



Platinum *pursuit*

Photo: Brian Phipps



Paul Childerley tells the story of his three-year hunt for a monster platinum-medal muntjac buck

I first encountered this particular muntjac buck while taking out an English novice stalker to shoot the deer I specialise in, Chinese water deer and muntjac. The first morning of the stalk was in autumn when the muntjac were feeding on the chestnuts. We waited, watching over an open grass ride where the muntjac would cross backwards and forwards from the thick plantation to the mature chestnut trees.

As the light rose, a fox appeared. It was one that had been giving me problems with the pheasants, and it was too good an opportunity to miss, as it was only 50 yards away. He took the shot and we were both very pleased with the result.

I knew the fox hadn't ruined the rest of the stalk as there were several good bucks in the wood. We only stalked for another 15 minutes before we saw a massive muntjac buck chasing a doe. Knowing the buck's mind was on the doe, we had plenty of opportunity to get set up for a shot. Being a novice, he moved just at the wrong time, caught the doe's attention, and it was all over. Her tail went straight up and the alarm call rang. She barked and led the buck back into thick conifer plantation.

After the disappointment of the muntjac and time was pressing we went out to the arable field and shot a Chinese water deer, which made his day.

Knowing the massive muntjac buck was there and thinking I may have a new world record, I was keen to go after him again. I called a good friend who has been after a big muntjac buck for a few years. Stalking into the area where I'd seen him the day before, we had all the eventualities covered. The wind was correct, we weren't visible, we were tucked into the base of a chestnut tree and we were looking over the plantation where he was last seen. The plan was perfect. I started to call with my favourite cherry whistle and nothing happened for 15 minutes. Instead of the buck



coming from the thick plantation, he appeared from behind us about 10 metres away; he must have tracked in a big circle to have the wind in his favour. As you have probably guessed, the buck was so close he could see us blink, but he stood there stamping his foot not sure what we were. We couldn't move. He caught the wind and he was away. That was the last time I saw him that season.

The following year our editor Peter Carr came to film a Chinese water deer culling video for The Shooting Show. We finished early, and Pete asked if he could fill the time with a muntjac stalk. I pointed him in the right direction, and as I knew of his skill and years of experience, I left him to it, secretly hoping he wouldn't shoot my monster buck.

Later, we met back at the larder, where all the stories of the day's hunting are told. Pete turned up with a big smile on his face. He had managed to bag a nice muntjac buck, but went on to tell us the story of how the big one got away. The buck, once again, had been chasing a doe, which allowed Pete to get in close enough for a shot – but once again the doe had foiled the plan.

Knowing the buck was back in the area, I sent out my most experienced guide, Scott, with a client from Sweden who specified he was after a medal muntjac. I gave the brief of

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the area where the buck had been the day before and told him the pressure was on because the muntjac buck was clever and had already got away three times. Scott used all his skills that he'd learnt over the years of how to outwit a clever buck like this one.

Scott came back with a larder story of his own: "We stalked into the right area. I called, and a doe came in, chased by a big buck. The Swedish client shot it and was over the moon, thinking he'd got the monster buck. On the way back to the car, delighted with the result, we bumped into an even bigger buck walking towards us on the ride. By the time he got his kit ready, it was too late." Although disappointed to not get 'the massive buck', the Swedish client did get a gold medal for the buck he bagged, so he left a happy hunter.

The following spring I was guiding an Austrian hunter called Gerhard who was keen on shooting a Chinese water deer

and a large muntjac. When we were on the range testing the rifle, I explained to him that getting a good muntjac buck would take time and a few outings.

It was a beautiful spring day and the sun was beaming down. We decided to go for an afternoon stalk for Chinese water deer. We started at about 2pm – at that time of the year Chinese water deer will sit out in the arable crops, sunning themselves. We parked up and stalked along the top of an arable field, stopping at a higher vantage point where we could see over the top of the crop. Through my Zeiss binoculars I could see a pair of ears sticking out through the top of the crop. The only problem was, it was not a clear shot. It was going to be a waiting game.

We stalked on a bit further to get into a good shooting position off the sticks. In doing so, we bumped a young buck, which ran directly at the old buck lying down. The plan was perfect. The old buck jumped to attention and chased the young buck straight back past us, not even giving us a second look, which gave us plenty





Bedfordshire: Muntjac



Gerhard bags a medal Chinese water deer before the main event

of time to get Gerhard onto the sticks and to take the shot. The animal was shot at 30 yards broadside and dropped on the spot to a round from the Sako 85 synthetic .22-250, which I find is perfect for the smaller species of deer. The buck was a good gold medal.

