

# Rabbit Shooting Hints, Tips & Experiences

- editor's shooting experiences
- woodland rabbit shooting
- keep that golfcourse clear
- rabbits in the summer & in different locations
- our expert's hints and tips

# Rabbit Removal

*Graham Allen recalls two very different rabbit shoots, one a walk in the park, the other an up-hill struggle...*

Rabbits are very cute, cuddly little animals; I should know, I've got one living in my house! Ok, so my children's rabbit is a household pet and I'm very fond of him, but I'll still go out and shoot his wild cousins if asked. Some people think that's rather odd, but you have to differentiate between pet rabbits and those reeking havoc elsewhere.

It's not all plain sailing though, as rabbits have got the odds stacked in their favour a lot of the time, so they can be very challenging quarry indeed. It's not always the case though and on one particular shoot years ago, it was easy as (rabbit) pie.

## Garden invaders

Rabbits were causing all sorts of hassle for an acquaintance of mine and were starting to get on his neighbour's nerves too. He lived in a beautiful converted oast house in the Kent countryside, but his garden wasn't so nice, as everything he planted was eaten pretty quickly by those wascally wabbits. They lived in an earth bank at the end of his garden and came out and ate everything green they could get their teeth into; grass, bushes, young trees and even pampas grass were on their menu. They were also breeding at an alarming rate, so something had to be done and fast. It was my first major shoot and I was itching to start.

Once I'd been introduced to the people living next door and had shown them my insurance, I had permission to shoot on their land as well, so I was all set. I'd been shown round one afternoon and I was amazed at how easy it was to get very close to my future quarry before they ran off. The landowner told me that they seemed to be oblivious to him when he was in the garden and were about pretty much 24 hours a day. They'd never been shot at before, so had no idea how dangerous human beings could be, and I was to use this to my advantage.

## Pest control is not a sport

On my first visit I simply settled down behind a bush, waited a while and shot every rabbit I saw! I was shooting an Air Arms XM100 pre charged pneumatic off a bipod and it all seemed rather un-sporting. This wasn't sport though; it was a pest control operation and a pretty ruthless one at that. Every rabbit was fair game according to the frustrated couple whose garden they were destroying. So, even tiny, cute bundles of fluff had to go. Call me heartless, but



these tiny kits would soon be chomping their way through the vegetation at an alarming rate, just like their parents. I did feel rather mean sighting them through my scope and placing the cross hairs behind their eye, but they knew nothing about the tiny piece of speeding lead that switched them off so clinically. I've wondered a few times subsequently if I'd been a bit too ruthless, but I've got a clean conscience and I can live with what I did, others may not feel the same however.

Ranges generally varied from 15 yards to 40 yards, but the nearest shot was about 5 yards away, straight through the top of the rabbit's head whilst I was leaning up against a tree taking a breather. It didn't even twitch; it just slumped down, knowing nothing about its demise. All this shooting was done in broad daylight and large bags were achieved on each visit. I must have shot well over a hundred rabbits in total and it was a relatively small garden. As well as the gratitude of the land-owners, I earnt a few quid out of my efforts, as I was also selling my bag to a butcher and he was very pleased with the supply of head-shot conies. The owners of one of the houses were so happy they even offered me the use of their swimming pool if ever I fancied a dip after shooting! I never took them up on the offer, as I always forgot to take my trunks. I'm not sure they'd have appreciated me skinny dipping... Even though the shooting was generally a doddle, I still had to resort to lamping eventually, as the remaining



rabbits got very wary. I used a home made lamping kit originally, but was sent a variable power lamp by Deben and this proved to be very effective, as I could use just enough light to shoot by, without lighting up the whole of Kent. Less and less ended up in my game bag, until Mixy took care of the few that evaded me.

It's not always so easy!

Last year a mate of mine told me of the damage caused by a plague of rabbits at the golf course where he played regularly. I was obviously keen to help out and we had a very pleasant stroll around one afternoon, and it was clear that he hadn't been exaggerating when he'd said they were all over the place. There were droppings and scrapes on just about every part of the course, and rabbits scattered into the bushes as soon as they saw us coming. We met up with the head green-keeper and he showed me the areas where they were doing their worst. Some

of the 'tees' had been ruined, as the rabbits had been digging into the soft, sandy soil, and the green-keepers had been fighting a losing battle, filling the holes each morning, only to have to repeat the process the following day. It was bad enough that the tees had been attacked, but greens were now being targeted, so something had to be done.

The biggest problem for me wasn't going to be the rabbits, but the golfers! They were as numerous as the bunnies and were there all the time; as soon as the sun came up, there they were. They were there late into the evening as well, with some insisting on playing when it was nearly dark... don't these people have homes to go to?

