



The Great British eight: part two



Dom's mission to stalk eight native UK species – six deer species, wild boar and wild goats – continues

Wild goat (November)

As our red deer stalking had taken us so far north, we combined the trip with one of the rarer stalking opportunities in the UK – wild goats in Dumfries and Galloway.

"You see where the peaks disappear into the cloud?" Yep. "And you see the white and black flecks just below the cloud-line?" Just about. "That's the goats." Oh. It looks a long way away. "Aye, it is that," said our stalker.

Wild goats have been residents here since the Vikings brought them over, according to the Forrest Estate's head stalker Kevin Gibson. They are not a hugely popular quarry and until recently the Forestry Commission had culled these animals. But Kevin realised they add an interesting alternative to the roe and reds on the estate for clients with eclectic tastes.

They are good value, with a very reasonable trophy fee if you do run into a decent Billy. With only one day to get one in the bag, neither Colin nor I cared what calibre of goat we encountered.

They aren't as tricky as a red and often are really quite straightforward to stalk – the physicality of the climb is test enough. Kevin had located a good group of animals with a good Billy. These animals are spectacular, with thick, long coats of grey, black, brown and white, long sweeping horns and a penchant for the most inaccessible of environments, making them a truly different experience.

Tricky or not, I wasn't going to risk stalking in too close. I took a textbook shot from 150 yards on the broadside Billy. He staggered at the strike but, instead of falling, hopped a gully and disappeared from view behind the rocks. Running forward 50 yards I took up a prone position and put in a follow-up shot that stopped him in his escape. The first shot was too far forward, penetrating the neck but missing the vitals. It is worth being aware that finding the shoulder on a goat is not always easy. Long grass, short legs and shaggy fur, combined with my inexperience, was the cause of my error. The second shot, with the animal fully visible on the rocks, was mercifully spot on.



Due to their long hair, short legs and the area they inhabit, finding the shoulder on a wild goat isn't always the easiest task

The feeling of elation at having 'got my goat' was heightened by the magnificent view back over the estate. The major drawback was that what goes up must come down.

I had a brew and a bowl of broth while Kevin took the quad back for our carcass. Soon after, estate stalker Willie and Colin returned with two cull animals. Colin, too, had found the ascent physically tough but when he took his animal from around 80 yards, one of its mates was daft enough to hang around. It was a decision he was made to regret, courtesy of a 150-grain Federal soft point.

Chinese water deer (March)

Our CWD hunt actually started as a muntjac outing. I have never really been a trophy hunter but had always fancied a decent muntjac buck skull-mount for the wall. Our host, Les, was confident that getting us each a good buck would be a 'doddle'. His patch covers plenty of prime ground not far from Milton Keynes, just off the M1.

Once on site I hooked up with a friend of Les', a local keeper who had access to a wood that received very little hunting pressure. As a consequence there were plenty of muntjacs around the place. We saw several on the way to the high seat, with one doe presenting a very comfortable opportunity off the sticks at barely 30 yards. I was after a buck though, so we continued.

Once in the seat, another doe showed in the ride ahead of us. She proceeded to graze in plain view for at least half an hour. It was lovely to sit and watch her but also very tempting; a couple of times I raised the rifle and picked her up in the Swarovski scope. But each time I held back.

In fairness, a good buck did show – for about two seconds, it walked briskly across the path directly

to my left. By the time I'd rotated to bring the Tikka T3 to bear it was gone. Then another, smaller buck showed briefly at extreme range, but again never stopped, saving me a tricky decision.

Colin and Les had also seen plenty of does but no bucks and we were feeling frustrated. A quick head scratch and a rapid change of venue saw us targeting Chinese water deer. We were close to Woburn, where the first population of CWD became established.

Les tends to use what he refers to as an 'ambush' technique. And boy, does Les know his ground well. The flat terrain can make life tricky in some areas and sticks were definitely an advantage.

My CWD proved to be straightforward. The animal showed in the very first field we tried, providing a comfortable 80 yard shot; 100 grains of .243 is more than enough calibre for these small deer.

Colin, too, got very lucky, encountering a terrific medal buck in the very last of the light securing himself an exceptional head for mounting.



Dom's CWD turned out not to be such a difficult target



One of those days: plenty of doe muntjac, but not a buck in sight



'As I edged right to try and force the issue it sped off, its white flag of a tale mocking me'

These deer have lovely colouration, and with their elegant build and long tusks they really do look spectacular. What had looked to be a truly disastrous trip after muntjac turned out a superb result on what we thought was going to be a troublesome subject.

Sika (March)

After a good start we suddenly found ourselves running out of time, with the end of the sika season fast approaching. Hockham Deer Management managed to put us onto an opportunity in Dorset, and we found ourselves trying to snatch a quick snooze as we awaited first light.

Stalker Morgan Andrews met up with us, he recommended we head off one at a time. Colin won the coin toss so I settled down for another sleep.

The boys returned empty handed, putting the pressure on the evening stalk. We decided to split up – I went with Morgan and Chester, the Bavarian hound, while Colin and our other Dorset sika expert Jerry Lloyd went off to a nearby high seat.

Much of the land that Morgan and Jerry shoot requires moderated rifles. I was fortunate enough to borrow Morgan's 7mm Winchester Short Magnum with handloaded 120-grain ammunition.

