



Calling isn't just for roebucks. Paul Childerley gives the low-down on how to call muntjac effectively and relates his top three muntjac-calling stories

Muntjac bucks are my personal favourite to hunt. They are a challenging species with precise senses, using the ground they live in to their best advantage. There are many ways we hunt this species, from high seats looking over arable field edges and open woodland areas, to foot stalking and calling.

Calling is the most exciting method. When it works, it's the most rewarding and effective way of getting the correct animal. There are many different calls on the market but I stick to two basic ones that were originally designed as roe deer calls: the Buttolo and the Hubertus Cherrywood. The Buttolo is loud and can be used as an aggressive call – good for getting animals' attention from a distance and bringing them out of thick woodland. The Hubertus call is adjustable from making a lower-

pitched loud call to a small soft squeak for the closer situations. Both are easy to use and a must-have for hunting muntjac.

Early autumn when the chestnuts are falling is a fantastic time to hunt muntjac as you have a good idea of their whereabouts and their movements. I recently succeeded in three outings with three good bucks. The first was with Henning, a client from Diana Hunting Tours, the second was on my own, and thirdly with Karl Waktare, from GMK.

Henning contacted me for his first hunt in the UK. He had researched the deer species and was intrigued by the muntjac, not having seen one before. We were to stalk an area where the population of muntjac is not high but the quality is amazing. He was with me for two whole days to try to get his buck.

We set off in the morning darkness to get to an open grass area before first light, so

we could get set up ready for any animals passing back to the small scrubland and hedgerows. Half an hour passed and all we spotted was Chinese water deer heading back from the arable fields.

I decided we should head out to a small hawthorn wood where I'd seen several animals when I was lamping foxes. Approaching the wood, we saw a young doe grazing on the side. She had no follower so there had to be a buck around. I set Henning up on the sticks facing towards the doe and explained I was going to try to call a buck in, so he had to be ready – and he was not to move his hands or his head. When you call muntjac you tell them exactly where you are, and they will use all their senses to identify what is going on. Having good eyesight, they will pick up any slight movement.



Muntjac: Calling

“As much as I like guiding, there is nothing better than grabbing the rifle and heading back home for an unstructured day of hunting”

In my experience of muntjac calling, every situation is different owing to the ground, weather and the reaction of the deer. On this occasion I used the Buttolo to try to draw a buck out from the thick hawthorn wood. When I'm trying to draw a buck out from woodland I face the Buttolo towards the woodland, squeak two long calls and one short call facing the opposite direction, simulating a doe turning her head. This process was repeated three times over the course of five minutes. In this instance the doe was not interested and I knew we were wasting our time in that area.

After repeating this process in another couple of muntjac hotspots, time was pushing on and I decided we should head back towards the truck.

Approaching the truck, I set the shooting sticks up and Henning looked at me as if I was mad. All that was in front of us was a 20-metre-wide fir belt with no ground cover. But I sounded the Buttolo as loud as I could towards the belt eight times, and waited.

I could see movement from underneath a small bramble bush, and after glassing it for a moment, recognised a buck peering through the bottom of the bush. I gave three more quick calls and told Henning to get ready, look at the bush and keep still. The buck ran towards us with his tail in the air and one thing on his mind. Henning could not believe his eyes. I whispered, "Don't move until he turns, then take the shot," but the buck was now 80 metres away and circling to get the wind on us. The buck kept stopping but every time it was in the wrong position. Now it was approaching 40 metres and it was the last chance before he turned and went, so I gave a quick squeak, which stopped him in his tracks. Down went the buck and we sighed in relief.



For a quieter, controlled call, the Hubertus is the way to go...

As much as I like guiding and giving hunters the experience, there is nothing better than grabbing the rifle and heading back home to the Cotswolds for an unstructured day of hunting. Nearing the end of the roebuck season, I had to take the last couple of cull roebucks off a piece of ground to meet my cull plan. I successfully shot a young buck on first light from an area below a large wood. After a quick field gralloch I stalked the rest of the lower fields, planning to head back to the wood to give a muntjac a try.

Heading to the heart of the wood, I made for a large, incredibly thick young plantation with tall, white grass and bramble growing throughout, which makes it impenetrable apart from three narrow paths. This makes it a perfect area to set up on the sticks ready to call.

I stalked in quietly, making sure not to give the game away as the muntjac could be exceptionally close. The situation was set: rifle on sticks, facing the wind with three rides cutting through the plantation with about 100 metres' visibility up each path.



