



Hunting like an *Edwardian*



After acquiring a 100-year-old W.J. Jeffery rifle, Andrew Venables takes a trip back in time and stalks in on a muntjac in classic fashion

I recently travelled to Berkshire to join my friend, the game chef and deer manager Mike Robinson, to help deal with the equivalent of a large flock of show-jumping sheep roving through thousands of acres of crops and causing significant damage. These huge herds of up to 350 fallow deer can be seen in the middle of the day, grazing and sunning themselves in enormous rolling fields, some as large as 300 acres. There is no cover available to stalk in and with hundreds of eyes and noses defying the hunter's approach they are easily disturbed, often moving several miles to another location outside the stalking territory of those responsible for their management.

One solution to the problem is to cull at longer ranges, which obviously requires considerable professional skill, the right equipment, good back-up, and a high degree of caution to ensure safe, humane shooting. After a day setting up, spotting and shooting at longer distances where the focus was narrow and concentration intense, I needed a change of pace to remind me what hunting is really about. I found my alter ego by using a delightful recent acquisition and addition to the Venables gun cabinet(s).

This acquisition came about after Mark Crudginton, of George Gibbs gun makers, and a tweed-clad group of muzzleloaders came to WMS Firearms Training this summer and whetted my appetite with a wonderful collection of antique shotguns and rifles. The old kit still did the job effectively and targets clanged amid palls of white smoke, the smell of sulphur, thumps, cracks and laughter. I was very taken with a couple of turn-of-the-century bolt-action rifles. Open sights, real wood, classic calibres and workmanship to die for flicked a switch in my otherwise pragmatic shooting brain. A few months later at the Holt's September auction the hammer went down on a 6.5x54 Mannlicher Schoenauer by W.J. Jeffery on a Steyr 1903 action made in 1903 for Lord Brownlow. Sold to Mr Venables. Clonk.

Back in Berkshire, my stalking day started under a clear, crisp sky at 6.45am sharp. The Jeffery, duly charged with five rounds of lethal-looking 160gn round-nosed soft point, was ready to shine, having proven its open sights on targets at 100 and 200 yards. Realistically, on smaller deer, ranges out to 100 yards would be an elegant sufficiency.

Setting out quietly down a track leading to a beautiful 200-acre wood of mature, deciduous native trees, I was quickly galvanised by Mike pointing into a paddock and whispering, "Bloody hell, it's the muntjac that's raiding the rose garden, take it!" Stopping for just long enough at 40 yards for me to mount the rifle, the muntjac then bolted for the hedge, only to appear on the track moments later. As she stopped for the classic look back I got the sights onto her chest but she turned into the wood at the moment I fired, leaving the bullet to punch fresh air before burying itself harmlessly in the ground. The shot rang around us, its echoing boom very different from the muffled thud of my usual moderated rifles.



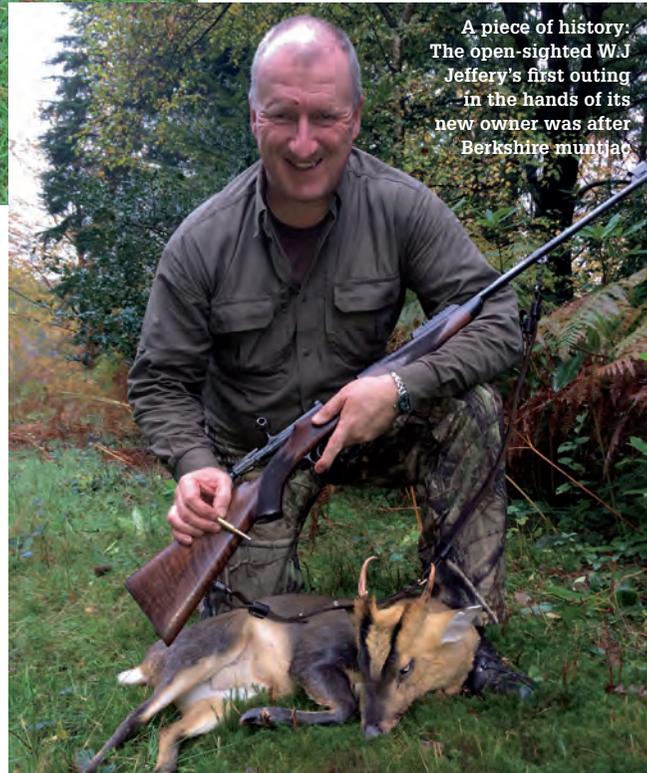
Muntjac: Berkshire



Instant drop: The muntjac was down on the spot to the 160gn soft-nosed bullet



We moved on, with Mike muttering darkly about the gardener, the ninja flower raider and plans for its demise



A piece of history: The open-sighted W.J. Jeffery's first outing in the hands of its new owner was after Berkshire muntjac

A detailed inspection of the spot and five minutes with Millie the wonder dog analysing every nuance of scent confirmed a clean miss. It happens. We moved on, with Mike muttering darkly about the gardener, the ninja flower raider and plans for its demise.

Stalking in mature English woodland is wonderful thanks to the variety of flora and fauna, and as we moved the numbers of squirrels we saw feeding rather than fleeing confirmed our pace was reasonable. We took a few minutes here and there to try the Buttolo deer call to see if we could distract a muntjac buck from his morning rounds in the undergrowth, but to no avail. We paid particular attention to movements around the various pheasant feeders along the rides and this soon rewarded us. Peering into a small clearing some 70 yards to our left a different shape caught Mike's eye amid the hen pheasants fussing near a feeder. A quick glance through his bins confirmed the backside of a muntjac, which disappeared behind a large sweet chestnut trunk. Quietly I set up on the sticks, breathed deeply, flicked up the 100-yard leaf sight, moved the silent wing safety from right to left and waited. It took only a moment for the buck to dart from the safety of the trunk to the open ground beside the feeder and stick his head underneath for breakfast.

Focus on the front bead... set it in the shallow V rear sight with a bit of light around it... put the bead on the deer's inside shoulder noting its position, slightly quartered towards us... take up the first pressure on the trigger... check sight alignment... squeeze and boom. As the shot broke I could see the deed was done as the buck dropped instantly. I reloaded and reset the sights on the deer's now inert form as Mike confirmed the round had landed on the button at the base of the neck. After waiting for a minute to be sure, I made safe and Mike moved forwards with Millie to further her training. She sniffed the deer which, unusually, was lying on its brisket to confirm all life extinguished, rather like a miniature of one of Walter "Karamojo" Bell's 300 elephants, taken between 1900 and 1930, with the same calibre using 160gn steel jacketed solids.

My W.J. Jeffery, made 111 years ago for a calibre invented 114 years ago, was regulated to shoot a 160gn bullet of high sectional density at a relatively slow 2,400fps. It did the job perfectly then – it went on to be used by Lord Brownlow's gamekeeper to cull fallow on his estate – and still does now. The round severed the spine in front of the left shoulder, clipped the right shoulder and exited leaving a 15mm hole and little surrounding meat damage. In my experience, the 100gn .243 or 150gn .308 typically used in this type of stalking will render the front quarters inedible with this shot placement. While it would be presumptuous of me to make claims for the round I used based on taking just one deer, it appears there is much to be said for decent thoracic bullet placement, modest velocity and high sectional density. I generally learn something new every time I hunt but it's not often the teacher is over a century old. Thank you Mr Jeffery. I look forward to our next outing. ■