



# Cultured *trophy*



Professional stalker Paul Childerley promotes the trophy management of muntjac and supports this alien invader as an asset rather than a pest species

**T**he muntjac as a sporting prospect is an exciting quarry species. Unfortunately, it is often regarded as just vermin and too often shot indiscriminately. However, more and more deer managers are recognising the commercial value of trophy bucks and are cultivating quality trophies on their ground. This species has found favour with both British and continental stalking clients who value its unusual trophy and the exciting hunting it offers. Selective culling of inferior bucks and reducing the overall population of the area can work hand in hand. To achieve this, one has to apply the same principles used in roebuck management.

I am quite fortunate to have extensive ground to stalk and shoot over. Much of this is adjoining, which makes management in practice far easier. That said, smaller areas can be managed successfully when working with neighbours, or if the next area is un-shot.

One of my prime muntjac locations is actually a satellite farm of 3,000 acres. Three sides of it are arable concerns, and the remaining boundary is with a military base. I have to diligently cull the deer numbers and it's quite hard to keep up, as the muntjac migrate from

the base at a rate that has to be experienced to be believed. It is worth noting that once stalking permission has been granted, it is nothing but fool's folly to rest on one's laurels and not to keep up with the agreed cull plan. Landowners look at deer in a different way and will expect your side of the agreement to be fulfilled.

Time spent in this area keeping the deer in check has paid dividends, as the results have quickly followed. The muntjac population is not high, and I can now crop a limited number of exceptional trophies. I would like to think that these heads are all thanks to my endeavours, but in reality I expect a number of these superb beasts form part of the infill from the adjoining military area.

Last year I had ear-marked three trophies to be taken from the ground. The first two were accounted for no problem by a client who knew what he wanted and could shoot straight. However, my next client was a no-show for personal reasons, and this left me in a bit of a dilemma regarding the third buck. I needed to shoot him as I was sure he would either be displaced or not survive the next winter. He was obviously an old animal by his appearance and behaviour, and



## Muntjac: Bedfordshire



Silent ambush: Paul was in place as the light began to fail

he occupied a less than perfect territory. I hadn't had a good look at his antlers as he was only active very late in the day, but I had seen enough to know they were heavy. Time constraints and the fact that he was particularly elusive ruled out another client, so I decided to take him myself.

Four evening outings in succession proved unsuccessful. I hadn't even stolen a glimpse of him, but I was sure he was still in residence. The buck was obviously mostly nocturnal, and a full moon hadn't helped. However, on the fifth evening I set out hopeful ever. I knew my ground, I knew he was still there and I knew his time had come.

The fickle wind of the last four nights had been replaced by a stiff south-westerly breeze. With this in mind, I sought the lee of an old dead elm stump. Comfortably seated between its ancient roots, I spied across to the young plantation and waited in ambush. My approach to the vantage point had been a careful one. Stalk a yard, spy a minute. It had taken time, but I had arrived without disturbing the area. I had deployed the bipod, my Sako .25-06 was safely resting in it. I had done everything I could to improve my chances, and I felt confident that tonight would be the night.

Shadows began to lick their way across the narrow field of winter wheat that separated the plantation from my position. Shades of grey replaced the field's vibrant colours, and I was thankful for the Zeiss 12x56 binoculars that probed through the growing gloom with an uncanny ease – with a lesser glass I would have been sunk. However, my earlier confidence was rapidly receding as the daylight cacophony of birdsong was replaced by the subdued sounds of the night birds. It was just about time to call it a day when a muntjac doe came trotting out of the plantation, followed by the buck.

The rifle came smoothly to the shoulder, and the buck soon filled the Zeiss Varipoint scope. I tracked the animal at a confirmed 160 yards until he stopped momentarily. Touching off the trigger at this

opportune moment saw the buck rear slightly and dash off in an impressive outside curve – which a fullback would have been proud of – and disappear into the trees from whence he came. Confused, the doe stood a while before she sought the same sanctuary.

I felt sure the shot had been good, but after I had waited 10 minutes, a restricted search with the torch revealed nothing. Retiring from the field was the only option, and the search resumed at first light. It was better to do this than paddle about blindly and make it harder for a tracking dog to find the line.

After an anxious night I returned, and the light enabled me to pick up a good blood trail along a deer track and find the buck dead less than 50 metres into the plantation. The Federal ballistic tip had done its work well and I was astounded at the great head this buck carried. He was by far the best muntjac buck I have taken to date – measuring 76.8

points, he was well into gold medal standard and therefore a client's dream.

Muntjac are an incredible sporting species and are well worth the same effort we apply to roe for trophy improvement. Yes muntjac need to be controlled, but vermin they are not. With a little foresight and application, they can be managed as a valuable sporting asset. ■

*For trophy muntjac or cull stalking, contact Paul Childerley on 07715 638934 or paul\_pskb@yahoo.co.uk.*



Heavy headgear. Management pays dividends