

Dawn was beginning to brighten the sky as we climbed the ladder to our *hochsitz*, or stand, built in a large oak tree overlooking the side of a long slope. Before sitting down, we glassed the immediate area with our binoculars. My German forester tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to a roe deer buck that had just stood from its bed.

This buck was an excellent six-pointer, and the guide told me to shoot quickly. The animal was only 75 yards away and when I squeezed the trigger of my Sako .270, the 150-grain bullet hit the buck in the lungs. He went down and didn't move. My hunt had only lasted ten minutes and even though I had taken a fine trophy, I was disappointed because of the shortness of the hunt.

The roe or reh deer is the smallest and most widely hunted member of the deer family in Europe. While the red deer stag is the king, the stately little reh buck is certainly the prince of the European forests even though the average weight is 40 pounds. Shoulder heights average 30 inches. Their winter coat is grayish-brown that changes to a bright reddish-brown in May with a white rump patch. On the females it is heart shaped and on the males it is kidney shaped.

The antlers of a good buck are 7-9 inches long with six points, and the antlers are shed each year during the month of November. The prime young bucks under six years old are seldom shot and before the rut, only the undesirable animals are taken. It would be a grave error to mistake a good, young buck with four points for a poor quality buck 3-6 years old with the same number of points.

All *jaegers* are required to be able to determine the age and trophy classification of a buck before hunting. This is taught in the hunting school and by practical experience. Many American and German *jaegers* spend much of their free time studying and categorizing the reh buck.

Hochsitze dot the German countryside and in some large fields 8 to 10 of these high seats can be seen. These elevated platforms for reh hunting are usually located at the edge of a forest overlooking grain fields or open areas in the woods where small evergreens have been planted. The deer feed in these areas in early morning and late evening.

BY ROBERT C. KEFFER

photos by author

A typical *hochsitz*, or hunting blind, as used by European hunters in quest of the majestic roe deer buck.



Hunting The Prince



In recent years, the forest has been a source of inspiration for many artists and writers. The forest is a place of mystery and wonder, a place where the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are often blurred. The forest is a place where the past and the present meet, a place where the echoes of ancient times can still be heard. The forest is a place where the soul finds its home, a place where the heart is filled with peace and tranquility. The forest is a place where the spirit is free, a place where the mind is at ease. The forest is a place where the soul is at home, a place where the heart is filled with love and compassion. The forest is a place where the spirit is at home, a place where the mind is at ease. The forest is a place where the soul is at home, a place where the heart is filled with love and compassion.



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Of European Forests



Hunters must be able to judge the age of a roe deer buck because the prime animals are not harvested. This 3-year-old with four points could be taken.

Stalking is popular when the leaves are damp and walking is noiseless. Stalking conditions are excellent following a rain, and the deer seem to favor this period to feed. When alarmed, the reh barks like a dog. It is eerie to hear the cries of two or three alarmed animals ringing through the still forest on a foggy morning.

Hunting reh is normally best at early morning and late evening hours except during the rut or *blattzeit*. The *blattzeit* begins in mid-July and ends around the 10th of August. During this period, the bucks seem to lose their wariness

and can be seen anytime during the day chasing does or attempting to find a mate.

They can be lured with artificial calls or a leaf that imitates the high-pitched call of the doe. The decoy cry of a fawn will also bring the buck on the run for he knows the female will be near. At this time, the hunter has the opportunity to take a wary old buck. Though reh reach the age of 15, very few *joegers* have taken bucks over 10 years old. In three years of hunting in Germany, I have shot several reh bucks. The oldest was eight years old.

After the rut, bagging a buck is dif-

ficult with the decreasing hours of daylight. Like American whitetails, they seem to become more cautious and nocturnal in their habits.

On each *revier* (shooting area), consisting of between 1000-2000 acres, a yearly shooting quota is established after the game census is taken and before the hunting season. The census is taken during the winter months when the reh come to the feeding stands maintained by the foresters or *revier* owners. This type of conservation assures no big game animal will ever become an endangered species by overhunting.

To prove this system is efficient, over 500,000 reh deer are taken each year in West Germany with another 60,000 killed on the highways. The number killed by hunters is impressive considering the small size and large population of the country. Reh are a common sight throughout Germany. In France and Italy there is no controlled shooting, and this small, handsome creature is rarely seen there.

Every U.S. Forces hunter is permitted to shoot six reh bucks a year. The season begins on May 16 and ends October 16.

