

# Regional Revitalization through Gibier

The game meat processed in Kozagawa Town is highly rated by top restaurant chefs

Kozagawa Town in Wakayama Prefecture has successfully launched a new local brand, Kozagawa Gibier, making the most of techniques to process wild game meat that are considered to be some of the best in Japan.

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## TAKASHI SASAKI

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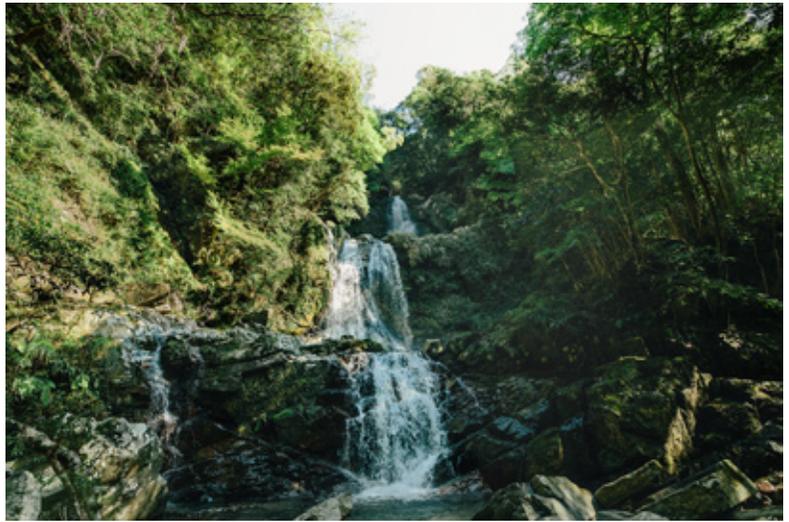
**K**OZAGAWA Town is located in the south of the Kii Peninsula in Wakayama. While it occupies a large area (294 hectares), the number of residents is small at around 2,500, and approximately 96 percent of the area administered by the town is covered with forests. The meat of wild game hunted in this lush region has been attracting attention in recent years in Japan, where it is known by the French term “gibier.” Takanori Hosoi, who is in charge of the promotion of Kozagawa Gibier at the town office, explains the appeal of the brand, which has turned crop-damaging wild animals into prized regional resources.

Kozagawa Town in Wakayama Prefecture is thickly forested

All photos: Courtesy of Kozagawa Gibier Yama no Hikari Kobo

“According to elderly residents of Kozagawa Town, wild game was once consumed widely here. Some even say ‘meat’ used to mean the meat of wild boars. However, after the emergence of professional butchers, people started to avoid game because wild game meat processed by amateurs smelled raw and unpalatable. Wild animals have caused significant damage to our crops in recent years, and we cannot help but kill around 1,000 deer and 100 wild boars each year in the area administered by the town. However, we only consumed a very small amount of meat taken from those wild animals. The majority of animals were disposed of by burying them in the hills. Experienced hunters in the area started to voice their concerns, saying that they did not want to participate in the taking of life without reason, or that they should only hunt as much as they can consume,” Hosoi says.

The wild animals of Kozagawa Town roam in rich natural surroundings



The circumstances prompted Kozagawa Town to start initiatives to allow them to actively use wild game meat. In 2015, they constructed a new game meat processing facility, Kozagawa Gibier Yama no Hikari Kobo, to start the processing of quality wild game meat under stringent hygiene control.

“Yama no Hikari Kobo is known for several features unseen in other meat processing facilities. The first one is experienced cooks who judge the meat. The second is the freshness of the meat. We only accept wild animals that were killed in the last two hours by hunters who attended classes provided by the



Inside the processing facility

town office. The reason is the deliciousness of wild game meat is greatly influenced by the quality of the cleaning carried out immediately after killing them,” Hosoi says.

They now sell wild game meat under the brand name Kozagawa Seiryujika Kinmomiji. The wild animals grow in a rich natural environment. The exquisite taste of the carefully processed game meat is evaluated highly by chefs, including those who work at Michelin-starred restaurants. In addition, the Satoyama no Gibier Burger, developed by Kozagawa Gibier in collaboration with the popular Pan Kobo Kawa bakery, which operates chain stores in Wakayama and Osaka Prefectures, won the grand prize at the All Japan Regional Burger Grand Prix in 2016, when they took part for the first time. The

initiatives supported by the whole town are evaluated highly, and the town was selected by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries as one of the Game Meat Use Model Districts (seventeen districts across Japan) in March, 2018.

“Winning the grand prize with our Gibier Burger not only made general consumers aware of Kozagawa Gibier, but also changed the awareness of wild game meat significantly among local residents. Kozagawa Gibier now supplies wild game meat to elementary and junior high-schools in the town, and the meat is used as part of school meals. Venison curry is extremely popular. In addition to restaurant, Kozagawa Gibier has released a Kokoro Utareru line of vacuum-sealed game meats, which allows ordinary families to prepare wild game easily at home, and lately has focused on new product development aimed at athletes, since venison is high in protein yet low in fat and is known to have a superior fat burning effect,” Hosoi says.

Wild game, the blessings of nature, is enriching the lives of people in the region and far beyond. 

The prize-winning Satoyama no Gibier Burger. The game meat (gibier) patty is a blend of venison and wild boar

