

Hunting from Tree Stands and Ground Hides

Thirty years ago 90 per cent of North American whitetail hunters walked-them-up or still hunted, as they call this method in North America. The invention of the portable tree stand has slowly but surely changed the way whitetails are hunted. Today more than 80 per cent of whitetail hunting is done from tree stands and to a much lesser extent, from ground hides. Why such a dramatic change in hunting strategies? Because sitting and waiting in tree stands and ground hides is so much more effective than walking after deer such as sambar and whitetail, who throughout the millennia have perfected the art of avoiding predators – humans included.

Author

When walking-them-up, a traditional method for hunting sambar, the hunter moves through the forest in an attempt to find and kill the deer in its daytime retreat. This quest is often unsuccessful for the forested mountains which sambar inhabit are mostly steep and liberally carpeted with fallen branches, dry eucalypt leaves as well as twigs and sticks, making it very difficult, and at times next to impossible to get within rifle shot of them. Many hunters underestimate sambar and fail to realise that unless the conditions are perfect, ‘walking-them-up’ is mostly unproductive. Many sambar are ‘put up’ but not seen. This is not surprising for no other hunting method stacks the odds more in the deer’s favour. Bedded, sambar have the huge advantage of using their acute hearing and smell to detect the hunter who inevitably breaks a stick, spooks a currawong, wallaby, wombat, kangaroo, dingo or other creature. If this doesn’t betray him, then the breeze, the direction of which can be ever changing, will. As if this isn’t enough to contend with, sambar are wired to see movement, even in their peripheral vision. All of this puts the sambar in a supreme position and the hunter at a huge disadvantage. Sambar could not wish for a scenario more suited to their survival.

Unless conditions are perfect for walking-them-

up, the hunter will be more successful sitting and waiting whilst the deer moves, rather than the reverse. I have found the most effective strategies for hunting sambar are the ones that have been proven performers on white-tailed deer throughout North America for at least forty years, and roe deer in Europe for nearly a century. This is not surprising, for in many ways sambar, roe and whitetails are very similar although there are several major differences. First, sambar are much larger and consequently their population density is usually significantly lower than for whitetails. In fact, a given area of habitat can support four whitetails for every sambar (Shea et al 1990, p 60). Whitetails are said to be much easier to pattern than sambar, but the sambar’s much greater size makes them easier to see and provides a far bigger target.

Right: *By using portable climbing tree stands to hunt sambar, Cath Rayment of Bairnsdale and her husband Geoff are able to keep their very large family and friends in venison all year round. Climbing tree stands enables them to ascend to exactly the right height for best observation. Stringybark and box trees with a diameter between 250 and 500mm are ideal as they allow them to ascend more easily. Typically they stay just below the surrounding tree canopy which is usually between 5 and 10 metres. Photo: Geoff Rayment.*

