

# Eight tips for fair dinkum deer hunters

By Marcus O'Dean | 8 June 2016

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Ted's fallow buck taken with 7mm-08

#### Tip 1 – Get Fit

Get yourself into reasonable condition for trekking up and down a few hills and hopefully carrying a back pack loaded with venison and antlers back to your camp. If you are not fit enough, then your hunt will be a disaster right from the start, unless you're an awful lucky hunter. With me, keeping fit has been something I have always enjoyed doing. All my life I have been one to do a few exercises most mornings. Having also been walking hills chasing deer since my teens, possibly that has helped me to keep fit naturally. Now at age 72 I still enjoy walking the mountains although certainly a lot slower than I did in my thirties. A good easy exercise is to **get into your hunting boots and wear a loaded back pack and start walking around the block, doing longer walks each time. Walking up and down stairs is great too.** Once you are used to walking many miles in your hunting boots carrying a loaded pack, a slow stalk/walk in the hills will seem much easier to you.

#### Tip 2 – Gear You Wear And Carry

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(<http://www.sportingshootermag.com.au/oversights-activists-slam-supermarket-for-selling-kangaroo-meat-in-stores>)

Now the next thing you need to think about is what you're wearing and carrying. Firstly you certainly need a good **strong comfortable pair of boots** with good ankle support as sore feet or blisters will ruin a hunt. (The walking around the block in training will certainly break your hunting boots in and make them a breeze to wear) Good **serviceable clothing and light gloves, hat and a face net are very handy** for the deer hunter. Maybe you can be lucky enough to run around in jeans and T shirt, with your face shining in the sunshine and jag a decent stag or buck, but to be on the safe side good comfortable hunting clothes are a must. There are many makers who sell great hunting clothing, just check out the adverts in this magazine to find a few. **A small day pack** will be a handy thing to have along with a few snacks inside plus some wet weather gear, camera, phone, spare knife, torch, GPS, matches, toilet paper etc, etc and the list here can be endless as it depends on whether you're out for a day hunt or a full weekend or maybe even longer. **(Check out Zach Spark's article on the hunter's daypack in this issue.)** One other important thing is a **good pair of high end binoculars**. As a small but very important extra thing, a **blaze orange piece of clothing should be worn**, especially if you are lucky enough to score a deer, as carrying a deer head on your back with nothing to show another hunter that it has already been shot, could prove dangerous. Even a blaze orange hat would do to be visible to others.

### Tip 3 – Arm Yourself

Next will be a suitable rifle and scope that you know you can handle well. Minimum calibre in my opinion for say fallow deer is the humble .243 with a suitable 90 or 100grain projectile. For larger deer, larger calibres are more suitable ranging from the 7mm-08 upwards to whatever calibre rifle suits you. Main thing being is that you can handle it well with no flinch. Importantly you should practice well with your chosen rifle and be able to fire it with reasonable consistency, whether leaning on a tree/rock or off the shoulder, as sometimes this will be what is needed to be able to get that deer that breaks cover unexpectedly. Projectiles are very important too, as if they are too heavy for your chosen calibre chances are they will not expand and pass through an animal doing very little damage allowing it to run far enough to lose it and this is something we never want to happen. **Reading through Nick Harvey's column you should get a fair idea of correct size projectiles for the game you hunt**, but as a rough idea a good 140grain from a 7mm-08, a 150grain from a .308 or similar, a 165grain from a .30-06 or 180grain from a .300Win Mag and so on. As deer are a relatively thin-skinned animals, normal cup and core projectiles will do the job very well so long as they are well constructed and most popular brands will get in to prove lethal. Mono projectiles are also very good, but in my humble opinion they perform better if slightly lighter than the normal weight cup and core you would use. A good idea that is also inexpensive is to do **a lot of practice shooting offhand with a .22**. Shooting away a brick or two will get your eye in and give you an idea of your stance for that offhand shot, while reinforcing that vital muscle memory necessary to be automatic.



Red stags by two

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#### Tip 4 - Know Your Deer Species

Study up on the deer species you wish to hunt and **where to aim for a sure killing shot**. Try to learn whatever you can about the chosen animal, **footprints, droppings, wallows** etc. For most deer hunters the rut is the main start of the hunting, but some pre-season exploring can be very rewarding for you. Those binoculars mentioned before will be very handy to you if you find a cozy spot high on a hill overlooking as much country as you can. With some luck you might even see some deer and be able to watch them to learn their habits. **Look for rubbed trees where a stag or buck is marking his territory**, scrapes for fallow and preaching trees for sambar. Wallows are good to take note of and if you own a trail camera then you should set it up in what you think is a well used area and maybe get some great photos of animals doing their thing.

