



Huntress in the making



Stalking guide Paul Childerley is pressured into taking a young but optimistic novice stalker out after her first roebuck in what was a difficult rut

This year's roe rut was patchy, but thankfully determination won in the end and it finished better than average. I have had the opportunity to guide a number of stalking guests from all walks of life – sports stars, aristocrats, captains of industry, Wall Street fat cats and more often than not those just like me, the average Joe. This year I had a young novice stalker named Natalie who was a delight to take out in pursuit of roe.

The young lady in question is a keen countrywoman who bush beats regularly, rough shoots, ferrets and harvests a significant number of rabbits with air rifle and rimfire. By trade Natalie is a shooting publication assistant editor – on *Clay Shooting* magazine, a sister publication to the fine journal you are reading now. As a result of this connection, our editor heard her wish to grass a roebuck. A half-hour phone call to yours truly battered me into submission, and I agreed to take the lovely lady out on her first roe stalk.

Rutting roe is one of the spectacles of the English countryside that Mother Nature mostly keeps to herself. For me and many other stalkers

it is the highlight of the stalking year. Natalie was keen to witness the rut and, if possible, to shoot a suitable beast. That's the kind of guest I like – no pressure, happy to enjoy the privilege of opportunity to hunt on someone else's private estate and pursue a truly wild quarry. She eats what she shoots and already had a recipe ready for her first buck.

The rut was in full swing, but the day before our first outing together a cold north-east wind curtailed all rutting activity. All chasing abruptly stopped in the part of Gloucestershire where we would be stalking. I had an anxious time of it the next day as it dawned cold and bleak, but thankfully it soon brightened and began to bode well for the evening stalk.

Natalie arrived 15 minutes early, complete with camera crew ordered as a last-minute idea by the editor, director or what other title you would want to use for Mr Carr ('pain in the Jacks' is my printable choice). The pressure I alluded to earlier suddenly returned with a jolt. However, Natalie's enthusiasm was infectious and she quickly proved her competence handling both the .243 and .308 with absolute confidence

Roebuck: Calling



Moving on, we skirted the woodland and on into a bean field, which we scanned from the margins. Interestingly there wasn't just one but three bucks in this field, one a medal head holding a doe. The closest cull buck seemed oblivious to the call, but as he was on the edge of range I decided we would sit it out and wait in the hope he would eventually head our way. Unfortunately the fading light beat us, and we had to give him best and retire from the field buckless. Despite the lack of success Natalie was remarkably upbeat, and looking forward to the next evening's outing with more than the usual degree of optimism.

The following afternoon we started calling with the cherrywood whistle in the wood next to where we left off the previous night. Nothing doing, so we cautiously made our way into the beans. No sooner had we moved into the field than did we bump a buck just 20 yards in front – he stopped broadside at 60 yards but the lack of a suitable backstop didn't leave us a shot option. Even if we had, Natalie quite rightly said she wouldn't have been happy to take a neck shot as the beast's body was hidden in the beans.

We left the buck to move off, gave him a few minutes and headed on into another wood and a favoured calling position. Finally here everything came together. A few peeps on the cherrywood whistle brought an instant response from a concerned doe coming into the kid call. Sure enough, a young and very shootable four-point buck followed her out, nose to ground following her amorous scent, and totally oblivious to Natalie and me lying in wait and full of expectation.

I let out a long, low whistle, which instantly produced the expected response. The buck froze statue-still, and Natalie took the opportunity to draw a steady bead on the shooting sticks and execute a considered shot, dropping him where he stood, death taking him in an instant. Natalie was overjoyed at the result and quite rightly proud of her performance. It had been a real pleasure to guide her.

We carried the beast back to the truck between us and the conversation was all about how she was going to turn the beast into different cuts and try various recipes. I had no doubt that this was one lady stalker that had become a firm enthusiast. ■

For stalking opportunities with Paul Childerley contact 07715 638934 or www.childerleysporting.co.uk

THE
SHOOTING
SHOW

Watch Natalie's first deer stalk in full on the 5 August episode of The Shooting Show. Watch it at: www.theshootingshow.tv

on the range. We were soon away into the woods with cameraman James following.

Our first port of call looked over a steep gully into a belt of trees where I knew a buck was working. I tried a few repetitive peeps on the cheery wood whistle to coax out a doe with hopefully a buck in tow, but 15 minutes later it was still a no-show. Moving on, we tried various glades and favoured calling positions to no avail. I tried the Buttolo call imitating an in-heat doe in the hope of attracting a buck at distance, as this call travels far if not subdued in one's pocket. Nothing. It seemed the cold snap had put the rut off.

Then all the theory was thrown out of the window as we stumbled on a buck chasing a doe into cover. We stopped and immediately tried to call him out of the trees. It was obvious he was still intent on the doe he was stuck to so we hurried to the other side of the Christmas tree plantation to catch them on exit or try the call from a different position. But half an hour later we still hadn't been able to tempt the buck or doe out from their haven.

Leading lady: Natalie's stalking career is off to a good start

