

# Global Deer Hunting

*First in a Series: Germany Roebuck*

ARTICLE BY **MAGNUS PELZ**

Lost in thought, I hear a crackling 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.

Though common, whether hunting whitetails in South Texas or, like me, pursuing the diminutive roebuck in Germany, the site of a doe with her fawn is captivating. A hunter never grows weary of watching deer.

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. I watch the scene through my binoculars and as the two of them retreat in the forest, an hour has passed.

It is the first of May, a day German deer hunters anxiously wait for; it is the opening of hunting season. In Germany, it is illegal to hunt hooved game between January 15 and May 1.

The roe deer are relatively small deer, weighing between 35-80 pounds and occur throughout Europe. They have short, erect antlers measuring up to 10 inches in length with two or three branched points. A four-pointer is rare. Unlike most cervids, roe deer begin regrowing antlers almost immediately after they are shed.

I'm hunting on a friend's preserve in Bavaria, a state in the southeastern region, roughly the size of South Carolina. Sitting in a raised blind in a fir tree along the edge of a meadow, I have a spectacular view from my vantage



The author scans a meadow for a roe deer.

IN THE *Field*



From his vantage point, the author had an excellent view of his surroundings.

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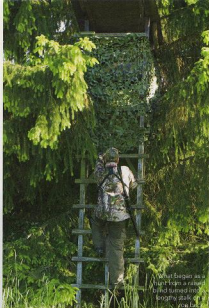
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point across the field and of the terrain to the left and right of me. A forest borders the other side of the meadow.

Except for a rabbit scampering about underneath, everything is quiet as that magical time approaches – just before sundown when the bucks feel safe enough to come into the open to forage. Now it is important to stay alert. Time and again, I scan the edge of the forest on the other side of the meadow, yet no movement to be seen. Then, 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 500 meters away, yet it is easy to see with my binoculars that a grown buck is part of the threesome. The other roe seem 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 favor. To the contrary, the two bucks crouch down in the meadow so that all I can see of them are 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,



What began as a hunt from a raised blind turned into a lengthy stalk on a tree ladder.

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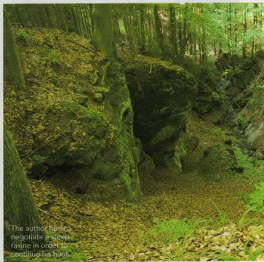
In light here that sets an interior and is a kind of silent motion taking  
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Fortunately, a hillside kept the author hidden from sight while he made his stalk.

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 under cover. No sooner said than done. I leave my backpack in the blind and take only my binoculars and rifle with me. I climb down 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. 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. Thirty to 40 meters deep in the woods, I carefully move parallel to the meadow in the direction of the game. After 200 some meters, 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 circumnavigate 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



The author barely negotiates a steep ravine in order to continue his stalk.



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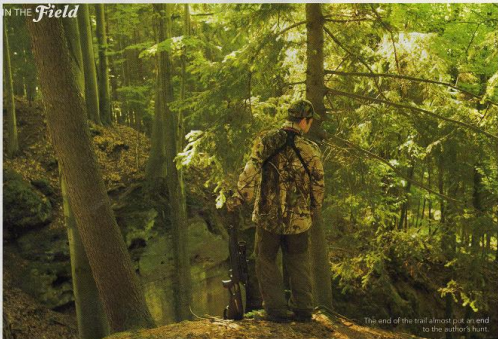
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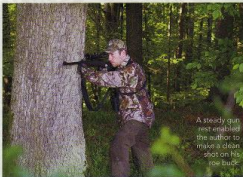


The end of the trail almost put an end to the author's hunt.

moment. I evaluate the risks and decide to go for it.

Luckily, it hasn't rained for a while. 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 descent 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,



A steady gun rest enabled the author to make a clean shot on his roe buck.

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 into the woods for another 150 meters 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 80 meters, I can very clearly recognize 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 exertions of the climb and stalking, not to mention the sheer excitement, have 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. It's just enough time for me to get him dead in my sights and, as the sound of the



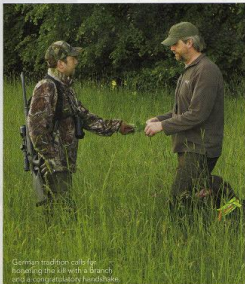


The hunter poses with his hand-warmed trophy buck.

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! ➔



German tradition calls for honoring the kill with a branch and a congratulatory handshake.