



Monster Malform



Paul Childerley takes a time-out in the tranquil Cotswolds to help with the roebuck cull

May is my favourite time of the year to stalk roebucks. The woods have come alive and the birds are in full song. The area where I hunt is the most picturesque place in the world, with a mixture of deciduous trees and a carpet of bluebells throughout, in the tranquil setting of the Cotswolds, my home county, where I grew up and learned the trade from my father.

After a bad day in the office, I checked the forecast. The weather was going to be perfect the next morning – still and warm. I set my alarm for a 3am start to get to the ground before light.

When I'm out guiding clients, I seem to take everything but the kitchen sink with me, but when stalking on my own, I have only the bare essentials. I took my new combo R8 and V8, which is a Blaser Professional Success with a .243 barrel, the Zeiss Victory V8 2.8-20x56 scope, my trusted pair of 12x56 Zeiss binoculars and my new hand-crafted Cael knife from Emberleaf.

When I arrived, the light was just breaking. As I was kitting up, a pair of muntjac crossed the ride about 30 metres away. Luckily they kept on moving and didn't give the game away.

I headed out to the edge of the first block of woodland because the deer tend to feed on the edges before heading back into the woods for the day – a great place to ambush a young roebuck. My cull plan for the area is young roebucks, old bucks that are going back, and anything that's not strong enough to last the rut.

Glassing across the wheat field, I could see two roe deer crossing between the two woods – the second was a young buck. They were about 300 metres away so I had to try to cut them off before they got to the other wood. The race was on. This was not so much stalking but silently moving fast to try to beat them.



Keeping low in a crouched position whilst in a full speed walk, I got to a far wall where they would be heading in 100 metres on my left. Getting into a nice shooting position, I could see they were still heading directly at me. After watching them approach, I could see it was a pair of last year's young, both bucks. One was a small four-pointer and the other had two small nobbles on his head. This young buck was obviously a very late form from last year and was a perfect one to cull for stock management.

Making the decision to take out the small buck, the pair turned to go to my left hand side and gave me the perfect shot. I took a high neck shot so there would be no carcass

damage. He dropped on the spot and the other buck bolted back to where he came from, stopping several times across the field.

Keen to try out my new knife, I collected him, gralloched him out on the edge of the woodland and was pleased that I had taken out a poor animal and got some good venison for the barbeque that weekend. Once cleaned up, I headed out to the boundary to work my way back to the car, which would take roughly an hour.

On the way to the boundary, I saw some movement on the edge of the main block of the woodland, and saw two roe deer milling around. They were just inside the block but I



Roebuck: Malforms



A buck in the bluebells: Paul poses with the monster malform

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couldn't see what they were, as the tree cover was too heavy. I circled downwind across the wheat field, hoping they would not spot me. Once I got to the edge of the woodland, they had wandered deeper into the vegetation, which was going to make it very difficult to see them from a distance. Also, because I had to get so close, they would hear every movement I made, but I love a challenge, and that's why I do it. I wasn't sure all this effort was going to be worth it as I had not identified a buck, so could have all been in vain.

Luckily, there was a deer run going through the wood so it made my life a lot easier, not having to wade through the cover. Using the classic stalking method, walk a few paces then glass the woodland for movement, this went on for 200 metres back through to the heart of the wood but no sign. Then I heard movement behind me, and a pair of roe appeared from my right, about 30 metres away, I couldn't crouch down, all I could do was freeze and it seemed to work as they carried on browsing. I could see

without binoculars that it was a malform buck with a doe. Not being a great fan of malform bucks, I didn't hesitate with a shot. In one swift movement, I mounted the rifle, cocked the action and looked through the scope. I had it on 12 power, which is not good for a 30 metre shot! With the extra movement of trying to wind the scope down, the doe spotted me, stamped her foot then bolted. The buck hadn't seen me but was going to follow the doe until I gave him a sharp whistle, which gave me enough time to take a shot. As it was a free hand shot, I took a heart shot, knowing it would be the best option for the result. Listening to where the last crashing was, I knew he'd gone roughly 40 metres back to the open area, to where the bluebells were growing.

On approaching the buck, I realised it was a lot bigger than I first thought, it turned out to be a nine-point malform and very heavy. Amazingly it was clean of velvet; these type of bucks can't scrape it all off, and it's the most unusual buck I've taken to date. ■



The malform was a fine and unusual trophy to add to Paul's collection