

EXCLUSIVE

By Paula Murray

SCOTS explorer Mike Laird wants to be transformed into a 'human crocodile' by members of a tribe deep in the jungles of New Guinea.

Men living near the crocodile-infested Sepik River must go through a gruesome right of passage where dozens of deep cuts are packed with ash to create elaborate patterns of raised scars.

The effect resembles a crocodile's skin and is supposed to represent the special bond between the villagers on the large south-west Pacific island and the killer reptiles.

Mr Laird, who found fame in the *Castaway 2000* reality series, has now petitioned elders to be allowed to become only the second Westerner to take part in the initiation.

Speaking from Bali, where he is working as a scuba-diving instructor, the 47-year-old from Edinburgh said he is an "experience collector".

As well as his year on the Hebridean island of Taransay, he has also attempted a dangerous crossing between Russia and Alaska, cycled across Iraq, Bolivia, Syria and northern Pakistan, worked as a war photographer in Afghanistan and taught English in Russia.

Mr Laird said he also liked to "bag countries", and added: "I've almost hit 100 countries, too, so it's going well."

"I've a few more daft things planned for next year, including the Sepik Crocodile Festival."

"I have nearly finished negotiating my way to being accepted as I think only the second ever Westerner to have their back cut open multiple times and each cut packed with ash so that it festers and forms lumps."

"The overall appearance results in something akin to a crocodile's skin."

"It is pretty brutal, it's a right of passage to manhood in the tribe, and it takes several days and a lot of blood loss."

"I'll know more about it in the coming weeks and I think I may need to visit the tribal elders for the final approvals."

The festival, which is usually held in August, sees boys as young as 11 risk their lives to take part in the painful scaling of the skin to become men.

They believe crocodiles from the Sepik River, the island's largest, became human, and volunteer for the initiation which leaves them with scars, usually running

RIGHT OF PASSAGE:
A New Guinea native with skin decorations that pay tribute to the crocodiles of Sepik River



Explorer plans his skin deep tribute to crocodiles



TRADITION: A wood carving of a crocodile at the Sepik River, and a spirit house

from their shoulders to their hips. The boys – and in some cases men – are kept in a spirit house for six weeks before tribal leaders make the cuts across their bodies.

Although the boys are allowed to numb the pain by eating certain plants with healing qualities, the process occasionally ends in death. However, the idea behind

it is to demonstrate discipline, focus and dedication, with the ability to stand pain at a younger age translating into stronger men in later life.

The ceremony is regarded as one of the strangest coming of age rituals in the world.

Mr Laird, *right*, said: "If I want to do

something, whatever it might be, I'll make it happen."

English explorer Benedict Allen spent months living with a tribe in the Sepik River valley in the 1980s and, after an initiation ceremony, became the first – and so far only – non-tribe member to undergo the sacred process.

He still carries the markings on his back and chest from the ceremony on the world's largest tropical island.

He recently returned with BBC journalist Frank Gardner in search of the elusive birds of paradise and recalled the brutal process he went through at the age of 24.

He said: "The initiation had been designed to make me a man as strong as a crocodile."

"I was trashed every day for six weeks."



By Paula Murray

NEARLY 1,000 people have been told about their partner's violent past after two years of Clare's Law in Scotland.

The Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS) was launched on October 1, 2015 after a campaign by Michael Brown, whose daughter Clare Wood was murdered by her violent ex-boyfriend in 2009.

It gives people the "right to ask" police if their partner has a violent history. Concerned family members, friends or neighbours can also request the data.

Some 2,144 requests for information have been made to Police Scotland since the scheme was rolled out and 927 people have been told their partner has an abusive past.

The force received nearly 59,000 domestic abuse reports last year, working out at about one every nine minutes, making it the greatest single demand on the service.

Detective Superintendent Gordon McCreadie, national

Almost 1,000 warned of partner's abusive past



FACT FINDER: Mr Brown, right, pushed for the right to information about partners after his daughter Clare, far left, was murdered by George Appleton, left



lead for domestic abuse, said the aim was to "eradicate the harm" caused by the violence.

He added: "It is a deplorable and debilitating crime which can cause lasting damage."

"It is commonly about control, with a perpetrator seeking to slowly strip away the liberty, confidence and power of the victim, often

through the use of threats, intimidation and violence.

"DSDAS is one way in which we can get ahead of the curve, helping to prevent people from becoming victims."

"It also sends a message to perpetrators and those whose behaviour might be escalating that if they become a domestic abuser their behaviour today

will likely impact on every other day of their life and many of their future relationships."

Dr Marsha Scott, chief executive of Scottish Women's Aid, said: "We are a big fan of the idea information is power. The more information women have about the domestic abuse histories of their partners and ex-partners, the better."

Robert Pratt for Chimie International Proudly Presents

JACK JONES

80th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION TOUR

JAN 2018		
24 ABERDARE	THE COLISEUM THEATRE	0800 014 7111
25 EASTLEIGH	THE CONCORDE CLUB	02380 613 989
26 BURY ST. EDMUNDS	THE APEX	01284 758000
27 ST. ALBANS	THE ALBAN ARENA	01727 844 488
28 LONDON	THE CADOGAN HALL	020 7730 4500
30 MALVERN	THE FORUM THEATRE	01684 892277
31 NEW BRIGHTON	THE FLORAL PAVILION	0151 666 0000
FEB 2018		
01 MANCHESTER	THE BRIDGEWATER HALL	0161 907 9000
02 BIRMINGHAM	TOWN HALL	0121 780 3333
03 PERTH	PERTH CONCERT HALL	01738 621031
05 GLASGOW	ROYAL CONCERT HALL	0141 353 8000
06 GATESHEAD	SAGE GATESHEAD	0191 443 4666
08 SOUTHEND	CLIFFS PAVILION	01702 351135
09 CANTERBURY	THE MARLOWE THEATRE	01227 787787