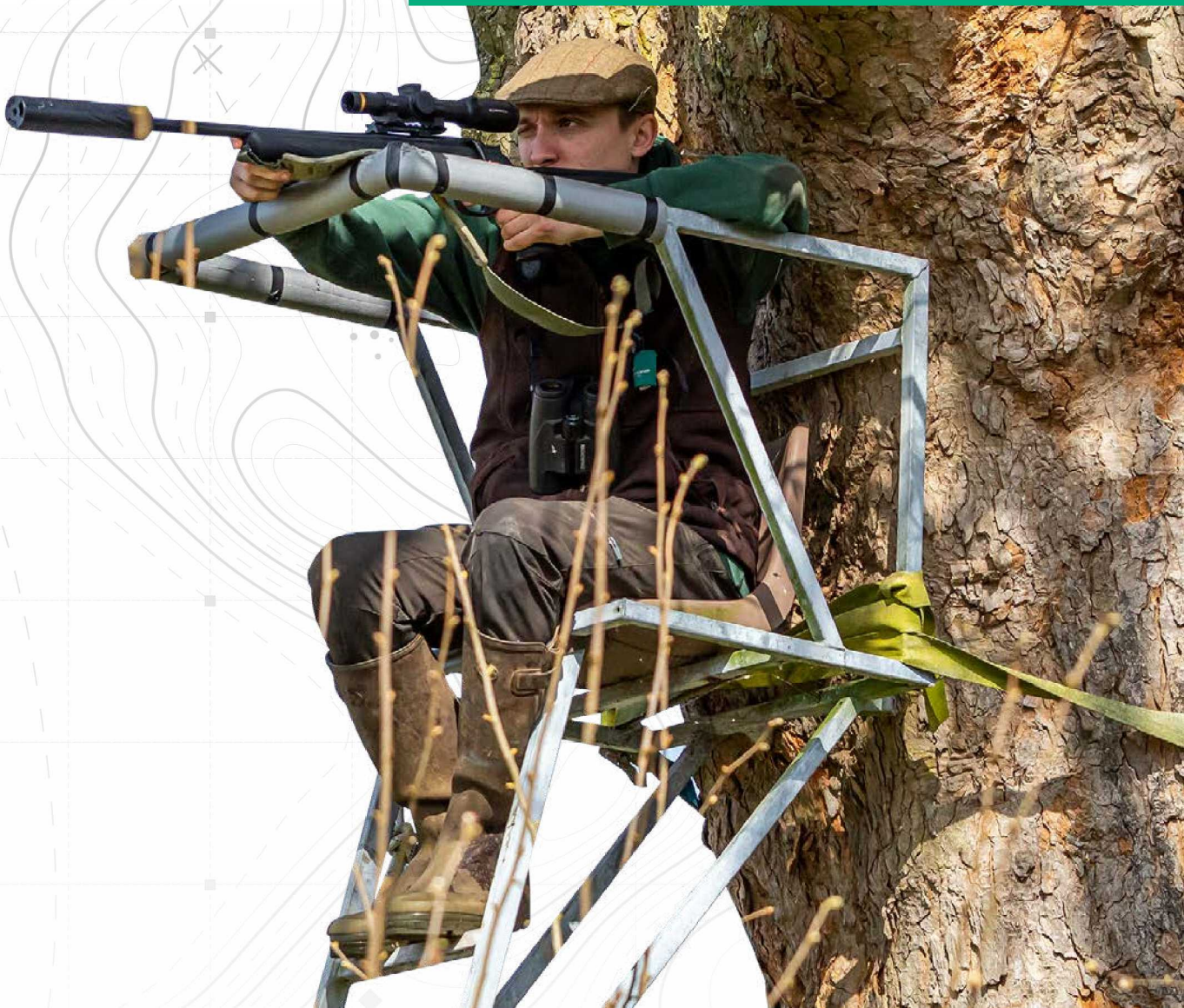


ENGLAND &
WALES **BEST
PRACTICE
GUIDES**

High Seats.

Culling Deer





Introduction

This guide describes the types, siting and use of high seats for deer management.



Uses of high seats

High seats are typically used by deer managers as a means of safely shooting deer.

They are commonly used as vantage points to wait, undetected, in likely areas of deer activity and to maximise the safety of any shots being taken.

Typical situations high seats may be used include:

- Areas where either the spotting or safe shooting of a deer is difficult.
- In situations where waiting for deer is more effective than stalking on foot.
- Overlooking vulnerable crops or conservation sites.
- Overlooking areas where deer emerge from cover, such as woodland edges and rides.
- Overlooking deer transit areas or crossing points.
- Overlooking areas where there is high vegetation e.g. bracken in mid-summer or prethicket forestry plantations.
- To restrict shooting to known safe areas and distances.

Types of high seat

Commercially made high seats are usually constructed from steel or aluminium, whereas homemade seats are commonly made from timber.

There are benefits and disadvantages to metal and wood high seats such as:

- Metal seats are far stronger and will last longer.
- Wooden seats will cost less and be easier to adapt and repair.

A seat may be essentially permanent, semi portable or truly portable, designed to be moved either regularly or at each use.

There are three main types of high seat. These are detailed below:

Lean-To

- Designed to be leant against and secured to structures such as mature trees.
- Usually the easiest to set up and lightest in weight.
- Can be made from metal or wood.
- Requires suitable trees/structures which can limit where they can practically be used.

