the long haired haggis that never carries the dorsal fin mark. In light of Adam's observations of 1748 'it was so indescribably hairy' it is easy to conclude that the Lowland haggis is directly descended from the Mull type. As MacLean was from Skye, some researchers have surmised that he was a haggis thief and not a breeder.

According to the Theorists, John MacLean covertly established a haggis breeding ground in the bluebell woods a mile from the village of **Pollokshaws** - a village that many skirted round - in part to avoid paying the toll at Pollokshaws West, and in part because the village was inhabited by **Flems** and **Burgundians** (known as the **Queer Folk**) who worked the **textile mill** powered by the Cart waters. The fact that there is no further mention of haggis sightings for twenty five years suggests that MacLean was only breeding enough haggis for himself.

Dr. Adam Smith questions the role of MacLean and finds it impossible to believe that the Highland and Lowland haggis are of the same stock. Up until now there has been no question of the **Celtic** origin of the Highland haggis -even if there is evidence of a **Norse** strain and an **Irish** variety which are now extinct. Many firmly believe that the pedigree of the Highland haggis is pure. The Lowland haggis by contrast is viewed as such a strange creature that Smith has stated that it has not evolved from **Mull** stock. He has gone as far as to suggest that MacLean did not introduce the *hagginasus popularis* into the Lowlands, but that in his escape up the Cart, he came upon the last colony of *hagginasus vulgaris* in existence.

A number of 'experts' have concluded that Smith is right and that the Lowland haggis was the first variety of haggis to leave the sea and make its habitat on land. They place this event as happening about **3000 B.C.** The Lowland haggis was widespread throughout the **British Isles** and **Ireland** when the Celts arrived and began hunting them as a source of food for their horses. When the Celts realised how well their horses dined on haggis, they began eating the animals themselves. Haggis numbers were rapidly depleted over two centuries until the Celts introduced controls and prohibited the hunting of haggis between **Beltane** and **Eostre**. When the **Romans** invaded, hunting restrictions on the haggis were abolished. Haggis hounds were developed as a breed, and for four hundred years haggis were hunted and devoured.

In consequence, the haggis was forced to retreat to the remote parts of **Britannia**. The fact that they survived in these areas was due to the predominantly Celtic populace who resisted the Roman laissez-faire free-enterprise attitude. Yet, haggis numbers dwindled as more and more of the animals took to hiding in the coastal and lake waters. The Romans were keen anglers, so that by the time they left **Britain**, there were few haggis in **Albion**. The outbreak of war between the Celts and the **Saxons** forced raiding parties to eat whatever haggis they could hunt. By the seventh century, the land haggis was endangered, and by the eighth century it was extinct except for a small colony on the **Outer Hebrides**.

Yet by providence the marine variety - which had been surviving on seaweed - re-established itself on land as the heather-eating Highland variety.

The **Smith Theory** is a remarkable one, and in part explains the strange looks and behaviour of the Lowland haggis as we know it today. It is more plausible than the **MacLean Theory**, and consequently there is now a general consensus that the

Highland haggis of the 1730's could not have been the fore-father of the Lowland haggis. There are too many differences.

While the Highland haggis prospers, the Lowland haggis still continues to be endangered. There are reasons for this. Since the collapse of the British nation (1979 to the present) as a people of well-balanced, well-educated mild tempered citizens well-disposed to God's creatures, there has been a regression amongst the populace to hunt haggis. At first glance the cause of this regression has been Government initiative schemes which encourage people to be economically self-reliant. While it is commendable that the individual should be encouraged to grasp all opportunities available to him or her, it has made many view themselves as businessmen and everything in life as a business. These 'new merchants' have not been a direct threat to the haggis, but their business methods have resulted in a lowering of income for the majority of the populace. Many once-respectable citizens find themselves hunting the haggis to feed their children. Only the rich can afford to hunt the Highland haggis (and do so in vast numbers on the large private country estates in the Highlands), but in the Lowlands, it is the low-income zero-rated subsistence-level poor who forage in the bushes and allotments of council estates for the *hagginasus vulgaris*.