#### Tip 5 - When The Hunt Begins

Awareness of **wind direction is of utmost importance to you** as a deer can smell you from a long way and just disappear without you even knowing you were close to them. Naturally hot air rises and cool air sinks, so early **in the mornings while the air is cool I try to hunt down low** as if your up higher than the intended animal chances are your smell could drift down to it, then slowly I make my way up to a higher elevation. Naturally you should always use the wind direction to your advantage. In spots where it's easy to hunt low down, moving very slowly and glassing often with your binoculars can often work for you. (This worked especially well for me and the editor Marcus O Dean quite recently) Quite often though it is not possible to hunt lower down so make sure where you do hunt, the wind is in your favour. **Later in the day as the warmer air rises it is better to be higher on the mountain with good views.** As the day warms up even the cool air from low down will rise causing a mountain breeze. Deer don't like strong wind as it affects their best danger detectors, their ears and noses, so on a very windy day they will often keep to lower, thicker country and valleys out of the wind. Deer also like to get warm on a cold morning, so a secluded spot where the sun first hits on a hill is often where you might spot them.

Tip 6 -The way you walk is important

Naturally you should **walk very slowly and as quietly as possible, stopping often to glass and check your back trail.** Sometimes deer will stay very still in hiding rather than run and give themselves away, then move out after you have passed. I have actually witnessed three red hinds hide behind a patch of lantana while my mate who was hunting on the other side of the mountain walked right past them within twenty metres. The country there was pretty open and the deer were probably just caught out. After he had passed the patch of lantana they just calmly walked away and crossed back over the track he was using. Maybe it doesn't happen often but who really knows and that episode made me always look behind me every now and then when walking in the bush. Also another thing about **looking behind you is you will see what the country will look like on your return trip.** People often get a bit mixed up when returning through rough country as it can look totally different when walking back. **Skylining yourself when crossing hill tops is something you should try not to do.** Use a bush or tree as cover while crossing the hill top. **Staying in the shade** is far better than walking in the sun as movement is more noticeable in the sunny spots. If high on the hill or mountain make sure that you are not high enough for any part of your body to be sky lined as the sun starts to rise or drop, as it could make you more visible. Try to **use deer or cattle tracks while hunting** as these are ready made mountain roads and most of the noisy stuff has been kicked out of the way, also they follow the easiest ways around the hills. Naturally **deer will also follow the easiest route while walking and feeding.**

Tip 7 – Hunt In The Rut

The Rut or Roar is probably the most exciting time to hunt. There is nothing quite like sitting on a hill listening to red stags roaring each other or fallow bucks grunting. **An old cow horn or a piece of poly pipe makes a good item to use to try to roar in a stag.** **With red deer for example, sometimes they might be very quiet and a small roar might just get them going.** Usually I have found the **stags that make the most noise are usually the smaller stags and the big ones only let out a low moan now and then.** It's great to try to home in on a roaring stag and actually roar them in towards you. My son Brenton is an expert in this and often calls stags in very close even as close as ten or so metres, but being mainly a bow hunter he needs to get them in as close as possible to be able to take a shot. **If roaring, don't overdo it** as often your loud roars could scare a stag away rather than towards you, or if one is close he will sneak in on you and try to work out what you are and then just disappear.

**Sometimes it's far better to just sit and listen and use their roars to enable you to get in close enough** to take a shot. **Doe or hind calls will often entice a stag or buck during the rut**, so practice these calls too while practicing roaring. Usually in the early part of the rut mostly the smaller stags will be doing most of the roaring and the big boys will come along a little later on and take over. Sitting on the side of a hill overlooking good country with your binoculars is a great way to go. In some places where there are lots of deer the rut can go full swing and be very exciting with a few stags all roaring at once. Then in other spots where there are not too many deer, the rut can be a very quiet time as the competition is just not there to harass them, but just persevere and put in the time and it will definitely happen at some time.

 Hinds will often give the hunter away.

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#### Tip 8 - Housekeeping

Finally getting your deer is a great achievement and very rewarding. First thing to do is to **be quite sure that the animal is dead** and then **set it up in a good position for a photo shoot.** **Clean any excess blood away** and make it look tasteful as photos with blood and guts everywhere are no good at all. After the photo shoot, then if it's a stag or buck and you want to have it mounted, then **take your time and do a good job of caping.** If a doe, hind or stag and you want the meat, **make sure the animal is well bled.** Try to keep your hands that have touched the skin away from the meat until they are cleaned. It's good to take some disposable rubber gloves with you for this reason. Once your deer has been packed into your back pack make sure you **put some bright orange tape or an orange shirt over the antlers or pack for safety** reasons. Then take your time heading back and savouring your successful hunt.

Good hunting


**Ted Mitchell Snr**

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