This made early mornings a regular thing again, but a chap's got to sleep and it started wearing a bit thin, especially as I just couldn't seem to make much of an in-



road into the numbers causing so much grief. I could take out a few on each visit, mainly from sitting and waiting, but this can be very time consuming, as you can never be sure if your quarry is actually going to come out to play. One particular hotspot proved to be quite productive, as I had a decent vantage point from the base of an oak tree, where I could observe whilst staying hidden. I was completely concealed and actually managed to bag 5 or 6 at a time from along the hedgerow. I must be getting impatient as I grow older though, as I soon got fed up with hanging around despite the bags.

## Special FX

I'd been sent an FX Verminator to test and it really came into its own whilst walking the course. It's a very handy, ergonomic little carbine and deadly accurate, and as it was in .177, it was the ideal tool for a mooch about. As long as I kept ranges under 35 yards, it was a point and shoot affair and as long as I did my bit, the shot hit home with a satisfactory conclusion every time. The rifle's compact even with a moderator fitted and it's not too heavy either. I was always conscious that a golfer could be round the next corner, so I was forever checking and double-checking that I had a safe shot. Safety's the number one consideration with any of the shooting sports, and 'better safe than sorry' is definitely the order of the day.

## More firepower and extra help

Lamping was therefore my next strategy, but the rabbits on this course must have been the most lamp-shy I'd ever come across. I tried dimming the lamp to its absolute minimum and fitted various coloured filters, but I just couldn't seem to get within air rifle range very often. Luckily I've got a couple of .22 rimfire rifles and these had to come out for some sniping near warrens. At last I could finally start making a bit of a dent in the numbers!



The head groundsman is a very sensible chap and knew that if he could clear as much scrub as possible, there'd be less hiding places for the furry pests, so him and his team soon cleared huge areas of nettles and brambles. This obviously moved a lot of rabbits on to pastures new and a few visits from a chap with ferrets got rid of a load more.

Damage to the course is now greatly reduced, which meant the staff and players were a lot happier. It would have been nice to have been able to clear the problem single handed with an air rifle, but sometimes you just have to be realistic, admit the rabbits have got you foxed and call in assistance; or just get a bigger gun!



# Rising Sap

*Pete Wadeson becomes a tree hugger as he rids a sapling plantation of tree-loving rabbits*

An increasing number of farmers in my area are diversifying by planting saplings and landscaping some of their land for recreational use. However plantations can attract unwanted visitors in the form of pests taking an interest in the young shrubs and trees – as I recently found out on one of the farms that I have permission to shoot over.

## A fine line

Rabbits that only used to be seen in small tight knit groups on one particular side of the farm had now risen to near plague proportions, and on this particular piece of land they could no longer be tolerated as they had destroyed a large part of the new plantation.

As you can see by the photos of the area – after getting permission to plant them – the saplings had been carefully arranged on the hill on the far side of a field facing the house so the trees would eventually reach a boundary tree line. From his lounge the farmer takes great pleasure now he has more time just watching the land and taking in the scene and watching the wildlife that visits. The downside is he's also now got the time to actually see the damage rabbits, squirrels and even vermin such as magpies and crows actually do around his land in ways he'd never have imagined.

## Damage Limitation

He'd initially done the right thing by planting the young trees in plastic growing tubes to bring them on and give them protection in the very early stages of growth. Unfortunately as they grew to a height where the tubes



had to be removed, instead of surrounding them with further protection of wire mesh he'd left them unprotected. He's not a woodland manager, so he wasn't to know, as he started his project purely because he enjoys the fact he's putting something back into the land he farmed for so many years.

When he rang and outlined his problem I said I'd take a look so that meant initially just having a ride up in daylight for a proper recce. All I can say is I couldn't believe the devastation, which is not too big a term for what had happened to the unprotected young trees and shrubs. The rabbits had nibbled all exposed saplings at the base of the hill, and it's surprising how far up an object a rabbit can reach when stretching up on its back legs. Left unchecked they were obviously going to travel quickly up the hill to wreak havoc on any exposed plant in their path.

It was a pitiful sight near the adjoining field because most of the young trees had bark eaten away all the way around near the base to almost a foot up. Effective as purposely ring barking a tree to kill it. Many slow growing shrubs had been stripped of all foliage and bark from the ground up until only a few green fronds could be seen on the very top; some of the thinner trees had even been eaten all the way through and left in two halves. They'd also dug down near the base of the young trees to get at the roots because the taste of the sap is reputedly sweeter!

