



Selective Shots



Paul Childerley explains that a good management plan isn't always about taking the first available shot, and recounts a recent stalk where that proved to be the case

Whether you have thousands of acres in Scotland or a small farm in the south of England, one of the most important parts of managing deer is to put together a management plan. Carrying out your plan correctly will ensure you keep your stock in a good, healthy condition, and will increase the quantity as well as quality of your trophies and the herd as a whole.

On one of the estates I manage, the owner likes to me to manage the roe deer numbers because of his forestry projects. After a discussion with the landowner, he asked if I could go and take a couple of extra roe deer off an area where he was planning to put in a new plantation for a pheasant drive.

It's one of the perks of the job and I have great pleasure in stalking this ground myself as it is a beautiful part of the country and the stalking is difficult.

The evening before I was due to set off, I gathered together my equipment of Sako 85 rifle with bipod, with my Zeiss optics on top, my favourite 12x56 Victory binoculars, a pair of shooting sticks and my roe sack to hopefully fill.

As the light broke, I could see three deer on the plantation plot. The area where the trees are going to be planted is an old game cover crop that had been mowed ready, so the deer were finding some cut maize, which is excellent winter feeding for them. As I gained light I could see that it was a doe with her two previous year's fawns. They all looked in great condition and I wasn't happy with culling any of this group. Going with my gut feeling that there would be several more deer on the corn drilling below the cover, my first task was to get past the three deer without spooking

them. Luckily they were busy turning over the maize cobs and I was able to stalk past them with ease. When I eventually got to the wall at the bottom of the cover, I knew I was on the wrong side of the wind for them but I was hopeful they would retreat away from where I was heading.

On approaching the wall, I could see two roe deer about 100 metres away grazing on the drilling. I set up on the wall, then glassed the two animals to see what they were. Straight away I could see the doe was in poor condition and the fawn was broken coated, so my plan was to take them both. I decided to take the fawn first as it was in poorer condition than the doe. I got comfortable, using the wall as a good solid rest. The plan was to take both the animals but, knowing the doe would probably bolt to a further distance (and I was not comfortable



Deer management: Roe doe

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shooting at long range using the wall as a rest), I decided to crawl along the back side of the wall to where it had fallen down and then I could try and get a good rest on the bipod and be able to take both animals in quick succession or to allow for a longer shot.

As I was trying to get into position, the doe from the previous group must have caught my scent. Instead of heading away, she decided to inform everybody I was there by giving a loud bark and stamping her foot.

Quickly checking over the wall, I could see the two were alert and on their toes, so speed was of the essence. With a quick dash into the prone position, with bipod deployed, I was ready within seconds and took a broadside heart shot on the younger animal. The shot was perfect but the old doe headed straight out to the middle of the next field over, which was winter ploughing and would be a nightmare to get to. I stayed in position and just watched to see where she was going to head to.

After a few minutes, she started to head back towards a pine wood on the far valley. I thought I could head down to the bottom of the ploughed field, where I could wait for a safe shot across the ploughing. So with a fast-paced walk, I made my way into position.

There was no time to get comfortable – she had appeared on the horizon and was heading straight towards me but there would be no safe shot until about 200 metres in front. I set myself up ready, facing the direction she would cross, but as all stalkers know, good plans need to be adaptable, and this one was one of those times. The doe headed back to my left-hand side where there was no safe shot from the bipod, so I had to wait until it was a closer shot and I could get on to my shooting sticks. Luckily she headed to the edge of the ploughing and followed the headland edge down towards me. There was no cover for me to hide in so I was going to have to use the element of surprise. I wound my



Patience pays off: With the first pair spotted in good condition, Paul decides to try elsewhere

Right choice: The poorer pair were taken cleanly, with Paul meeting the landowner's request while maintaining overall herd health



scope down to 8-power, turned on the red dot, closed the bipod and got the shooting sticks semi-ready. A cock pheasant sprung out of the hedge in front of the doe, which gave me the opportunity to stand up, get on the sticks and take the shot. A great morning's stalking and a great job done. ■

CHILDERLEY SPORTING

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