



# The Hunting Calendar

COMPILED BY JOHN BISSELL, JAMIE CARLE, MARK JEFFARES, JAMIE MUNN, NEIL PHILPOTT, ROY SLOAN, PAUL STENNING AND GREG DULEY

At this time of the year, things are starting to wind down rut-wise for our main deer species but starting to build for others, especially tahr and chamois.

And of course, this is the time for waterfowling, with the main winter season starting on the first weekend in May throughout the country.

## RED DEER

In most places, the Red deer rut will be pretty much over but contrary to popular belief, May can be a great time of the year for the Red deer hunter. The stags will go pretty quiet for a couple of weeks after they finish rutting, which is usually the last week in April and the first week in May. After that, their metabolism kicks right in and they are flat out trying to cram in as much high quality feed as they can, to make up for what they lost over the rut and to prepare for winter. Added to that is the

reduced competition because a lot of hunters are chasing those small feathery things.

During May, hunt the areas that offer the best feed: flats, slips and bush feed faces. All of these areas can produce a stag at this time of year. For those of you with farm access; go looking for a crop or paddocks that have been shut up for a while. Be there right on first light - half an hour afterwards may be too late. The stags will often be mobbing up again so don't be too hasty in shooting the first one you see because the big fellas hang back a bit to make sure it is safe. In areas of low or no chopper pressure, the tops are still a great place to hunt at this time of year. May weather can be outstanding with long fine, settled periods.

June brings colder weather and the deer start to settle into their winter feeding patterns as their metabolism drops. Still keep your eyes peeled in the May spots but start to pay particular attention to mid-level, north facing feed faces in the bush. Consider which parts of your hunting areas hold good food sources such as broadleaf, five finger, lancewood, marble leaf, mahoe, kamahi, the large-leaved coprosma species and/or grasses.



*You'll still find Red stags on the tops after the rut feeding up before the winter, choppers permitting! Photo Corey Geddes*

Go looking for high slips and open patches that catch a lot of sun and keep your eyes on open spots where the sun hits. Deer can come out on to these at any time of the day. I have shot plenty of deer on slips just as the sun hits them after a cold night or a spell of bad weather. If you're not a bush hunter, then focus on these spots.

## SIKA

The Sika rut carries on quite strongly into May at times, with peaks of activity right through the month. You will find stags a long way from their

home territories as they search out the last few cycling hinds and they can really cover the country at this time of year. They can come up to a roar quite strongly, thinking they've found a hind when they more than likely haven't. This can cause quite a bit of roaring activity, with more stags around the last few cycling hinds.

By June it is pretty much over, and what we've said above for Reds in May now fits the bill. The stags will still be in the hind country, but hunt the best feed areas now, which is not necessarily their roaring territory, where they were in April.

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*This is still a very good time to target Sika stags. Grant from Allan Millars H&F happy with his stag*

## CHAMOIS

Chamois are heavily rutting during May so it's a great time to be climbing into nanny country. Bucks will come from afar to service a group of nannies and leading up to and throughout the rut, bucks can be found wandering the ridges and spurs in search of a mate. And they can be quite careless about their endeavours, which is in your favour. In my opinion, a good layer of snow makes glassing for chamois tracks in the snow much easier. It can become difficult though when you have bits of snow scattered across your hunting area with rocks or dark objects protruding through. Glassing the country then resembles a television set with no reception - and given that chamois tend to hole up in that broken steep country - there will be a few television sets around!

## TAHR

Mid to late June/early July is a great time to head out for a bull as he will be starting to turn into a puff ball and he'll be strutting around, curling his upper lip to his female counterparts (fellas, maybe that's the trick??). The mature bulls will kick the younger bulls out so there will be a few roaming about, trying to find somewhere to fit in. If you're after a good bull, it will pay to pass up these young roamers and keep an eye out for the mature bull in a larger group of nannies and juveniles. If you're just after your first tahr, then this is also a great time to be out.

As with chamois, go back to those spots that typically hold good nanny numbers, because that's where you'll find the bulls. And be prepared to climb into the steep stuff during June/July as this is the time of year that the bulls show more interest in rutting than feeding. Typically, you'll find them amongst the bluffs and perched on prominent rock shelves overlooking and defending their domain.

They will still move down a couple of hundred metres during the late afternoon/evenings, keeping an eye on their female counterparts while they feed. If you want to avoid climbing into the steep stuff, you still have the option of positioning yourself at the base of a set of bluffs and playing the waiting game. Bulls will be quite dark coloured and their coats will be really starting to thicken up, which is something to bear in mind when you're deciding what calibre to select and where to place your shot.

## WAPITI

The month of May can be a good time to hunt Wapiti, and I treat it just like spring. The animals will be feeding up after the rut as the bulls try to regain lost weight. They can be out in the open feeding just as long as the weather is kind and as a rule of thumb, it's not too bad in May/June. The sun is low in the sky and Fiordland can be very cold this time of year so go prepared. A good place to start looking for a trophy is a feed area on the open tops, any slip country and the heads of the valleys. Just remember - leave those young animals till next year.



*This is rut time for the Whitetail, and where there are does, there'll be a buck along soon enough!*

## FALLOW

The Fallow rut will be coming to an end mid-way through this period but keep an eye out for a late buck around the does. I have found that bucks tend to drift back into their male groups and feed up before winter, not unlike the Reds. If you hunt the Greenstone/Caples area, they can be found in and around the scrubby faces where the bushes seem to retain more heat. This micro-climate allows for a longer growing season for the grasses. The same can be said for the Blue Mountains, where a good place to look for a buck can be the young pine and cut-over areas. You will need to be on the ball early in the mornings or wait until last light with these well-educated animals. Also, don't forget about the broadleaf faces where the animals can be found picking up the early winter leaf fall.

## WHITETAIL

This is Whitetail rut time and these animals rut well into June. Unlike other deer, Whitetail don't make a sound when they rut; nor do they hold groups of does. The norm for a buck is to have an area around which he has a number of rutting pads. He will walk around his area checking these pads, so knowing his routine is a good way to get a look at him. Does he visit these pads every day or every second day?



*Sambar hinds and stags will still be putting on condition before their rut.  
Photo: Daniel Weggery*

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If the pads are being used, sit somewhere and watch them. If you have the wind right, you may get a look at him. In his area, there will be a number of does living and once a doe comes into season, he will spend a lot of time with her for a few days. The old bucks have a habit of keeping to the thick stuff so keep an eye on those thick Stewart Island faces. They are not hard to find.

### SAMBAR

By this period, most stags will be out of velvet and starting to get ready for the rut, which will get underway by mid-June. Stags will be doing their rounds, visiting wallows and scrapes. Your best bet will be to sit back and watch over an area where the stag is likely to pass through on his way to the wallow or scrape. They tend to follow the same path. If

you are patient enough to sit and wait, you have a good chance of being rewarded. Don't be tempted to shoot a young stag just because it is with a group of hinds. A bigger stag is likely to come along to do the job when the hinds are ready to be mated.

### RUSA

The month of May will see the hardening of antler for Rusa stags and by mid to late June, they will be getting ready for their rut, which will be underway by July. With winter and its lower temperatures approaching, be sure to make the most of any fine spells, as Rusa will be out on slips soaking up as much warmth as possible, especially early in the morning. If you find one Rusa, you're likely to see others with it so be patient - and you might just find what you are looking for. 



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