How has this come about? Once again we must look to the past for some sort of answer. In 1776, **Lord Bute**, former prime-minister and **Whig** party leader, was taking air on **Glasgow Green** with the city officials. The court favourite of young **George the Third**, Bute was teasing the attendant ladies about their 'bon ton' enthusiasm for the latest French fashions. Suddenly one of the ladies squealed "*Beasties! Beasties!*" and fainted. Heads immediately turned, but nothing was seen. Lord Bute tiraded the embarrassed officials on the filthy state and squalor of their vermin infested city. The officials hung their heads in shame until the great luminary **Thomas Campbell** stepped forward and said "*Tell the ladies not to fear, my Lord. Yon things are amongst God's gentlest creatures.*"

On hearing this, Lord Bute unbraided the poet. "*You're a loon, man! Rats are the lowest of vermin. Have you not read your Britannica!*" "*Indeed I have, I have my own bound volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica*" replied Campbell "*but yon things were Haggises.*" "*Haggises? Haggises?*" repeated Lord Bute. He looked astounded. "*Aye, aye*" said Campbell "*Haggises, not rats.*"

The city officials puffed out their chests. "*There's a colony of them living on the Green*" said the Provost. "*But what are these Haggises?*" asked a lady. "*Ancient beasties native to Scotland*" replied the leader of the council "*and edible too!*"

Lord Bute was about to have the whole council dismissed for lying to the ladies when he was interrupted by a military messenger carrying news that the American colonies had revolted. He had to return to London immediately. In a gesture of

goodwill, the city officials had a haggis captured and sent with Lord Bute for King George.

Naturally, haggis do not take well to captivity or to traveling. They are prone to sickness and usually burst their own paunches when handled by humans. As a result - despite warnings not to do so by the city officials - the haggis exploded in Lord Bute's carriage when he poked it just beyond the Burgh of **Rutherglen**. The King was denied his gift, and the haggis continued to remain an obscure myth to all non-Scots.

LOWLAND HAGGIS HABITAT

By the start of the **nineteenth century**, it was noted that overweight Lowland haggis were feeding on grass, a feeding habit that is in line with the **Gunna variety** of the Highland haggis. The droppings of the barnacle goose on the isle have so fertilized the island that a green carpet of lush grass is the natural staple of the Gunna variety. This can not be said for the Lowland variety who eat grass as a dieting measure.

It is curious that there is little mention of the general appearance of the Lowland haggis. The Highland haggis with its legs of various lengths (to aid it in its ascent and decent of hills) is unmistakably shaggy. In summer its hair is golden brown; in autumn, purple; in winter, white. It blends with the hills and moors of its Highland habitat. It is easy to delight in the Highland haggis's beauty of form, its endearing habits, its grace of movement, and its aromatic tweedy smell.

No such observation can be ascribed to the Lowland haggis as we know it today. To think of the Lowland haggis as a beautiful creature with delightful habits is absurd. The creature's ungainly movement (on account of the flatness of its habitat) and its off-putting smell (it is susceptible to pollution intoxication and mistakes cigarette ends as food pellets) is enough to discourage the squeamish from prolonged contact. Though once a finely formed and attractive pastoral creature, in adapting to city life, the Lowland haggis has suffered two centuries of stressful conditions which have turned it into a scavenger. The destruction of wilderness and parkland around and within its urban terrain has forced the haggis underground (they used to sleep in the open).

The denudation of their urban habitat has been traumatic, for haggis are clannish creatures, and they rarely travel more than a mile from their colony. They live in family units and have strong bonds with their extended family of grandsires and dams. Dispersion of the tribal unit (due to diminishing food resources) has brought about a reduction in their numbers.

