

ZONES OF SILENCE

ON A COLD DAY WHEN A CHILLING WIND IS BLOWING, FIND WHERE ZONES OF SILENCE AND WARMTH COINCIDE AND YOU WILL FIND SAMBAR – IN FACT ANY SPECIES OF DEER YOU CARE TO MENTION.

▪ BY ERROL MASON

The morning was overcast - but not heavily – and showers were forecast for later in the day and snow was predicted as low as 500m. Later in this early September day that's exactly what happened. But at the moment diffused sunlight was seeping through the clouds warming the north face. I estimated the ambient temperature on the opposite north face to be about 12° C. but it was much, much, colder on the south face we were glassing from due to a chilling southerly blowing straight into us.

It was 10am when I focused on the base of a large eucalypt where I had seen a hind bedded once before and lo and behold there was another. A large sambar was bedded in an open area in front of and slightly below the large dense canopy of an ancient eucalypt. My 8 x 42 binoculars enabled me to clearly identify it as a young stag. The diffused sunshine which was illuminating him was being absorbed by his large 'solar panel-like' biomass, a fact which helped him maintain the correct body temperature – a vital biological issue for sambar during cold weather.

Being 1/3 of the way down from the spur line, he was in the lee of the cold southerly. Motionless tree canopies and the understorey of dogwood and tea tree which surrounded him, testified that he was in a 'zone of silence'. He was motionless except for his jaws which moved slowly as he ruminated peacefully, oblivious to five Homo sapien predators on the opposite face just 250m away. But sambar did not evolve having predators leap from the opposite face and kill them and it's timely to reinforce a favourite saying of mine: *if you are on their face you are in their face; if you are on the opposite face you are in another world.*