Free Standing

- Doesn't require any structure to remain upright, so can be used anywhere suitable.
- Tend to be heavier and more difficult to set up than lean-to seats.
- Can also be made from metal or wood, with fully enclosed seats also an option to provide a stalker with the maximum shelter and concealment.

Doe/Low box

- A more permanent type of seat that is constructed and left in place.
- Provides the best concealment and shelter.
- Sited on the ground, so careful placement to maximise opportunity and safety is vital.
- Usually constructed from wood.



When choosing or designing a high seat consider these additional points:

- How long is the structure likely to remain safe, for instance some wooden seats may have a working life of only a few years.
- How easy/safe will it be to access the seating area when climbing the seat.
- The position of the rails, many rails are too close to the seat for comfortable shooting and provide little support for the shooting hands' elbow.
- The distance between rungs. Particularly on home-made seats do not place the rungs more than 30cm apart.
- How comfortable the seat is and if it allows the user to turn to shoot from the sides/back.
- How easy it will be to transport and erect. Most high seats do not need to be more than 4 metres from the ground to the seat.

Siting

Consider the following when deciding where to site a high seat:

- Ensure that deer are likely to use the overlooked area.
- Position the seat so as to maximise the safest backstop available.
- Where possible provide for a stable shooting position in as wide an arc of fire as possible.
- It may be advisable to mark out safe shooting areas and known shooting distances for reference by users.
- Where possible, use natural features to help make the seat and its approach route less visible. It is not usually necessary to artificially camouflage high seats unless they are particularly exposed.

- Avoid siting on skylines.
- High visibility may draw unwelcome human attention to the seat.
- Avoid facing the seat in a direction where the sun might reduce visibility.
- The direction of the prevailing wind. Ideally, choose sites where human scent will not usually be blown, either from the seat or its approach routes, over the shooting area.
- Over time, shrub and tree growth might reduce the available shooting area, be prepared to clear and maintain sight lines.
- In woodland situations consider clearing a route over the last 50 metres or so to allow a silent approach.
- Locate away from known routes of public access where possible.
- Planning permission is not required if a high seat is associated with forestry or agricultural protection. However, check with the landowner before erecting.

Maintenance

Routine maintenance of high seats is vital to their continued safe use.

- Carry out a formal inspection annually and record results (consider numbering seats for the record).
- Carry out and record any maintenance work necessary before use.
- When erecting/removing high seats, critical times to take extra care are when lifting the seat from transportation, raising/lowering the seat, and whilst fastening/detaching a lean-to seat to its support.
- Fasten lean-to seats securely to the support, by either ropes or a ratchet strap. Do not nail or screw directly to trees.
- It is advisable to secure the seat to its structure with a chain and padlock.
- Construct wooden high seats from a strong straight grained wood such as treated larch.
- Ensure that the rungs are securely fixed and incorporate wire or metal rod reinforcement in case of breakage.
- Consider placing small mesh wire across the rung, to provide sure footing in wet conditions.
- Do not paint the ladder if this would cover up dangerous cracks in wood or untreated rust patches.
- When constructing a floor area ensure that boards are heavy enough to take the desired weight and are fully supported by cross supports. Treated timber is best for loadbearing boards.
- Make sure that no part of the structure can move or separate when in use. Moveable shooting rails can be particularly dangerous.
- Remove old seats no longer in use or unsafe.
- Keep a record of high seat locations.
- Where practical prevent unauthorised access by removing the lower section of ladder.
- If a ladder shroud is fitted it must prevent access along the sides or back of the ladder otherwise it may increase the likelihood of injury rather than reduce it.
- In public areas fix an approved sign indicating that the seat is not for general use.



Use

Before considering using a high seat, consider the following:

- Ensure that an appropriate risk assessment has been carried out and recorded where appropriate.
- Follow Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance and ensure that activities adhere to the relevant Health & Safety Legislation.
- Take all reasonable precautions to prevent potential liability for injury resulting from both authorised and unauthorised use of high seats.

When using a high seat, follow these steps:

- Approach and leave seats quietly.
- Carry out a quick check that the high seat is safe and fit-for-purpose immediately before use.
- When climbing keep a minimum of three points of contact on the ladder, meaning at any one time when climbing there should be at least two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand on the ladder.
- Carry the minimum of equipment up the seat.
- Ensure that there are no rounds in the chamber of the firearm when climbing up and down the high seat.
- Only chamber a round once stable in the seat, and with the rifle pointing in a safe direction.
- When two people are using a double high seat only one person should climb or descend the ladder at a time.
- When two people are using a double high seat ensure that the status of all firearms present has been checked and confirmed between parties at all stages.
- Ensure that the rifle and other equipment cannot fall from the seat and remains pointing in a safe direction.
- Once settled scan the entire area for dangers, then for deer.
- Decide on the available safe backstops and do not compromise by taking shots elsewhere.
- When shooting ensure a stable shot by using all available support, including the side rails, rather than shooting with the rifle only balanced on a single rail.
- Ensure that there is some form of cushioning (e.g. a hand) between the rail and the rifle, and that the barrel is not in contact with any part of the structure.



- When taking shots at less than 25 metres allow for the fact that the angle of the bullet path could be very steep and the rifle will shoot low (see Firearms and Ammunition guide).
- If using a dog, ensure that it is secured safely where it will not be injured should something fall from the seat.
- Be aware of the dangers of falling asleep and hypothermia.

Further Information

■ The Work at Height Regulations 2005

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/the-law.htm>

■ BASC High Seat Film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l2Nous1WAY>