



# STALKING THE BUCK

There is hardly a date that the German hunter looks forward to more than the 1st of May. This day marks the end of a long waiting period, for during the 15th of January and the 1st of May it is illegal to hunt hoofed game in Germany. Then finally, it is the beginning of the first hunting season of the year. It is the 1st of May, the start of the roebuck hunt.

I didn't hesitate a second to accept the invitation from Werner, a hunting buddy, to go on a roebuck hunt on his preserve in Bavaria beginning of May. After a short drive through the idyllic preserve, Werner drops me off at a raised blind in a fir tree along the edge of a meadow. The other side of the meadow is bordered by a forest so that I have a spectacular view from my vantage point across the meadow and the terrain to the left and right of me.

I climb into the blind quite early, around 5:00pm, wanting to make sure I don't scare off any deer while taking my position in case they should come out early on the meadow. I don't expect to see any game until later, so I get comfortable, load my weapon, lean back, close my eyes and enjoy the warmth of the sun. Deer are usually active in the morning and evening twilight when they are on the move foraging – the time in-between they seek refuge somewhere in the woods to ruminate.

Lost in thought, I suddenly perceive a cracking noise coming from somewhere at

an angle in front of me and as I open my eyes, I see a deer emerging from the forest, taking a few steps onto the meadow. From the teats it is obvious that this doe has recently given birth and to my delight I now see the fawn, only a few days old, following her with unsure and clumsy leaps into the meadow. Then jumping around carefree and cute as can be, amused, I watch the scene through my binoculars and as the two of them retreat in the forest, an hour has passed.



Everything is quiet again. Now it is important to stay alert, for the time has come when the bucks feel safe enough to venture forth and forage in the meadow. Time and again I scan the edge of the forest on the other side of the meadow, yet no movement to be seen. A rabbit hops on by and helps me pass the time and then all of a sudden, as if by magic, there appear three roe on the meadow adjacent to mine. They came out of the forest way too far to the left of me, about 550 yards away, yet it is easy to see with my binoculars that a grown buck is part of the threesome. The other roe seems to be a one year old buck with antler velvet and a doe – though at this distance it is

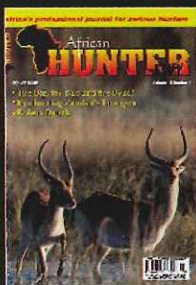
difficult to be sure. I wait and hope that the roe come closer and browse on the meadow in front of me, but unfortunately, they don't do me that favour. To the contrary, the two bucks crouch down in the meadow so that all I can see of them is their head and antlers.



What to do? Stay put and wait or get down from my raised blind and stalk them? But how? A direct approach across the meadow is not worth a try – not with three pairs of eyes watching ever so carefully over the terrain. The wind, however, is on my side, coming from the direction of the roe, so I take matters in my own hands and decide to stalk the buck. I only have one chance to get closer, if I make it to the forest on the other side of the meadow unnoticed, then I can make an approach in the woods undercover.

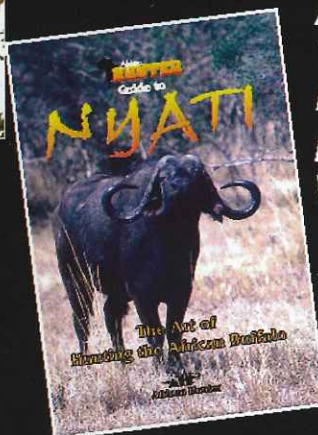
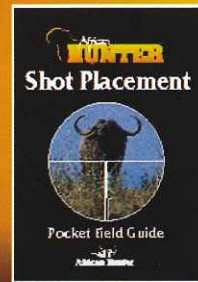
No sooner said than done, I leave my backpack in the blind and take only my binoculars and rifle with me. I climb down from my vantage point with the utmost of care and am pleasantly surprised to find myself out of view from the roe due to a very slight depression in the terrain. Half crouched and as quietly as possible I sneak across the meadow towards the forest

# African HUNTER Magazine



The African Hunter Magazine - Published six times a year. Subscribe Today for \$60 Incl. P&P.

