



# BUSH HUNTING TACTICS

# CHEATING STAGS

## WITH ELECTRONIC CALLERS

**Some hunters might feel that using modern electronic gear like callers can take some of the challenge away from their hunting and that's fine. I have myself hunted bare feet with a home-made bow and arrow set and actually, to my Mother's surprise, made two notable kills as well. While they were very satisfying at the time, killing two sparrows at the age of twelve only made me save harder for an airgun and I must admit there was no hope for me after that!**

My point is, I do understand if you like to keep using your old cow horn but I suggest you read on anyway as you might just pick up some new found inspiration.

I use what is known as an "AJ Caller" and make no bones about it. It's the first and the best on the market in my books. It's got calls designed for local game from ducks to Wapiti and they work, sometimes too well as I'll get onto later. They are designed by

Allan Foot who distributes them under "AJ Productions" and hence their name.

Despite them being a bit sensitive to water and a bit bulky to carry I am convinced I see more stags using one. However, there are a few things with them that I want to share with you so let's get started...

With Sika deer, keeping in mind that Sika are the most vocal of all deer species worldwide, it makes sense that they respond very well to calling.

1) Firstly, from my experience if you want replies from Sika stags (and who wouldn't), then rather than use the traditional "Single-call" I use the "Hee-haw" call and I use it on nearly full volume (call no.2 on the AJ Caller). It works especially well through an attached booster speaker although you do have the connecting wires and more batteries to contend with.

2) The "Hee-haw" is the territorial call that is used to attract hinds and the more repetitions within the call (within reason) the better and the more replies you will get.

*There you are! Spooked a stag without seeing him? He won't come back to your calling but you want to see what he's like? Try setting a trail camera right where he departed from only down the trail slightly. There's a very good chance he will quietly come back after you have gone. Pick your camera up the next day and check the results - it's worked for me!*



The caller is set to play five Hee-haws with the very last one tapering off. If you cut it back to four by stopping the caller early you will get far less replies and with three calls almost no replies at all. That is because the larger the animal, the more dominate (generally) and the more the girls are attracted to his calling so they try to do a longer, more repetitive call. This is a good point to remember before you chase off after that Sika stag that is only doing three or four Hee-haws. They appear to lose breath gradually as they call and watching them it's like they cannot draw enough air to replace what they are losing. Bigger lungs mean a bigger animal and longer Hee-haw calls.

What's interesting is that with Whitetail and Red deer, studies have shown that without the roaring from stags the hinds will not come into season and I suspect this is true for Sika as well.

3) If you are with your mate and he has a caller, try using them together to produce seven or eight Hee-haws. You may be very surprised at the results! Remember, this calling is used to attract hinds so will work better as you approach the peak of the roar in mid-April.

4) Reds will reply even more readily than Sika if not too disturbed and the loudest "challenge call" (no.1 on the caller) works best. When a Red is interested you can switch to the Reply roar (no.2) which really improves your results. It is only slightly different than the first roar but really gets a Red stag revved up!

Note here, you must change the cards inside your caller for different animal types. They are purchased separately for about \$50 each. The new caller has different cards to the old model and they are not compatible so check first.

5) There is another excellent call that will produce very good replies from Sika stags and that is a quiet fawn-call (call no. 5). It works best early morning when hinds are moving as this is when stags are very active in trying to snare one. It works like magic when a stag is close as well and at any time of the day.

I suggest that you get up high on a side spur or ridge on a still morning and play this call on very low volume, where you know a stag hangs out.

*My Scoutguard trail cam caught a Red stag roaring in 2011. Sometimes you get a very lucky shot like this one!*



This old stag came into a Fawn call last roar after several Single calls had no result. He had eluded me before on several different occasions but found the quiet Fawn call on the A.J Caller to be irresistible. Note the external speaker attached to my daypack.



Be aware that there are always likely to be other hunters about when you are roaring. Two hunters caught on trail camera 2011. At least they are wearing blaze orange.

After all, this is the same call a hind makes and is exactly what a stag is listening for. You will be surprised at how far away a stag will hear this call and then reply with a set of Hee-haw calls himself, certainly from several hundred metres!

**6) I must mention, there is one major disadvantage in using the Hee-haw call up high and on full volume and that is; you will call in other hunters – sometimes several!**

If they are using a caller as well you can be in for some real hair-raising moments as I have found out in the past.

Remember that the calls on the AJ Caller are **actual recordings of deer** so get yourself some good blaze orange clothing before you start pressing the buttons!