In Germany, one is allowed to shoot two males in each of the following categories: spike or button bucks under two years; males over two years with antlers weighing less than 150 grams; and bucks over two years with antlers weighing over 150 grams. This may sound complicated, but after one or two years of active hunting with professional guides or foresters, judging the trophy class becomes second nature.

Booking hunts is done by contacting the local Base Hunting Section and requesting specific dates and location. The hunting clerk will then make all the necessary arrangements with the appropriate Forestry Office. Many owners of private *reviers* offer hunting opportunities for a trophy fee. This fee varies and is based upon the animal shot and the trophy classification. A good red deer stag could cost more than \$1500, while a six point reh would cost about \$50.

I book all my reh hunts north of the city of Giessen in the State of Hesse. This is a two-hour drive from my home in Wiesbaden and is in the same area where I shot my only red

A hunting school must be attended before the hunt. This is the graduation ceremony of a group of hunters.





One can tell by the smile of this European chap that it had been a good hunt for him.

deer stag (August '73 issue of *The American Rifleman*). The reh are plentiful in this district and the foresters are all friendly and courteous.

For the past three years, I have had the privilege of hunting in the *revier* of Oberforester Dorr and with him I have taken three roe bucks and a wild boar. Herr Dorr is in his late twenties, married and a father of two children. We have become good friends and each hunt with him has been a memorable occasion. The most unforgettable roe deer hunt that I had in Germany took place on his *revier* in August 1972.

Herr Dorr said it would be doubt-

ful that we would see any reh as the rut had just ended and the animals would be resting after the strenuous month. The *hochsitz* was comfortable, open on the sides with a roof and was situated in a depression surrounded on three sides by brush-covered hills. Within 30 minutes, a two-year-old spike buck appeared, followed by a doe. The rut had ended but some of the younger bucks were still with the does. It was a small-antlered animal, and I decided not to shoot as it was still early.

A few minutes later another buck appeared about 400 yards away. This animal had one antler much longer than the other and would have made a fine trophy, but he did not come into rifle range. Bucks with abnormal antlers are highly prized trophies in Germany.

At 6 A.M., the forester decided we should still hunt. He descended the ladder and just as he reached the ground, he pointed to the top of the hill and shouted *sauen* (wild boar). I was getting ready to climb down and saw seven boars running down the hill toward me. When the forester shouted, the boar veered to the left and he told me to shoot. I couldn't get a good sight picture as the boars were running through thick brush. Finally, at a range of 105 yards, one large gray boar crossed an open area and I fired a quick shot. The bullet struck the boar behind the shoulder and even though the animal was knocked over by the impact of the bullet, it got up and started running again. I didn't have a chance for a

followup shot and the badly wounded boar crossed a tote road into another *revier*.

Herr Dorr presented a pine branch to the owner of the dog that found the wild boar. The dog's master then placed the branch in his animal's collar as a reward for finding the boar. This is one of the old colorful hunting customs in Germany.

Later, we got together to celebrate the eventful day. The *revier* owner was very happy for, according to law he was entitled to the meat of the boar because it died on his land. I was given the trophies, which included the hide and tusks. In my hunting in Germany, this was the only time I had seen wild boars. They are very elusive, nocturnal animals and are highly prized.

On another hunt with Herr Dorr in July 1973, I went to his *revier* to shoot a button or spike buck under two years old. His shooting plan required eliminating three of these animals. Herr Dorr told me he had seen two bucks of this category on an earlier hunt, but the chance of locating one on his large *revier* would be very remote. I booked a one-day hunt as I thought this would be a challenge.

It was a cold, windy morning with a light rain and for three hours we sat in the *hochsitz* without seeing any game. Finally, a reh emerged from an evergreen grove and started feeding in the meadow. I looked through my binoculars and thought it was a doe, however, the forester told me to shoot as it was a button buck. Then I saw the small mounds on the head. The reh was standing and started walking toward the forest when I shot. We found the bullet had struck the spine.

It was a very poor quality buck but an unusual trophy. The one-inch stubs were covered with hair. It continually amazes me that most German Foresters seem to know exactly where to locate reh bucks with antlers in specific trophy categories.

I have been awarded two gold medals at the Rod and Gun Club trophy shows for taking conservation reh bucks that were on the *abschussplan* (shooting plan). The buck I shot on the hunt described in the first part of the story was a very good trophy and an unforgettable experience. ■

Author poses with his wild boar taken in Germany.





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Of European Forests
By Robert C. Keffer