...but if it's volume you need, give the Buttolo a blast



As I was in the thick of it and there was a good chance the animals would be close, I didn't think a loud call would work – so the Hubertus call was required. I adjusted the tuning to a lower tone to simulate a female calling. I made three lots of three to five calls, leaving a 30-second gap between each set. After a few minutes' wait, nothing had appeared, so I decided to tune the call to a higher pitch to imitate a distressed fawn calling for help. This call follows a different pattern: continuous call for 15 seconds, then quiet for two minutes, then repeat.

I was about five seconds into my first call when a doe emerged on the central ride in defence mode with ears out, stamping the ground. As I was getting ready on the sticks, a buck appeared in hot pursuit of the doe. They were both facing me but he didn't present a good shot. The doe knew there was something wrong and was going to make for cover, so I gave a couple more really quiet squeaks and she couldn't resist. She pulled the buck in to about 50 metres away, then trusted her instincts, gave an almighty bark and jumped for cover with her tail up.

The buck didn't have a clue what was going on – he only had one thing on his mind. He turned to follow her into the bramble so I gave a loud bark to stop him, providing me with a good shot. This was a perfect situation to use the Hubertus call – the best way is to simulate the animals in their natural habitat – and it paid off with a buck on the ground.

And so to my final muntjac calling tale. As part of my work as an ambassador for Sako rifles, I had Karl Waktare from Sako's UK distributor GMK hunting with me to help launch some new products. Previously Karl had hunted Chinese water deer with me, so we decided we would try for a muntjac buck this time.

We headed out to a new block of ground I have in Hertfordshire, which produces many medal muntjac bucks. This part of the estate has mature oak trees with patches of bracken and bramble sporadically spread through the wood, which is perfect for calling as the animals are not nervous since they don't have to break out from the woodland.

We set off in a big loop, away from the woodland, to get to the far end of the wood, so the wind would be in the correct direction. On the way I explained to Karl that we would be calling, and told him what to expect and how to react when they come



Happy Henning: An overseas client with his first ever muntjac buck

in. Approaching the wood, we stopped on a hedgerow underneath a lime tree and set the sticks up ready to call. I used the Buttolo as we are a good 120 metres away from the wood; I was hoping it would call a buck to the edge to present a shot. Instead it alerted a muntjac, which decided to bark its head off inside the wood, moving down to the bottom corner. Normally this means a no-show as they are not happy and you have been sprung.

This deer continued to bark for about 10 minutes then appeared on the woodland edge, still barking. As we moved the sticks to get a shot, he saw us and slowly walked back in, still barking. Heading down after him, we realised that he was long gone and decided to give a few more calls because this looked such a good area. After two squeaks a young buck appeared, metres away, in the thick cover – but I decided he needed to mature.

I didn't want to overuse the call and end up making the deer wary. So we gave up calling there and stalked back through the wood. We saw many fallow deer, which made the stalk that much harder. Once



GMK's Karl Waktare swaps business for pleasure and bags himself a buck



Muntjac: Calling



Solo success: Paul shows he can still do the job on his own



A silver-medal muntjac called to the rifle, proving it really does work

they had finally disappeared and the woods settled back down, we decided to stop and call once more.

Looking over a small basin where the fallow deer had been rutting, I thought I might be able to call a buck from the adjacent cover and it would present itself on the bank, so we set up facing that way. I used the Buttolo with three rounds of three calls. On finishing the third set, I heard movement behind on the right. Looking over my shoulder, I could see it was a cracking buck at 40 metres circling to the basin. Karl waited until the buck was behind some hazel stumps then swiftly moved round into position. It was a textbook situation. The buck appeared, stopped, the shot was fired and the buck dropped on the spot.

It turned out to be a silver medal and was a perfect example of a muntjac with good brow tines, thick beams and perfectly symmetrical. This was an older buck – generally these are harder to call and

slower to come in, as they will look first and move second, but this ground had not been over-shot or over-called, and we used this to our advantage. ■

PAUL'S TOP TIPS

- React to your surroundings. Different seasons and environments will all require you to adapt your calling tactics
- Don't educate your deer. If you overuse your calls, deer will relate that to danger and you will not get the results you're after

CHILDERLEY SPORTING

Paul Childerley offers first-class deer stalking and game shooting in Bedfordshire and further afield. For more details contact Paul: 01908 282794 ■ 07715 638934 paul@childerleysporting.co.uk www.childerleysporting.co.uk