



Medal hat trick



Professional stalker Paul Childerley shuns the difficulties of drifting snow and manages to secure two trophies for his clients and take out an injured buck himself

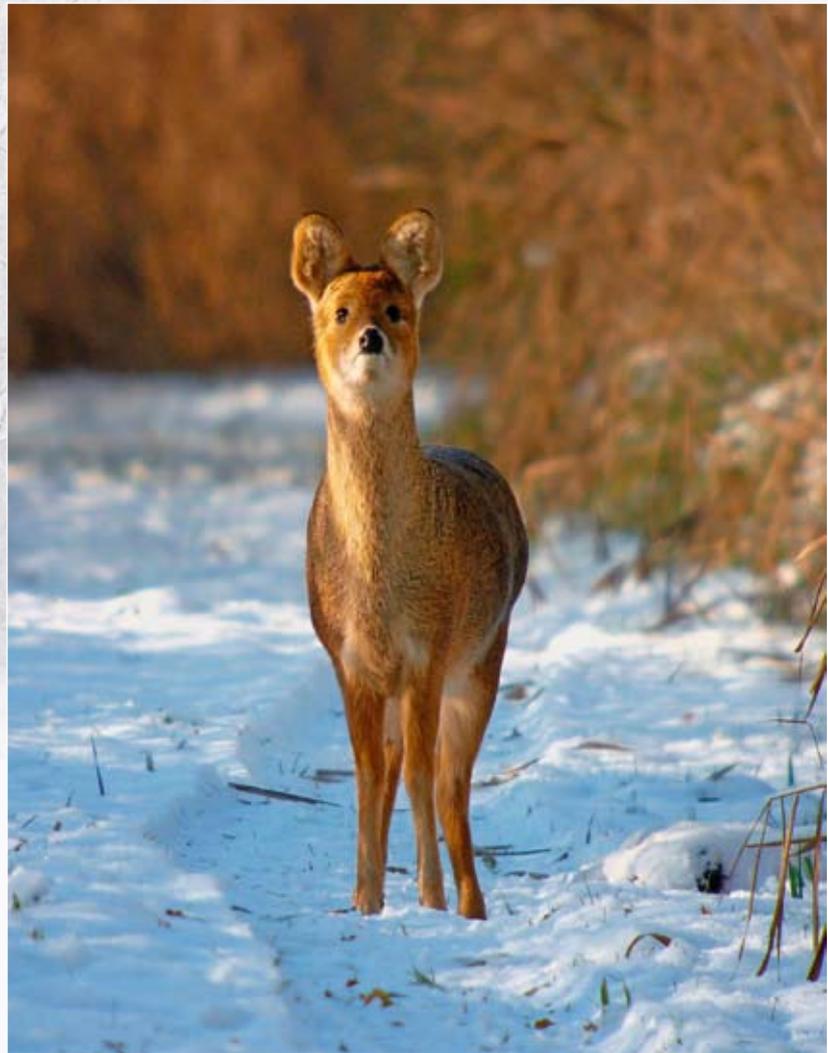
A surprise bout of snow puts Paul's stalk with clients in jeopardy

Last season had been going so well. I had steadily been taking out the earmarked trophy water deer bucks and pretty much wrapped up the cull of the year's youngsters. Unfortunately the downside of having a bigger-than-normal year class was that the deer numbers were so high the pikeys couldn't miss them. Illegal coursers do not recognise shooting seasons – but we couldn't reduce the overpopulation as early as we once could. Endless night-time patrols were put into practice and the scourge moved on to pastures new where the security perhaps wasn't as high as it is here.

I was feeling pleased with myself and looking forward to the last two clients of the season when the skies opened and turned the parish white with a good dump of snow. This was all very well, but it came on the eve of my continental clients' arrival. There is nothing worse than a fresh fall of snow to subdue deer activity. They soon get over it, or more probably used to it, but the timing on this occasion couldn't have been any worse.

The following morning at an ungodly hour I picked Jens and Claus up from the airport after a tricky motorway transit from the estate. The return leg was even worse, with compacted snow frozen into mounds of ice. However, we finally arrived safe and sound at the hotel with both guys in good humour.

These lads were keen, and a quick change into suitable stalking attire soon saw us at the larder, where I introduced the chaps to Scotty, my underkeeper. He was designated to take out Austrian hunter Jens for a cull buck, leaving me to look after Claus, who hails from Denmark and badly wanted to secure a gold-medal head.



Scotty and his guest made off from the larder as Claus and I headed to the other half of the estate. Leaving the vehicle behind, I checked the wind before taking a long spy across a 70-acre field of winter wheat. We were in luck, as two bucks were chasing each other, fighting for one of the main rutting areas. Frozen snow can affect the acoustics, and though the bucks were a good 400 yards away I could clearly hear their agitated clicking call.