7) The Single-call (call no.1) is the most aggressive call and can sometimes be heard all day continuously when a master stag has a hind in season with him. Sometimes they will use the call at very

low levels just so the stags close by hear it and keep their distance. It is common to find several stags together when this occurs and it can be very hard to call a stag away to get a look without spooking the hind away. If she goes, the stags will most certainly follow.

It can occasionally be heard when a stag is challenged but you will usually hear it when a stag has a hind on heat with him.

The Single-call works for you as well and you can not play it too loud, no matter how close the stag. It was made famous by the legendary Sika hunter, Neil Philpott, who produced the well known Sika Safari DVD (highly recommended!) and who writes a column for this magazine.

8) Beware! If you use the Single-call to reply to another stag who is Single-calling you will most certainly put the hind away. Unless the area you hunt in has had very little hunting pressure which is most unlikely these days.

**9) I believe Sika stags are getting a bit immune to the Single-call as Sika deer have very good memories and will remember a single event for at least a year!**

If you use it to call in a stag and then leave the area, there is a good chance the stag will come in and pick up your ground scent after you are gone. Even worse, if you keep calling after he cuts your wind he may NEVER come into your call again. He will certainly be much harder to call in the following year.

10) Now, where was I? Oh yes, when you want to call a Sika stag away from a bunch of deer with a nervous hind close by, try the Fawn call (call no.5), it can work very well.

Last roar I called three different stags out, one at a time, from a group under these conditions in tight bush while the hind squealed the whole time in protest of my noisy approach! They just can't help themselves as they think an-

*This 6-point Sika replied to a Hee-Haw call on the 13th April 2011 from about 200 metres away. He gave five Hee-haws and as expected we discovered later he was five years old. After using the Fawn call every five minutes he finally showed up 35 minutes later. I shot him from about 2 metres away. Note that a 6-pointer like this will always be a six and will not grow into an eight.*



work very well if your mate is calling with a Single-call and you reply with the spiker call, repeated four or five times in close succession and then sit quietly. Use it on mid-volume as it travels very well. I have also had some success with it after spooking a spiker and then calling. It settles him down and before you know it the stag turns up.

The spiker call may also be good before the stags join up with a spiker in mid-late March. It makes sense as most stags will have found a spiker for company by the first week of April.

15) Another point with Red stags, take care using call no.3 as this is to warn other stags off. It's the grunt of course and should be saved for when there is a stag really heated up and grunting at you.

**When that happens, expect him to come in fast, as he wants to sort the intruder out!**

other hind is close by so they want to take a look. Even when they hear you approaching, just Fawn-call again and carry on as they are expecting a deer and will usually not depart.

If you are making lots of noise travelling, as sometimes the bush dictates, use the stag mew (no.3) rather than a challenging single-call as I find it settles the deer down much more.

Remember to turn your volume right down or place your hand over the speaker as it appears to work best when done quietly.

This is a most exciting time as there could be a big stag from the neighbours there that you have never seen before, you just never know!

11) When you are heading to your hunting spot for the day and you come across a Sika stag Single-calling (and a hind cycling) elsewhere, remember that the stag you were planning to hunt that day (where you've seen all that stag sign) will most likely not be in his territory, unless he has a hind of his own. As you will know, if you have followed this magazine, stags will travel up to a couple of kilometres during the roar chasing hinds.

**12) If you think they are bound by territories, marked with rub trees or geographical boundaries such as creeks or ridges, then think again!**

My trail cams have shown clearly that they travel a couple of grid squares on

your map in a single day no problem at all. They will go to the closest hind cycling as that's where the action is. Next day they are usually back as the hinds only cycle for a very short time.

Every day is different while hunting Sika during the roar!

13) With Red deer, to pull away an old stag from cover when a full-blooded roar has no effect, try the fawn call (no.5) followed by the hind call (no.4). These are two very effective calls. After all, think about it - can you blame them for wanting to have their way with a hind over a scrap with the neighbour?!

**Using the Fawn call when a Red stag is close can drive him wild!**

14) One Sika call that I have not mentioned is the spiker call (no.4). I have found it can

I'm sure there are many other ways to use the caller. You can try adding your own calls as well that have worked for you in the past. Have patience. Often it can take 30 minutes for the bush to quieten down after you have arrived. And last of all, if in doubt, during the roar go to where the noise is, that's where all the action is likely to be. 🦌

*I had split up from hunting Mate Shane Batchelor an hour earlier (for the second time that day) when he took this pretty but light timbered 8-pointer. This was the second 8-pointer Shane shot from the same gully only a couple of hours previously that same morning. After his Hee-Haw call was replied to, Shane waited him out patiently while quietly using the Fawn and Spiker calls. The second stag turned up despite his first shot only a couple of hours ago.*