After I'd been around the area - more than once I might add - and at different times of day it became apparent they were on the land in large numbers, being most active early morning and early evening. I went early one morning and it was absolutely crawling with rabbits. In fact, the far side at the base of the main hill was like a slow undulating brown furry line. So that was the first factor sorted - the time of day they were active - but there were no warrens on his land so it was obvious they were coming in from surrounding fields off other farms just to get at his young trees. Obviously the rabbits had learned, the area was safe for them and early morning was the safest time of all to be around and they hadn't half taken a shine to the sweet sap and soft bark of those saplings.

## An on-going operation

When I'd established the feeding times, the first few visits I must admit were like shooting fish in a barrel. The silenced air rifle is a cracking tool for these situations. I was taking shots from various areas using the banking of the hill as a safe backstop, often waiting up to shoot prone at first light targeting the early risers. However, as expected they soon wised up to my shooting positions and I had to change tack to a type of opportunist hunting. Here I'd cautiously stalk up through the saplings using the fledgling trees as cover but though the shots had to be taken at longer range, the grow tubes on the saplings that still had them on made handy rests and steady aids for precise shot placement. Using my leading hand wrapped around the growing tubes to hold the rifle's forend to steady my aim – many times the shots had to be taken like this as the undergrowth was too high to shoot off the bipod.

## Time to switch

Then as if a switch had been clicked the area again seemed devoid of all life. This is where experience tells you that it's now the time when the hard work begins. A trick that hasn't let me down is simply to go at different times and looking not only for the animals, as they'll now be much more cautious and likely have spotted you, even if using full camo.

So you look for any signs of activity - checking the droppings and scrapings to assess how new they are. If you're finding fresh evidence such as this you know you're not far from the time of day they've switched their feeding pattern to. All animals survive and thrive because of one thing – their ability to quickly wise up to what poses a threat to them and therefore avoid it!

Towards the latter part of the 'job', and that's what it was and a hard one at that, I eventually discovered an area where I could overlook a patch of rough ground away from the trees, here the rabbits seemed very settled. I was able to hit them hard here as this was



an area they'd been gathering in before heading to the trees. In fact, I started taking a roe sack as it was handy to carry the bunnies off due to the amount I was shooting at certain stages of the coney cull.

Eventually equilibrium and balance of nature was restored – good luck to those young trees that have survived but I'll certainly be keeping an eye on them...



# On the green

*Many airgun hunters think gaining permission on a golf course is 'shooting heaven.' But Pete Wadeson reckons that you have to work at it...*

Rabbits and crows cause a lot of damage to well-kept golf fairways as well as bowling greens and sports fields etc., and virtually every airgun hunter would jump at the opportunity to shoot over a golf course with a rabbit problem. Yet my experience suggests they'd better make sure they're prepared to put in a lot of time and effort for little reward, because shooting rabbits on golf courses can be very difficult. You can go out at night with lamp or Nightvision scope with a silenced .22 rimfire rifle and have a field day as pro-pest controllers do, but with the limited range of the 12ft lb air rifle things are completely different. The airgun hunter is best advised to try early morning ambushing in areas the animals are known to frequent but the fact of the matter is the time frame of your early morning shooting window before the public arrives varies greatly depending on time of year.

## It began one spring

It's usually the green keepers who rake the bunkers and cut the manicured fairways and greens that first notice damage; either rabbit pellets or yellowing of the green due to areas becoming rabbit latrines or worse still, the pristine manicured grass being dug up.

Your first barrier is to gain permission as few golf courses allow any Tom, Dick or Tracy to wander around unless they know shooting etiquette, and they will look more kindly on someone who's been recommended and/or has references.

If shooting early morning, get there before even green keeping staff arrives, let alone golfers. Discretion is key to how you conduct yourself on a shoot like this. Wherever possible, you should not walk around wearing 'full' camo clothing unless out of view from the public who might arrive early for a 'round.' This is one reason that I often use a take-down air rifle such as my Air Arms S410 TDR, as it's very unobtrusive when being transported.

If not, it'll be necessary to use something such as a Napier Roller Plus Rifle Carrier to conceal your rifle when moving position or when leaving the course. This clever piece of kit rolls up to clip on the belt when not in use and unrolls to create a very handy and unthreatening rifle cover.



## Using cover

In some cases, depending on the landscaping of the course, you can use dips, gullies, rough grass and small groups of trees to your advantage to mask your movements and especially the final approach to a target.

As odd as this may sound, it's also advisable to take your own cover, such as a rucksack, to use as forward cover to snipe from. It helps break up your outline and provides a handy and steady rest for the rifle. It also serves to carry some camo net and other kit as well as being convenient at the end of the session for carrying away any rabbits successfully 'bagged'.

