



# One off roe buck



She's been hunting all her life – but only from behind a camera lens. Brian Phipps joins artist Teresa Davis to go after her first ever deer

**D**o you remember when you put your eye up to the scope and the cross-hairs on your first roe buck? I bet it's a day you'll never forget: a trembling finger poised on the trigger, perhaps a bead of sweat trickling down your brow... And it happened to sporting artist Teresa Davis the other day.

I first met Teresa at the CLA Game Fair in 2008, and caught up with her again at her studio just outside Bristol to chat about her oil paintings for a feature in April's *Sporting Rifle*. Teresa told me that, despite her vast knowledge and experience of country sports, which is reflected in her pictures, she had never fired a rifle – or any gun for that matter. "I'm a competent stalker – but only with a camera," she explained. "I go to Scotland every year and go out with professional stalkers on the open hill to get pictures that I use for reference in my paintings.

"My two ambitions are to shoot a red deer stag in Scotland and a roe buck, just once, here

in the west of England," she said. "But with such a hectic schedule I've never had the time to dedicate to it, so it's just a dream."

Never ones to leave damsels in distress, *Sporting Rifle* duly spread the word. Step forward Teresa's knight in a 4x4, Jeff Murphy of West Country Stalking. Jeff has an easy-going approach and has been giving stalking tuition for years. He set up some regular shooting sessions for Teresa on his rifle range high on the Mendip Hills in Somerset, choosing evenings with varying light conditions. Teresa turned out to be a natural, shooting satsumas on sticks and putting round after round in to a 3in target at well over 100 yards with Jeff's estate rifle, a Steyr Mannlicher .243.

It wasn't long before Jeff announced he was happy to take Teresa out stalking. As this was going to be her one and only roe buck, Jeff's remit was to make the stalk a memorable one. "I know the ideal place," he said. "I've just taken over a 40-acre patch of land based around an

equestrian centre in Wiltshire. The roe deer have been playing havoc in the fields and paddocks set aside for the horses and as they didn't have a stalker on the premises previously, I'm trying to keep on top of things. There are plenty of bucks around and some are real crackers."

Jeff picks us up early one evening in his 110 Land Rover. The equestrian centre, set in the shadow of the Westbury White Horse carved into the hillside, is often busy, so Jeff calls on his mobile phone to check all is OK before our arrival. "We've got the all clear," he confirms. The 110 kicks up plenty of dust as we make our way down the dry lanes bordered by the familiar bright yellow of the rape flower or lush grass and waving seas of barley. The early evening sun is still out with a vengeance, albeit slowly making its way towards the horizon.

"It's still warm so there is no hurry – the roe will probably be laid up," says Jeff. "The deer here wander around the paddocks right next to the stables in the early morning and late



Jeff checks out the 40-acre patch in the shadow of the Westbury White Horse



300 3-12x56 scope and a Wildcat moderator. The stalking sticks are simply green garden poles from a DIY shop.

Jeff runs through the basics of the rifle once more, and Teresa takes a few minutes to get used to using the sticks and picks various points around the adjacent field to get her eye familiar with the scope. Taking Jeff's advice not to wear camouflage, she's dressed in green Le Chameau clothing, perfectly adequate for the situation. The three of us gradually make our way around the stables and outbuildings. Roe in the immediate area have been almost unmolested here, so have been known to approach the stables unconcerned while the staff work away nearby.

But today we are on our own, so with acres of Wiltshire countryside to explore we leave the

stable block behind. Fields of buttercups carpet the ground in front of us, with many fields yet to be cut. "It's going to be hard going, because if the deer are still laid up we won't see them until we almost stand on them," says Jeff. Pushing on through hedgerows, we stumble across a well-used deer run complete with fresh slots. Teresa enthusiastically scans the fields and we carry on walking. With the sun beginning to set the air is noticeably cooler, and Jeff is confident that the deer will be on the move soon. We take a couple more steps and flush a doe not 30 yards from us, which runs across the field before pausing to look back. "Well, at least there is one deer around," grins Jeff.

Decision time. "I want to head towards two secluded small silage fields we haven't checked

evening, so a discreet approach is essential." Arriving at the livery we slowly make our way down the drive, the Land Rover barely ticking over, and pull up between two rows of stables, hopefully well out of view. Teresa is still using the estate rifle, coupled with a Meopta Artemis

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Moving through the hedgerows, the stalkers stumble across a well-used deer run



Teresa and Jeff opt for a neck shot due to the high grass



Femme fatale: Teresa sets the crosshairs on the buck

yet that have thrown up some surprises recently," says Jeff. "They have not yet been cut and as the grass is averaging three inches deep, it will be difficult to see the deer if they are still not moving." Jeff creeps up to the gate slowly. His eyes immediately settle on the far corner of the field. Following his stare we spy a standing buck enjoying the last rays of sun, oblivious to the huntress and her two companions.

Teresa moves cautiously forward as Jeff beckons her closer and fixes the buck with the Leupold rangefinder, which records a distance of only 35 meters. There's no hurry, as the buck seems relaxed. Teresa spreads the sticks, lowers

the Steyr Mannlicher into the V rest and shoulders the rifle. Silently easing the safety catch off she picks up her quarry through the scope. The buck is perfectly positioned, with a raised bank behind him providing a backstop, and Teresa is in a slightly elevated position. Remembering her training on the range she takes two deep breaths and holds the third. The moderator does its job, suppressing the noise of the .243 bullet as it is propelled in the buck's direction. Jeff and Teresa chose a neck shot due to the high grass and the buck is felled where he stands. Teresa instantly reloads without her eye leaving the scope, and waits for the all clear from Jeff. He confirms all

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Dead-on damsel: Teresa and trophy with the .243 Steyr Mannlicher that did the business



Smiles all round: Teresa and Jeff with a superb Wiltshire roe buck

is well by giving her a pat on the back, and a board smile emerges from behind the stock.

Quickly hopping over the gate, we cautiously make our way over to the fallen beast and Teresa gently presses the buck's eye with the shooting sticks. With no sign of movement we move in closer to inspect her trophy. Jeff looks pleased as we examine the smashing six-point buck. We had been lucky to find a shootable beast on Teresa's first outing after just three hours of stalking.

Jeff grallochs the buck quickly because of the fading light, with Teresa lending a hand. "I wasn't nervous at all," she says afterwards.

"This is something I've always wanted to do. What a wonderful stalk with the perfect result – it was so exhilarating. I couldn't wish for anything more."

I look at Teresa and say, "I have one more bit of good news. Vincent Brigode, the factor at Giack Estate, has invited you up to stalk a red stag in October." Teresa was speechless for

the first time since I've known her as we headed back to the Land Rover with her first buck. Her chatter soon returned on the journey home, reliving her first roebuck experience and barely containing her excitement about her forthcoming trip to the Scottish highlands. ■

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**Teresa Davis is a wildlife and sporting artist. To find out more about her, read the feature in April's *Sporting Rifle*, or you can meet her on her stand at the following shows:**  
**CLA Game Fair (stand D462): 24-26 July**  
**Honiton Agricultural Show: 6 August**  
**Midland Game Fair: 19-20 September**  
[www.teresadavis.co.uk](http://www.teresadavis.co.uk)

