

BUSH HUNTING TACTICS NO.9 - SIKA STAGS - WHERE DO THEY GO?

by Martin Askes

More on Wallows (refer Oct/Nov 2010 issue for rest of article) --->>

Using Trail cameras provides a lot of information about animals that are undisturbed that would be almost impossible to obtain any other way. The cameras quietly sit there for weeks or even months on end, in all sorts of weather, waiting for an animal to pass.

Wallows for Sika stags are like a communal area that no particular stag owns. When Sika stags visit them they do so in an orderly and civilised way. They do their "thing" one at a time, and if another stag shows up, generally they just wait their turn and when a stag finishes another one arrives shortly after.

When a stag arrives he has a good sniff around then starts to select himself a spot to sit down. He will dig about with his antlers, sometimes aggressively, and scrape with his hooves before kneeling to sit. What he is doing is checking for rocks or sticks that he might otherwise kneel on. If he finds a stick or a stone he will remove it or find another spot. They don't like kneeling on rocks or other stuff and who would?

Soft muddy spots are preferred and when they sit, they lie down and stretch their necks out and rub the sides of their faces onto the dirt and mud. As they have pre-orbital glands below the eyes I assume they are leaving their stag "signature" in scent together with scent from the belly and pizzle area.

They then have a bit of a roll (not right over) before rising to shake themselves, much like your dog after a wet retrieve on the ducks.

Then they always clean their antlers.

They do this by rubbing them on their backs, on both sides, and if there is a handy bush nearby they may thrash that to clean them too. I believe that the reason for the antler cleaning is that big white antler tips give the individual stag status and stops much of the fighting between stags. That's the reason they polish their antlers and that's what they are looking for when they answer your roars (hopefully) and come over for a look. They want to check out your antlers, so of

course you've got to keep them clean.

The whole process may take just 20 seconds or up to 10 minutes or more.

Can you tell if big stags are visiting the wallow?

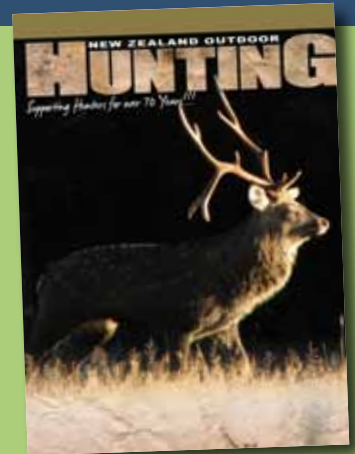
Look closely at the body depressions for antler marks. Often you can see where he has rubbed his neck and the end of his antlers can mark the ground and give you a good idea of his length.

Strangely enough, it looks like the young stags with their first heads use a different wallow. These are the young resident stags and it now looks like it is not just a coincidence that many of these small stags are using their own wallow. BUT all of a sudden a camera picked up a really big boy who used the same wallow as well as another wallow 500 metres or so away.

The frequency of stag visits increases from mid March to the end of the month where hardly a day goes by without a stag visiting.

What's the best time to intercept a big Sika stag visiting a wallow? I would say definitely the last week in March on a fine, still day at 8am. Want the GPS co-ordinates? Send your cheque to....

There is still much to find out and one is never too old to learn.



This stag only showed himself at night during the roar. Night time activity increases as the roar goes on. This is possibly due to hunting pressure.

KEEP GUARD

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If you want to read more on hunting wallows or want to catch up with some of my earlier articles in the Bush Hunting Series go to our website: www.nzoutdoor.co.nz