## Scouting the course

After written permission was granted by my local golf club committee, I scouted the course and picked out two areas; one a fairway near the clubhouse and the other a raised green not more than 200-yds further away. These two areas allowed me to initially make my first shots from the cover of a dry stonewall at the very rear of the car park. From here I could carefully sneak a look over and more often than not a few rabbits would be within range on the fairway, others would be too far for sensible assured shots while others could clearly be seen on the far green of another hole and in the bunkers and sitting on the rising banks that lead to the flat greens.



After my initial first few shots per visit, if I'd got two scut tails I was happy, in honesty if I got one it was a result. As soon as the others scarper at the sound of the pellet hitting the rabbit's skull I'd look over to the rabbits on the far side. As usual they were tuned into anything out of the norm but a golf ball being whacked hard off the 'Tee' sounds much harsher than a pellet strike and the disturbance usually didn't have them looking in my direction long or if they'd run for cover, it wasn't long before they'd return. If they went over the opposite brow of the hill away from the far green and bunker I'd quickly move across the open ground to the nearest cover, which was a small patch of trees and patches of longer 'rough'

grass. Always pick up your rabbits as you go, as you could easily lose or miss one on the way back - and few golfers take kindly to finding dead rabbits littering the fairway - see what I mean about how you have to conduct this type of shooting?

## Long stalking

If the rabbits on the far side of my position spooked and eventually looked less alert I'd often sneak onto the course via a walkway surrounded by steep banking, using this manmade gully as cover. Unfortunately from here I'd often have to make a long laborious slow stooped half walk-half crawl to the top of the banking to peak over back onto the course. I'd usually remove my pack and carry it by the drag handle to the small clump of trees set into the course - an annoying obstacle and place to avoid for a golfer, but an oasis for any airgun hunter trying to get within range of the rabbits frolicking on the other green.

No matter how far I'd got into or out of the rough ground and sparse cover, I'd scour all around as one rabbit spotting me here would sound the alarm and that arduous stalk was fruitless. At times I'd only just reach the cover of the trees to spy a rabbit just on the edge of the rough. This definitely was, if the rabbit was within range, a case of downing bag, calm my nerves, then take a shot at the closest target. Others I'd need to





crawl all the way to the edge of the rough, then across the fairway as it was 'dead ground' allowing me to stay low until reaching the slight rise that gave a clear view of any other rabbits.

## In the bunker

At other times, if I'd blown my chances by being seen, I'd head directly for the bunker as the rabbits always scampered down the far bank out of view to the tree line opposite. When reaching the bunker, I'd put the rucksack down in front of me to break up my outline and wait. Before they wised up and thought the threat had passed, on quite a few occasions, rabbits would simply hop onto the green and as I was already in position, it was a simple case of cross hairs on the skull, flick off the Daystate Air Ranger's safety and squeeze off a shot resulting in another cleanly dispatched and well earned rabbit.

Incidentally, after using the bunker ambush technique, rake it clean so as not to cause more problems for the ground staff.

## Moving further

As the committee had seen the results of my efforts, I was allowed on a while longer to be driven down to a far green where there was another pocket of coney's. This was a lot easier shooting as the rabbits were used to seeing staff vehicles and small golf carts. Shots were often taken within 25-yds and resulted in bigger bags and even crows

stayed on the deck such was their use to the ground staff vehicles. In winter, it can be bleak, the rabbits out in far fewer numbers and at night, so I only need to have the occasional session with a Nightvision rig to keep things in check.

Incidentally besides acting discreet there's another major reason to be off the course when the golfers arrive – safety. Flying golf balls are like bullets and I certainly didn't fancy being hit with one of those. However, due to the squirrel problem I'll be back when the leaves have left the trees and will have much more time slinking my way through the woods that surround the course - targeting the tree rats that can cause just as much damage to a golf course as any rabbit.



# Morning has Broken

*Graham Allen knows that an early morning trip to the farm is the perfect time for a spot of vermin control, especially when armed with a .25 calibre air rifle.*

I chose to visit my farm shoot bright and early one Sunday morning in the middle of May and I was rewarded by a beautiful sunrise as I arrived. There were half a dozen feral pigeons picking up grit in the farmyard as I drove in and it would have been nice to have been able to bag a few of them, as they're a real pain to have around, especially as they'd be on the lookout for nesting sites in the barns. The only problem was that I was busting for the loo. I know, a bit too much information but when you've got to go, you've got to go! By the time I emerged from the staff toilet, the ferals had gone but I knew they'd be back in a while.