By **1820**, it was estimated that there were about six tribes of Lowland haggis living within a three mile radius of Pollok Estate, and it was noted that in the last two

weeks of the month of July, there was a gathering of the tribes at the breeding grounds in the Estate. One keen naturalist candidly noted this phenomenon:

The 'fair fever' was on them. I have seen the deer rutting and the rabbit boxing, but I have never seen such a display of hot animal passion as that demonstrated by the haggis. July is the mating season, and there seems no limit to the number of times and the number of ways in which these consenting animals make their young. My vocabulary is insufficient to describe the high-pitched squeaking of these highly-sexed beasties. Unlike their Highland counterparts, these 'vulgari' do not seem to be content to share themselves with a single partner but prefer to do so with a hundred or more. It is now well established that the 'popularis' (Highland) changes sex every seven years, but no such happening seems apparent in the 'vulgaris'. The male and female of the species are distinct - there is no mistaking the anatomy of the creatures while the 'fair fever' is on them. It is almost indecent to witness such behaviour and one must conclude that a freshly cooked 'fair fever' haggis would make one of the world's most potent aphrodisiacs.

Unfortunately, the naturalist's observation was published by conservatives who tried to introduce a yearly cull of the Lowland haggis in July to prevent the animals from multiplying beyond control. It was reasoned that the expense of the cull could be off-set by the trade of haggis sex-glands for the creation of an expensive love potion for the wealthy.

This suggestion caused such an outrage that in the summer of **1821**, hundreds of haggis lovers patrolled Pollok Estate to protect the haggis. Unfortunately, the presence of so many people inhibited the shy animal from performing its annual mating rituals and there was a noticeable decline in the birthrate the following year. This did not deter any would-be profiteers from culling the haggis for its aphrodisiac qualities, and within five years the Lowland haggis was severely threatened with extinction. In **1826** a law was finally passed which forbade the hunting of haggis in the City of Glasgow and the surrounding shires.

URBAN HAGGIS HABITS

It has been a long established fact that in its wild and domestic state, the Highland haggis is a clean living animal. This is not the case with the Lowland haggis. To nature lovers there is not a more moving sight than the bathing ritual of the Highland haggis. To the city dweller, there is no more revolting sight than the morning roll of the Lowland haggis. While we are fortunate to have a painting by **Alma Tadema** 'The Birth of the Mountain Haggis', no equivalent work of art exists for the 'vulgaris'. There are a few smudged sketches and a series of indistinguishable 1820's studies entitled 'The Rut of the Vulgaris' but nothing comparable to **Lanseer's** beautiful 'The Bathing of the Wild Haggis of Glencoe'.

Let us compare the bathing rites of the two varieties.

The **Highland haggis** takes a bath at sunrise and a short dip in the early afternoon. The dam is the first to emerge from the heather just as the sun rises over the hills. She stands attentive and sniffs the fresh morning air. If she senses danger, she returns to the heather. If everything is safe, she edges towards the loch in a flirtive manner.

On reaching the loch shore, she utters the haunting 'lochan' call - a shrill call easily mistaken for the sound of the Highland pipes. On hearing this all clear, the sire left protecting the young, rushes to the loch side with the off-spring who bathe while the adults watch. According to most researchers, this routine is strict and unchanging amongst all strains of Highland haggis - three complete duckings in all seasons (unless the loch is frozen and bathing is abandoned) - and then a scurrying to the heather to dry-off in a rolling fashion. This done, the young lie quietly in the heather while the sire takes his three dips. Then finally, with the sire drying in the heather and instructing the young to look the other way, the dam takes her dips.

The **Lowland haggis** - despite the lack of clean water lochs and immense heaths of heather - has not abandoned the bathing ritual practiced by its cousin. (The haggis is constantly prepared for a return to marine living as a matter of survival.) Born with the same natural affinity to cleanliness, the urban haggis emerges to bathe just as the sun rises over the high rise flats. Finding no expanse of clear water, the dam has adapted itself to running to the edge of the nearest city stream.

On occasions when the streams are awash with sewage and chemicals, the animal ruefully views the foam on top of the water, but instinct makes it emit the 'lochan' call - muted now to sound like a car security alarm. The sire and young emerge from the hogweed and nettles itching and stinging, and without hesitation, immerse themselves in the water. Sometimes the itching is so intense that the beasties dip themselves five or six times before returning to the bank. Unable to dry themselves on the hogweed, they find some grassy spot to roll about on. Invariably, these grassy places have been soiled by dogs. This does not seem to worry the Lowland haggis. The morning bath is a habit; it is not taken for reasons of cleanliness.

