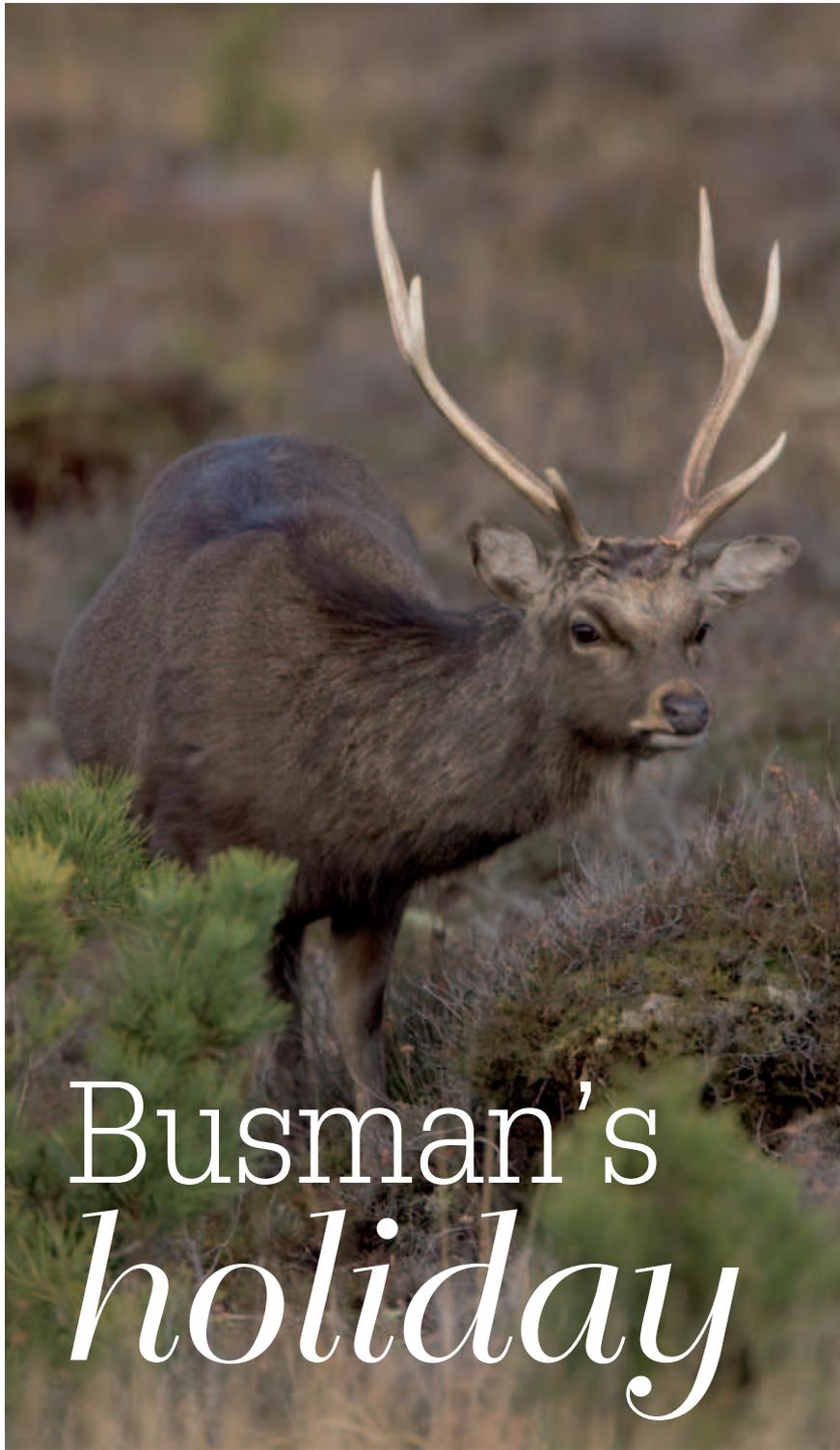




Dorset: Sika stag



Busman's *holiday*



Zeiss pro-stalker Paul Childerley is down in Dorset with a fellow professional trying his hand at the one species that has eluded him in his stalking career

I received a kind invitation from a colleague to go down to try and grass a sika stag in the rut on some of the best private grounds in South Dorset. It was my busiest time of the year with the game season in full swing, but having not experienced much sika stalking in my career, I jumped at the chance.

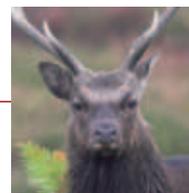
Arriving the evening before the hunt, I was even more excited when I got out of the car and heard the stags whistling hard in the nearby forestry. I was introduced to the head stalker over dinner where we exchanged a few stories and a few beers. Eventually we got onto the plan for the following day. As sika are renowned for absorbing bullet impact, a discussion took place regarding the correct calibre for this species. Thankfully the head stalker seemed pleased with my choice of calibre and equipment.

