



... with the left hand. An injury to his right hand forces Paul Childerley to become a left-hander for the day on the trail of a roebuck causing serious tree damage

As many of you know, I am a martial arts instructor in kickboxing – or, as Peter Carr calls me, the Bedfordshire Ninja. The early mornings and the long walks complement my training, and both disciplines work well together. During my last competition, against a professional boxer, I was triumphant but came away with a damaged right hand. After several ice packs and an x-ray, it was confirmed that the hand wasn't broken but my trigger finger was dislocated. Not a great result in my line of work.

A couple of days later, a landowner contacted me who was concerned with the damage on the new trees he had planted up the side of his driveway. Knowing the area, I suspected it would be a buck that I'd seen several times in the neighbouring wood – an older malformed buck, which was aggressive and already very territorial.

As I have been shooting for the past 30-plus years, there have been times where I've had to practise shooting both left- and right-handed – starting with an airgun and clay pigeons then moving on to controlling vermin with a shotgun and a rifle. Since my trigger finger was out of action and too swollen to feel the trigger properly, it was time to switch to southpaw, which is not my chosen stance. However, after making a visit to the range and getting through half a box of bullets, my confidence was up and I was ready for action.

Setting off knowing the weather was not the best – it was a cold day and a little too windy – but with the damage to the trees so bad, it was worth a try. Arriving at the area, a few of the outside trees alongside the driveway were heavily marked, with the two corner trees nearly snapped in half.

There was fresh fraying and some scrapes in the grass from that morning, which meant the buck was patrolling regularly but living in the adjacent wood.

Knowing the area, and with the weather conditions, I felt the buck was unlikely to return to the driveway trees that evening, so stalking through the adjacent pine wood was my best option. To make the most of the opportunity of being in this area, I wanted to assess the muntjac population on one of the nearby plantations, where a cull plan needed to be decided for the coming season. I decided to drive through and park on the edge of the plantation to ensure I had the wind in my face.

Getting ready was difficult, as even doing up my bootlaces was hard. This was going to be a good challenge, just like the one a few days earlier.



Roe: Bucks

“It was taking me twice as long to get prepared for a clear and stable shot”

Setting off through the plantation, there were lots of signs of high numbers of muntjac; the track ways were heavily used and by the time I was halfway through the plantation, I had seen several animals, one being a very good buck still in velvet. By the time I had reached the end of the plantation, I made a mental note that this area would require a higher cull plan to reduce the numbers to an acceptable amount.

The pine wood was in the distance, with just a few more fields to get to the top side of the wood. My plan was to stalk along the back side of the wood looking down the rows of pine trees, which gives a good field of vision.

After walking the whole length of the wood I hadn't seen a thing, but the cover was high and if the animals weren't standing, there would be no chance of seeing them. A little despondent, and thinking I would have to make a second or third trip, I set off back along where I had just walked in order to cut down into the middle, where there is an open grass ride. Just before heading down into the wood, something caught my eye. I looked back and could see it was the troublesome buck that I was after. He must have stood up when he sensed I was passing.

Not expecting to see him, I was not ready. This was going to be interesting as it was taking me twice as long to get prepared for a clear and stable shot from the sticks. The buck was standing in taller cover about 70 yards away, facing me at an angle, so there was no chance of a heart shot. As quickly as I physically could, I set up on the sticks, ready to take a left-handed neck shot, disciplining myself to take time and make sure I pin pointed the shot. On squeezing the trigger, all I heard was a click – it was a misfire, the rifle hadn't struck the bullet properly.

Unbelievably the buck still stood there, obviously thinking he was safe in the tall vegetation, thinking I couldn't see him. Grabbing the bolt with my right hand, I re-chambered another round and took aim again. Under even more pressure in case he bolted for safety, rushing the shot would end in failure so I made sure I took my time and squeezed the shot off gently. To my



After having to shoot left-handed, and enduring a misfire, finally something went right for the Bedfordshire Ninja

delight, he dropped on the spot and I knew the shot was good.

After wading through waist-high stinging nettles to get to the buck, I could only see the good antler, which would probably make a nice medal head, but on closer inspection, I could see the malformed other antler, which made it a very unusual head and the second large malformed head I've taken this season.

The buck was in great condition, showing no signs of damage to the body or to the head, but he had snapped the top point of the good side. He was an older buck and one I would have regretted taking out if he wasn't a malformed head and an aggressive territorial buck.

The shot placement was perfect for a neck shot with no carcass damage and the buck dropping on the spot. I took the shot off the quad sticks from a short distance using my Blaser R8 with a .243 barrel with a 100-grain Hornady bullet and a Zeiss V8 scope on top, wound down to 8x power to give me less movement off the sticks.



An unusual head, with a malformed antler on one side, makes the stalk all the more memorable

On reflection, it was a great stalk with a wonderful result, taking out an older, aggressive buck before the rut and keeping the landowner happy. In my experience, it's all about the effort and training before the event which leads to getting the right result. ■

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