Staying on our side of the hawthorn hedge, we carefully stalked towards them. However, the crunchy, frozen crust of the snow was like walking on Frosties – I half expected a cartoon tiger to jump out of the hedge. Claus sensibly stepped into my footsteps to reduce the sound as much as he could. I had also had the forethought to don a white snowboarding jacket, which blended in well with our surroundings. This was just as well because we had to negotiate a large gap in the hedge,



Chinese water deer: Bedfordshire

and, with crawling nigh-on impossible owing to the thinness of the snow crust, Claus had to keep to the deer's blindside and rely on me to shield him. Expecting to be compromised at any second, we ghosted along, crouching over to break up our silhouettes.

If the two bucks hadn't been engaged in a duel, we would have never have got away with it, but thanks to the hunting gods (Odin on this occasion) we eventually got into some dead ground and cut down the distance drastically. Inching forward to the lip of the hollow, I peeped over and checked out both bucks in the Zeiss binoculars.

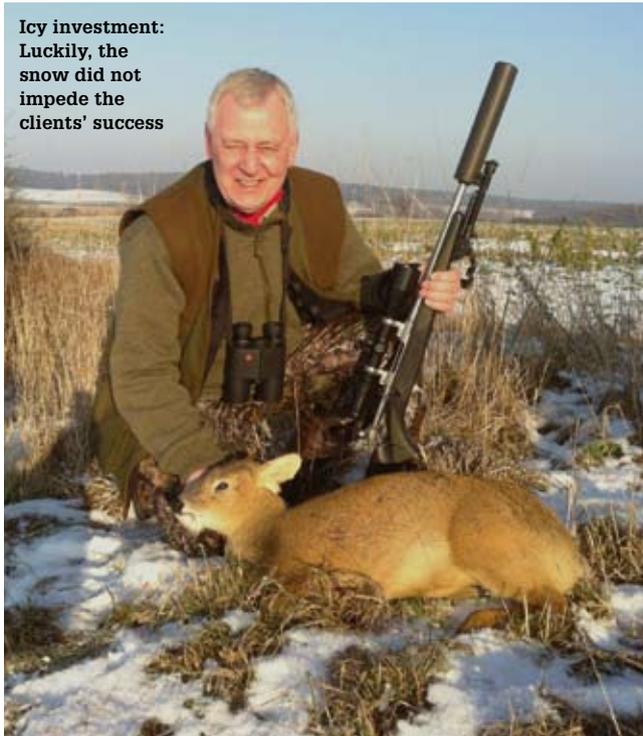
I couldn't choose between the two as they were carbon copies of one another. Then, just as I indicated to Claus to come forward, another buck jumped up in front of me and sped off to my left. He was clearly injured and it looked very much like he had been dragged down and mauled by a lurcher. His injuries were obviously severe as the buck soon pulled up and stood for a few moments. Unfortunately, as he was skylined the shot wasn't on, and he limped on over the rise and out across the boundary.

Cursing the poachers, I made a mental note to step up patrols and returned my attention to the two bucks – which had now become one. I have no idea where the other one went. The lone buck was staring at us intently as Claus raised the rifle and I gave him the nod to take him.

It was a textbook broadside shot. Rearing slightly, the beast dashed off 70-80 yards into a young plantation. Giving him time to stiffen, we made our way slowly over to the site of the shot as I was sure he had taken the bullet in the heart and was Valhalla-bound. The snow made tracking him a certainty, and just within the trees was our dead buck – one that would easily measure out as a gold medal.

Returning to the larder, we were greeted by Scotty and Jens, who had upgraded his buck to a medal-class animal that would also go gold. Two happy clients returned to their hotel, proving that my concerns about the weather had been unwarranted.

Icy investment:
Luckily, the snow did not impede the clients' success



Equipment reviewed by: Paul Childerley

Product: SAKO 85

Distributor: GMK = 01489 587500 = www.gmk.co.uk

Price: £1,710

Comments: Perfectly balanced and beautifully built

Product: ZEISS 3-12x56 VARIPPOINT

Distributor: Zeiss = 01223 401525 = www.zeiss.co.uk/sportsoptics

Price: £1,780

Comments: High performance at all light levels

Product: ZEISS 10x56 VICTORY BINOS

Distributor: Zeiss = 01223 401525 = www.zeiss.co.uk/sportsoptics

Price: £1,785

Comments: Exceptional light transmission

Product: HORNADY SUPERFORMANCE AMMO

Distributor: Edgar Brothers = 01625 613177 = www.edgarbrothers.com

Price: £POA

Comments: Fantastic, top-end factory ammo

After seeing my guests off, I immediately returned to the area where I had seen the injured buck earlier. Finding the stricken beast was easy – he had headed back to my side of the boundary. I picked him up with my binos at a distance, his ungainly gait telling me that this was the wounded buck. Driving to a position to cut him off, I waited patiently for him to arrive and put him down cleanly at 200 yards. He proved to be one of the biggest trophy bucks I have shot myself or with clients – and more than that, it was a relief to put an end to his suffering caused by a criminal element and to complete a fine hat trick with a clean conscience. ■

Paul Childerley offers quality Chinese water deer stalking and other species. Contact Paul on 07715 638934 or paul@childerleysporting.co.uk.

Unfinished business:
Paul was forced to finish what a poacher and his dog had started