It was an early start with a vaporous fog shrouding the blackness of the night. However, the head stalker seemed confident, despite the conditions, and this raised my morale. The targeted area was a 15-minute drive away and on arrival it looked like an old, disused sand and gravel works. After gathering up our kit, we walked up and down some sandy dunes, covered in heather and gorse. The proposed stalk started over a steep bank, headed down a gully, up a shingle bank and over to a heavily thicketed valley. My stalking guide was insistent we had to be absolutely silent for the last 100 metres, and it took us 30 minutes to find a clear shooting area, on a raised sandbank, shrouded in long heather.

As the light eventually broke, we heard two separate stags whistling – one about half a mile away to our left, the other closer and actually behind us. The mist lifted, and my man pointed out a group of four hinds and a pricket, accompanied by a young six-point stag, 150 metres away on the opposite bank. After glassing them with my Zeiss Victory 12x56 binoculars, we deemed the young stag shootable because he wasn't in good condition.

The pressure was on – the group was moving up through the gorse, and it was difficult to get a clear shot. Fortunately, the young stag was momentarily clear of the cover for a perfect broadside shot. With no time to dwell, I took him. He launched forward and crashed through the thick gorse.

Dorset: Sika stag



Sterling silver: Paul bagged a top quality stag on his first sika stalk

The rest of the group spread out across the bank, nervous and alert.

I was then told to take the pricket. He fell instantly to a back-of-the-head shot. The rest of the animals disappeared into the gorse.

We waited for 10 minutes then went to the strike point of the young stag, where we found a good blood trail. After following the blood for 60 metres, through cover that would stall a Tiger tank, we found him, expired under the densest gorse bush one could imagine.

Once we had dragged the beasts together, they were soon inspected and gralloched. I was delighted with both shots. My faithful Sako .25-06, combined with a Zeiss 3-12x56 Varipoint scope, had done me proud once again. I was using a Federal 120-grain softpoint bullet, which proved to be ideal for the job.

After we had dragged the carcasses back to the track, the two rutting stags we heard earlier started to whistle. This time it sounded much more aggressive – they were certainly challenging each other. I thought the morning stalk was finished, but my affable guide instructed me to load up once again. The big stags were next on the agenda.

Returning to the gully we had walked through earlier, we climbed up the far bank, and my companion cupped his hand round

his mouth and let out a mighty challenge call to a nearby stag. To my surprise, the stag replied immediately. The head stalker nodded in the affirmative, and the duel was on. We stayed stock still and could hear the stag approaching us as it answered the challenge. The stag was clearly the dominant one, and wanted us ejected from his rutting territory forthwith.

My man knew the stag would try to get below us to get the wind on his side. With quick thinking and silent, fast movement, we crossed to the opposite bank and covered the gully where the stag would try to cut through. The stag was soon heading towards us about 80 metres in front, traversing the bank. I was given the go ahead when ready, and the rifle was on the sticks in a moment. I breathed in deep to quell the thumping in my chest – an aftereffect of the exertion.

As the stag was fully charged up with a cocktail of adrenalin and aggression, he ran off like he hadn't been touched. I was confident the shot was good and my guide was already congratulating me. Amazingly, the stag had run a good 150 metres through thick cover and up a steep bank before falling in some long heather. I was over the moon to find a great eight-point stag that measured as a BASC silver medal. He had been rutting hard – one of his points was

Equipment reviewed by: Paul Childerley

Product: SAKO 75 .25-06

Distributor: GMK = 01489 587500

www.gmk.co.uk

Price: FROM £1,645 (SAKO 85 PRICE)

Comments: An excellent, long-lasting rifle now superseded by the Sako 85

Product: FEDERAL 120GN SOFTPOINTS

Distributor: GMK = 01489 587500

www.gmk.co.uk

Price: POA

Comments: A perfect choice for the notoriously tough sika stags

Product: ZEISS 3-12x56 VARIPPOINT

Distributor: Zeiss = 01223 401525

www.zeiss.co.uk/sportsoptics

Price: £2,000

Comments: A reliable scope for any stalk

Product: ZEISS VICTORY 12x56 BINOS

Distributor: Zeiss = 01223 401525

www.zeiss.co.uk/sportsoptics

Price: £1,840

Comments: Picked out the sika herd clearly

Product: DEERHUNTER RAM JACKET

Distributor: Deerhunter = 01564 782234

www.deerhunter.eu

Price: £194.95

Comments: Waterproof, windproof and extremely comfortable to wear

snapped away and he had debris tangled in his antlers.

I had shot this stag through the front shoulder blade, smashing his shoulders and taking out the upper half of the heart – and he still ran 150 metres. The three beasts were quickly collected and larded. I was offered a carcass to take home, and it turned out to be some of the best venison I've ever eaten. Of all the stalking I've been lucky enough to do, this was one of the best experiences, and I recommend it to anyone who gets a chance to go. There is nothing better than sika stalking in the rut, especially when accompanied by a knowledgeable fellow professional stalker. ■

Contact details

CHILDERLEY SPORTING

For stalking with Paul Childerley, contact:

M: 07715 638934

T: 01908 282794

E: paul_pskb@yahoo.co.uk

W: www.childerleysporting.co.uk