Unlike the Highland haggis which only eats once a day at sundown, the Lowland haggis eats constantly. This in part is due to the lack of nutrients in the city soils. In spring it eats garden flower bulbs; in summer it eats thistle leaf; but in winter it has to scavenge whatever it can. As a result, the Lowland haggis scavenge in packs, in part for defense, in part because they like each other. As an animal of voracious appetite, it can eat up to three times its own weight every day. The result of such obesity is that the haggis paunch is constantly distended which makes it difficult for the animal to effectively fight off enemies.

There is no specific enemy of the haggis, but once a predator has had the taste of haggis, there is the likelihood that it will want to do so again. This is the haggis's undoing. As the paunch is the tastiest part of the animal, the haggis always defends itself with its back to its enemies. The speed and ferocity with which it can strike its opponents with a backward kick, deters nearly all animals from attacking it.

In the revolutionary spring of 1848, young **Queen Victoria** heard the following tale from **Anna Maxwell**, one of her ladies-in-waiting.

I was on father's land, mam, and I was contemplating the loyalty of the constabulary in the light of the Chartist rebellions on the continent, when I beheld the most amazing thing. One of our dogs, Palmerston, had uncovered the burrow of a haggis, a creature peculiar to Scotland. It all happened so quick. Palmerston was barking loudly, and then the next moment he was whining on the ground. Then I caught sight of the three-legged creature running for its life down the hill towards the main road to Glasgow. A horse reared, and in a panic, the little creature kicked the horse so hard that the animal fell to the ground. By now the poor haggis was at its wits end. A man cornered it and began thrashing it with a stick and I prayed to God that he would stop. Catching sight of me out of the corner of his eye, the beastly man took his sight from the little short-haired thing, and to my joy, the creature leapt up and bit him on the leg. It then ran up the new railway embankment and along the line to where I believe the haggis have made homes for themselves in the cuttings. I went home, mam, no longer thinking of the constabulary, but of the people that they have been beating like defenseless haggis.

The moral of this tale stayed with Queen Victoria. When in later years she retired to the Highlands, she bred haggis at **Balmoral** and released them into the wilds once they were mature. But the Queen was unaware that while the Highland haggis flourished under her royal protection, the Lowland haggis continued to struggle against the odds.

IN DEFENCE OF THE LOWLAND HAGGIS

Although the Highland haggis sleeps in the wild in two concentric circles - the young in the inner ring facing inwards, the adults in the outer ring facing outwards - the Lowland haggis has adapted to urban life by living in ring tunnels, i.e. concentric circles underground. The adults no longer face outwards, but upwards. They share these tunnels with the **haggis maggots** - nocturnal creatures who bore up to the surface while the haggis sleep.

The relationship the haggis have with these maggots is beneficiary to both and is similar to the relationship that the Highland haggis has with the Highland bird which feeds off the grubs that live on haggis droppings. The haggis maggots use haggis droppings as their primary source of food. In order to reproduce (or when their numbers become too great) the haggis worm will sacrifice itself to the haggis

as food. The droppings of the haggis then contain the next generation of haggis maggots which hatch some weeks later.

These sacrifices take place all year round, but are increased in cold weather and when the haggis are depressed. During the July **mating season**, maggot numbers are reduced significantly as the haggis eats little else other than the maggot (which on account of the haggis's dieting has no droppings to live on) In mating frenzy, it is common for the haggis to eat droppings meant for the haggis maggot.

The long period of mating and the living below ground robs the haggis of natural oils needed to keep their coats in good condition. Many urban haggis have blemishes on their skin - rashes where the coat has become thin. (Most hagginasus vulgaris are now smooth coated or hairless due to their living conditions and from bathing in city streams.)

