

Wildlife *winner*



Yorkshire stalker Phil Fisher successfully bids for a trophy water deer buck with Bedfordshire stalking guide and Zeiss pro-stalker Paul Childerley, who tells the story

Earlier this year Pete Carr, the editor of this esteemed journal, pressed me into offering a trophy Chinese water deer buck for an auction lot in what he described as “an interesting initiative that would conclusively prove that hunters are also conservationists.” Despite his gift of the gab, this species is something of a sought-after commodity in stalking circles. I inwardly groaned – in fact I think I actually winced at the thought of giving up such a valuable trophy from my annual cull list.

Undeterred, the editor gave me his best sales pitch, which would have been the envy of an East End used car salesman, and finally – after twisting me into a verbal half-nelson with a guilt trip thrown in for good measure – he secured an auction lot from yours truly.

The last weekend of the season saw the editor arrive with not only Phil Fisher, who won the trophy Chinese water deer lot with his £453 bid, but a film crew as well. My concern at having to produce a suitable animal with five people in tow, and on film, and all by the following evening, was casually dismissed by Pete with a simple: “Oh, you’ll get over it. I have every confidence in you, and failure isn’t an option. Just make it happen old boy.” Nice.

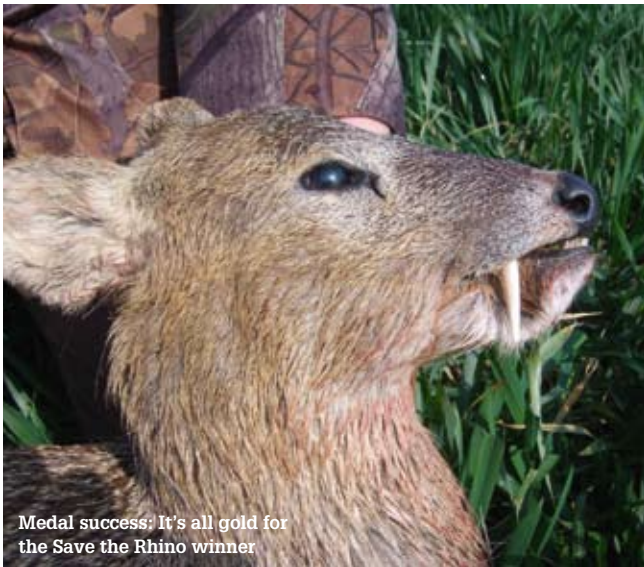
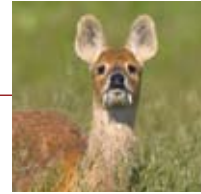
Phil proved to be a natural shot on the target, and as a former gamekeeper he had much in common with me. Confidence in both your client’s marksmanship and his clarity of thought not only makes guest guiding much more enjoyable, but also raises the chances of success greatly.

Next day we all met at the larder before dawn. Despite a thick fog adding to my woes, I explained carefully what the plan would be and what exactly I wanted of the cameramen. Climbing into the pick-up, I drew a little comfort from banishing the editor to the back seat to make way for our guest in the front. Seeing his six-foot frame uncomfortably hunched up between two cameramen raised my spirits as I headed off into the gloom.

I knew the sun would eventually burn through the mist, but when it would actually do it was anyone’s guess. Pulling up on what would be commanding ground in clearer weather, I killed the engine and waited for the murk to dissipate. Minutes inched towards two hours, and more in hope than anything else, we agreed the fog had lifted a little and decided to chance a stalk alongside the woodland edge, which was as yet still hidden in the mist. This proved to be folly as we hadn’t moved more than 100 yards when an alarmed muntjac barked out its warning to all. The situation was hopeless so we returned to the truck and decided on a change of location.

Parking up on the south side of the estate, where I knew of another suitable buck, we again waited for better visibility before implementing plan B. Incredibly, a superb muntjac buck meandered by the pick-up truck to the cameraman’s delight. But the second the window was lowered, the buck bolted away along with the chance of capturing any footage. Soon, the fog began to recede as the sun finally did its work and burnt its way through the hanging moisture to reveal a fine day.

Chinese water deer: Auction lot



Medal success: It's all gold for the Save the Rhino winner

To save time I worked the gateways and green lanes with the pick-up to try and make up some of the time we had lost. We quickly located a small group of Chinese water deer that had a buck with them that might fit the bill. I insisted that I would be only able to take one cameraman with me and Phil before I led on, leaving the editor and the other half of the film crew behind to watch from afar.

What little wind there was cut across our front, but we managed to negotiate it and stalk into a suitable position to close on the deer. Thankfully, between us and them I had a high seat secured to an old hornbeam, which would allow a safe shot as the field the deer were resting on was very flat.

After a cautious approach behind and along a stunted hawthorn hedgerow, I was finally able to get a good look at the deer through the Zeiss binoculars. Luckily the buck on the right hand-side of the loose group was a shooter. Leaving the cameraman at the bottom of the high seat with strict instructions to keep filming the chosen buck, I slowly snaked my way up the ladder and into the high seat, followed



Hunter conservationists: Paul and Phil stalking for rhino protection

Equipment reviewed by: Phil Fisher

Product: **TIKKA T3 .308**

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

Price: **£1,030**

Comments: Accurate, practical and affordable

Product: **KAHLES KXI 3.5-10x50**

Distributor: RUAG = 01579 362319 = www.ruag.co.uk

Price: **£1,171.46**

Comments: Superb clarity and price

Product: **LEICA GEOVID 8x56 HD**

Distributor: Leica = 0207 629 1351 = www.leica-storemayfair.co.uk

Price: **£2,129**

Comments: A market leader

Product: **WINCHESTER POWER MAX**

Distributor: Browning = 01235 514550 = www.browning.eu

Price: **POA**

Comments: Hard hitting and accurate

I winced at the thought of giving up such a valuable trophy from my annual cull list

by Phil. Chinese water deer haven't got the best eyesight, but our deliberate motion coupled with superbly camouflaged clothing saved us from detection.

Phil soon picked up the buck in his Kahles 3.5-10x50 scope, and on my instruction he squeezed away the 150-grain Winchester Power Max bullet. The moderated report was instantly followed by a sound strike, and the buck burst forward in a brief spurt, tumbling over dead shortly afterwards.

An exciting stalk completed by precision shooting promised a perfect end to proceedings – but our cameraman had failed to get the kill shot in the can. The high seat ladder had obscured the buck on the far right and he had been focusing on a different animal. Not to worry – Phil was overjoyed with his fine trophy, which later proved to be a gold medal animal, I had fulfilled my obligations and Save the Rhino was a nearly a monkey richer.

Despite the conditions we had managed to pull off what was a pretty tall order in anyone's book. It had been a most enjoyable stalk with Phil, who was right when he said: "The banter makes it." Our editor was right too – hunters can indeed be conservationists. ■

The Shooting Show

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