African Hunter Shot Placement Pocket Field Guide featuring 20 specie cut-away anatomic diagrams, SCI and RW records and hunting tips.



African Hunter guide to The Art of Hunting Nyati. Featuring more than 300 pictures and diagrams with over 450 pages.

For more information visit: [www.africanhuntermag.com](http://www.africanhuntermag.com) or email: [fishunt@zol.co.zw](mailto:fishunt@zol.co.zw)

Africa's Professional Journal for Serious Hunters since 1994



and not until taking several steps into the darkness of the woods do I dare to fully stand.

Did the roe get wind of me and bolt? I have no idea. It is impossible to see them from here. Now it is easier to get ahead, 30 to 40 yards deep in the woods. I carefully move parallel to the meadow in the direction of the game. After 200 some yards, the rude awakening of reality, a steep ravine cuts through the forest, winding its way from the meadow and crossing my path. I would be easily noticed if I circumpass the gorge on the meadow to the left, so I move along the ridge further into the woods. The ravine, however, only gets wider. There's no way around it, I have to climb. For a moment I consider giving up, but only for a moment. I evaluate the risks and decide to go for it. Luckily it hasn't rained for awhile, the ground isn't muddy and slippery, so I can count on sure footing. I carry a Blaser R8 with manual cocking system, so here too I'm on the safe side in case I do lose my footing and start sliding or drop my weapon. The descend down into the ravine is easier than expected. A number of tree roots are exposed along this very steep slope so that I can always get a good hold and work my way down.

Standing at the bottom of the gorge looking up at what seems like a cliff that I have to climb ahead of me, I start to wonder if this was really such a good idea. Nevertheless, it is too late to cast doubt now, somehow I have to get out of this gully no matter what. Even though I dig in my feet sideways for maximum support during the ascent, I slip and slide several times because there is hardly anything to hold onto. Finally I make it to the top and stand on the other side of the trench. Question is, has it been worth the effort or have the roe moved on? I haven't seen them since I left my spotting point and that was about 40 minutes ago.

I continue my approach deep in the woods for another 150 yards or so and then slowly change direction towards the edge of the forest and the open



field. What a joy to see the doe still there in the meadow, seems she hasn't moved much at all. From the third row of trees within the forest, I scan the meadow with my Minox binoculars and to my delight find both bucks, still crouched, in my field of vision. At a distance of a little over 100 yards I can very clearly recognise the velvet antlers of the one year old buck and the massive antlers of the stag through my binoculars.

I take some time to calm my breathing, the exertion of the climb and stalking, not to mention the sheer excitement has kept my pulse racing. Upon gaining control of my heart rate, I prepare for the shot out of nowhere with slow deliberation. I take a secure stance leaning against a tree. With my elbow dug in my side, I raise the rifle in the line of fire and cock. I whistle to break the silence and the stag is upright within a fraction of a second. He pauses to check if there is danger and if so, from where. Just enough time for me to get him dead in my sights and as the sound of the shot echoes, the stag drops.

The young buck and the doe make several short jumps as if to flee. Totally unsure as to what just happened, they repeatedly pause and without great haste finally retreat into the seclusion of the forest. I wait five minutes for the proverbial dust to settle and then make my way to the kill. Before stepping out of the forest, I do, however, break off a small tree branch from an evergreen, which according to old German tradition, I place between the jaws of the slain stag. This old custom is called 'the last bite' and is intended to express the appreciation of the hunter for the game, at the same time it is also meant to serve as a reminder to respect and sustain nature.

It doesn't take too long for Werner to show up. He heard the shot from his raised blind and followed the sound. In line with a very old hunting tradition, he also hands me a broken branch, the so-called Marksman's Break and congratulates me with a heart-felt Good Hunting. What an exciting stalk and what a magnificent buck!