We spotted a small herd as soon as we exited the vehicle but they were in a poor position for a safe shot. Circling round we were unable to relocate them and ran into a pricket that was also unsafe to shoot.

Changing location yielded an immediate result though, with a young sika grazing along the edge of cover. Morgan informed me that the rising brow behind the deer would provide a safe backstop. We circled around to use a crease in the ground for cover and allow us to bisect the deer's path.

A straightforward 120 yard broadside shot presented itself and, although the deer ran about 30 yards into the thick rhododendrons, Chester found the carcass in seconds.

A short distance away Jerry and Colin waited in the high seat. Jerry had told Colin exactly where to expect the deer to appear and, sure enough, several hinds and a pricket appeared right where he'd indicated. They watched them for about 10 minutes before the pricket came clear and offered a suitable shot. Job done.

Normally Jerry and Morgan prefer a bit more time to ensure a result. We put the pressure on them, and they came up with the goods in very fine style indeed – it makes for a more exciting story if things are that bit trickier.

Muntjac (April)

So with just a couple of days left on the clock we were after muntjac (again), in an attempt to turn our magnificent seven into a great eight. Again we turned to Hockham Deer Management, this time hooking up with Kerrie Howard and HDMG director Mark Jackson on land close to the Thetford Forest in Norfolk.



Though it ran 50 yards, Dom's muntjac was a definite kill, and a good end to his mission

Kit bag

We used a number of rifles during the course of this adventure. Here's what we packed.

- Tikka T3 .243, 8x50 Swarovski, 100-grain Federal Power Shok – for the smaller deer species.
- Sauer 202 .30-06, 3-12x50 Schmidt and Bender Zenith, 150-grain Winchester – ideal for larger deer.
- Sako 75 Stainless Synthetic with T8 mod, .30-06, 6-24x50 Swarovski, 150-grain Winchester – big zoom suits open hill work while T8 useful where discretion is preferable.
- Tikka M595 .308, 8x56 Swarovski, 150-grain Federal Power Shok – Colin's preferred choice for wild boar.



The toss of a coin meant I would be stalking first (for a change). After a while we started wondering if this most obliging of species was going to scupper us at the very last. There were plenty of roe about and dozens of hares.

Soon a muntjac doe trotted across a ride in front of us before disappearing, and then another looked like it would present an opportunity. I was up onto the sticks, but although I could make out the animal's tail it simply would not offer a shot. We were close, it knew we were there and as I edged right to try and force the issue it sped off, its white flag of a tail mocking me and my ineptitude.

Five minutes later Mark stopped again. Colin had also clocked the young muntjac, 80 yards away in the wood. I set up the sticks and mounted the rifle, but couldn't pick up the animal. A large oak sat between me and the deer, but unlike the previous animal it took a step forward, presenting head and shoulder in a convenient gap.

I took the shot and watched in horror as the deer ran off, disappearing into the wood. I felt something approaching panic as I realised I'd messed up my opportunity. Mark told me to relax and rolled a

leisurely cigarette. After a five minute wait that frayed my nerves we headed over to find the muntjac lying stone dead. Entry just below the heart and an exit that had ruined the far shoulder. Quite how it had managed to run 50 yards is beyond me.

Delighted at my success – though aware Colin was still to achieve his eight – I kept to the rear of the group and smiled quietly to myself.

With no more success that morning we decamped to a local inn and feasted on a grand breakfast before retiring to a static caravan. The Hockham crew are very well-equipped to deal with visiting stalkers.

Mark returned with Kerrie later in the afternoon and we split up. Of course, with nothing riding on our outing a lovely buck was good enough to present himself at an obliging distance. With him in the bag I was more than pleased.

The evening wore on and as the light began to fade we started to worry. Finally Colin returned, and explained.

"We came across a buck and a doe as we stalked towards the high seat," he said. "But they kept popping back into cover and we couldn't get

a shot. When we did get up to the high seat a number of deer came out of cover on our right hand side but went back in before I could line up for a shot. With the light beginning to go, Kerrie spotted a pair of muntjac on our left but out of range and then, with just minutes to go, another young buck appeared on our right a bit closer – about 140 yards. I knew it would be the last chance, so I took the shot, even though I would have rather have had it a bit closer."

Talk about cutting it fine! The prospect of spending the drive home with Colin in full-on strop mode didn't bear thinking about – although, as he later pointed out, "I'd have stayed in Norfolk until I did bloody get one!"

So mission accomplished. The great eight had been attained, with less than a week to spare. We had stalked from Sussex to Dorset, Norfolk to Hertfordshire, Cumbria to Galloway. We made some firm friends and had some unforgettable experiences. Our aim was to get away from our usual stalking routine. It's fair to say that Britain offers a superb array of challenges for the sporting rifle. At the end of it all, we both have some superb memories. I would advise any sportsman to check out the outfitters in this magazine, pick an adventure and head out there and do something different. You won't regret it. ■

Contacts and useful numbers

A big thank you to all who helped us achieve the great eight. If you fancy doing the same we can highly recommend the following operators:

Hockham Deer Management (sika, muntjac, CWD), www.hockhamdmg.co.uk, 07894 833165.

Morgan Andrews (sika), 07951 573743.

Forrest Estate (wild goat, reds and roe), www.forrestestate.com, 01644 430230.

Jonathan Standing, Forest Hall Estate, 01539 552252



A last-chance 140-yard shot at a muntjac was called for to make Colin's great eight complete