It was too early to go for the muntjac so we decided to go for another Chinese water deer. The young buck that had alerted the larger buck had run over the ridge and out the other end of the field, so we decided to go after him. Knowing he was going to be far away, to say the least, we decided to walk through the middle of the field, where we could be seen easily, to save time.

As we approached the ridge in the field where we could see down to one of the main woods, I could hear forestry work going on in the wood, so wasn't expecting to see much – but to my surprise, there was a lone muntjac about 100 yards out grazing in the sunshine. I glassed him with the binoculars and could hardly control my excitement. It was the monster buck I'd been after for three years. This was such a surprise

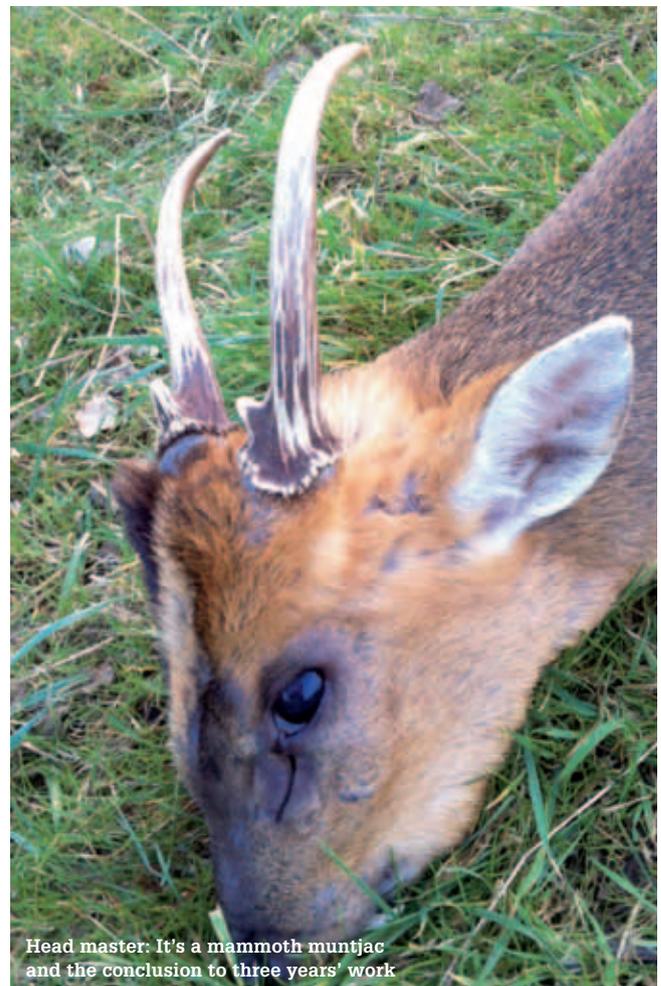
to me as you rarely see old muntjac bucks out at this time of the day, with all the forestry disturbance and us shooting at the other end of the field. The only problem was, he was 250 yards away and we were in the middle of an open field.

We hit the deck. I explained to Gerhard that it was a very good buck and we would have to crawl in because we were in the middle of the field. The good news was that the buck was oblivious to all that was going on, so we took our time to get in the right position.

We crawled into about 180 yards and decided it was time to take the shot as the buck was starting to raise his head, getting agitated with the forestry work going on nearby. I got the rifle ready and the bipod was down ready for Gerhard to take the shot. With that, the buck bolted for the wood. Luckily Gerhard was experienced and ready for this. Just before the woods, the buck stopped for a split second, and I instructed Gerhard to take him. The buck leapt straight into the wood, but I knew the shot was good from the reaction, and I congratulated him straight away.

We approached the area and found a good blood trail that led us 15 yards to the buck in the thick cover. It was the monster buck. Gerhard was delighted with the result – in his first afternoon he'd shot a gold-medal Chinese water deer and a platinum muntjac buck. The muntjac scored 73.5 in the BASC measuring system – truly a great trophy. ■

For muntjac and Chinese water deer with Paul Childerley, call 07715 638934 or email paul@childerleysporting.co.uk.



Head master: It's a mammoth muntjac and the conclusion to three years' work