*There are known cases where the Lowland haggis have been kept in captivity and become domesticated. A contemporary of Charles Darwin, **Professor Kelvin**, believed that the haggis defied all the rules of evolutionary theory.*

Entry 1869. *Scientific progress. One hagginasus vulgaris called 'Dougal' captured in Glasgow. Has survived the first year of study. Specimen kept in cage. Reaction - unresponsive.*

Entry 1870. *Kept in a box for the whole of its second year. Reaction - ate more. Has begun to change colour*

Entry 1871. *Kept in a basket. Reaction - behavioural pattern not unlike a dog. Shows signs of increasing loyalty.*

Entry 1872. *Kept in the drawing room. Reaction - domesticated apart from bouts of pining for the outdoors. Has developed a white coat*

Entry 1874. *Allowed to sleep on my bed. Reaction - fully at home. Considers itself part of the family. Aggressive when kicked off bed.*

Entry 1876. *Decided to release Dougal in the park where he was caught. Rejoined his tribe and displayed no signs of distress at being returned to the wild. Indications of annoyance by the sires of the tribe at his white coat, but signs of acceptance by the tribe dams on account of Dougal's very attractive appearance after a seven year diet of white heather.*

In the last hundred years our understanding of the Lowland haggis has not really advanced. We know as little as our Victorian ancestors did. On the other hand, our knowledge of the Highland haggis has increased to the extent that it is now big business. The demand for haggis outside of Scotland is wholly met from stocks of domestic haggis reared on Highland estates. Recent surveys have shown that the export of haggis has increased a hundred fold in the last twenty years. To the lover of the haggis as an animal, many think this deplorable and have called for it to be stopped. They feel that the haggis is a fine creature that should not be hunted or reared for human consumption.

As Scotland's national animal, the haggis should be protected. Yet one cannot help feeling that it is the unlovable nature of the Lowland haggis (in particular its

environment) that has turned many people against the haggis in general. For many years the wild uncouth nature of the urban variety has given the species a bad name. Their aggressive nature when cornered and their co-existence with the maggot have prompted many well-meaning citizens to wage war on them.

This has proved to be more difficult than imagined, for despite the vulgaris' reluctance to travel more than a mile so from the tribal enclave, all efforts to discover the exact location of their ring tunnels have been in vain. Even extensive campaigns to thwart the July rut in **Pollok County Park** (formerly Estate) has failed for one reason or another.

The Lowland haggis have and will always be an elusive quarry. Their place in the evolutionary chain has not yet been fully ascertained. Though it appears that there is no disease amongst the haggis, it has never been fully established at what age a haggis dies. It is interesting to note that Dougal (the white haggis re-released in the wild) was sighted bathing in the River Cart as late as 1939. At the time of his capture Dougal was estimated to be about seven years old with a life expectancy of fourteen or fifteen years. It is now generally accepted that the Highland haggis lives on average the same length of time as a Scottish man, and the Lowland haggis, the same length of time as a Scottish woman (which is a number of years longer).

There are still many things peculiar to the Lowland haggis that we know nothing about. Every year millions of visitors come to Scotland and enthuse about the Highland haggis. They go in droves to the moors of **Rannoch** or the slopes of **Glencoe** without realizing that there is a Lowland variety. And now that the **Burrell Collection** is situated right on the spot where the Lowland haggis yearly gathers in 'fair fever, it is surprising that this fact is not more widely known. Of course the *hagginus vulgaris* has had to adapt to the building of the art museum on its traditional rutting ground by going about their business after dark. This has shortened the period of mating as the long summer nights provide less than six hours of darkness. As a result, since 1983 the population has been on the decline, though not significantly enough to warrant closure of the art museum for two weeks in July.

I would like to say more about the Lowland haggis, but at this stage in my research, this is all I know. I am not against the consumption of the haggis - necessity makes the poor hunt the creature down - but I urge all lovers of creatures everywhere to preserve the haggis in the wild - Lowland or Highland - and to treat the national animal of Scotland with respect, so that our children may have the glorious pleasure of sharing their homeland with this wonderful beastie.