It was still a bit fresh as I got my gear out of the Land Rover and assembled my kit but it looked like it was going to be a gorgeous morning. I put on the Deerhunter 3D Sneaky Camo suit (from Idleback) and I was confident I'd pretty much disappear once in the woods. No camo is a cloak of invisibility of course, as noise and movement are often a hunter's worst enemy but once set up amongst the undergrowth I hoped to be as unobtrusive as possible. I had gloves and even had a cover for my rifle, so total concealment was the order of the day.

I had a .25 calibre BSA Scorpion SE with me, that had a rather nice Hawke Nite-Eye Digital 3-12 X 50 fitted. I'd done my homework at Pete's Farm air rifle range, so I had aimpoints from 10 to 30 yards worked out and a crib sheet stuck to the stock. The big old slugs have quite a curved trajectory, so knowing your ranges is essential when using this hard-hitting round. A Deben rangefinder would give me a spot-on readout to any quarry that might come my way and I knew that the 19-grain H&N Field Target Trophies would pack a hell of a punch. I always have an FT-style beanbag with me when I go hunting, as it's a comfortable



seat to shoot from but also the perfect way to protect the rifle I'm using. I hate laying any rifle on the ground, so the cushion allows me to put the gun down without damaging it; the Scorpion I was using had a synthetic stock but I still didn't want to scratch it if it could be avoided. The seat can also be used to rest the rifle if I took any shots from off a gatepost or branch and really makes for a steady shot. They can also be rolled up to make an impromptu bipod when shooting prone. I've been using one from Custom Sporting Mats and Hides and it's very well made and good value at around £30.

## Waiting Game

By the time I'd got set up at the bottom of the farmyard, ferals had started to circle above me, I positioned myself near some chicken coops and hoped my quarry would think I was just a bit of extra vegetation. The mesh suit must have fooled the birds, as two landed on a barn roof prior to landing on the ground; they often do this, as it gives them a chance to check for danger. Pigeons need an abrasive in their crop to help grind up food and the grit and gravel around the farmyard is ideal. I had to be careful where I shot, as I didn't want a ricochet damaging anything or leaving the boundary. I had to wait 15 minutes before the pigeons moved into a safe position, but at last I could take the 20-yard shot. The FFT to the side of the head was extremely effective, so it was lights out instantly. That was one accounted for but rather annoyingly nothing else presented itself.



I was just about to make a move when I heard a ring necked parakeet screech from a nearby silver birch tree, it took me a while to locate it amongst the leaves on the tree, but a 15 yard shot wasn't exactly taxing and it hung by one foot for a moment before falling down. I should explain that escaped parakeets have found my part of Kent to be ideal for them, so they've bred, have established large colonies and are becoming a real pest. They are tough, gather in large numbers making a hideous racket, stripping buds off orchard trees and even pushing out some native species. (Editor's note: Parakeets have now crossed the River Thames and are now beginning to appear in Essex).

I waited for another 20 minutes or so but no more ferals arrived. There were plenty of wood pigeons flying over though and they would have been relatively easy shots for someone armed with a 12 bore, but it was very early on a Sunday morning and it would have been rather anti social to say the least! I stopped off in the woodpile and checked my 5 yard zero, which turned out to be roughly the same as my 30-yard aimpoint; little did I know this would be rather fortuitous...

I was feeling a bit lazy that morning, so I decided to drive up the track into the woods; I normally walk and I wish I had on this occasion. If I'd walked, I could probably have shot the two squirrels that sat slap bang in the middle of the track, as it was they just scampered off into the hedge.

I parked up in the woods and carefully strolled back to see if the squirrels had reappeared but they'd made their way into the safety of the golf course next door.

## The screech of parakeets...

Whether they're calling to each other or simply singing, the ring necked parakeet is a noisy bird, producing a load screeching sound. As soon as I heard one calling from back in the woods I knew there'd be more than one, but would I be able to find them? They're the same colour as newly sprouted leaves, so it can be almost impossible to see them, even if they're making a racket right above you. Luckily for me they were sitting in an oak tree with very few leaves on it and weren't disturbed by my slow approach. I rested the Scorpion on my beanbag that was over the



trunk of a fallen tree and the bird fell to a 17-yard shot. The others flew off at the sound of the pellet hitting their mate and I was just about to retrieve it when I spotted a squirrel coming towards me. He stopped on a low branch 20 yards away and he too came tumbling down. I was starting to get too hot for comfort, so went back to the car and took off the fleece jacket I was wearing under the cammo suit, only to hear another parakeet squawking from where I'd just come from, how annoying! It took a while to get back into position and even longer to find my quarry, this time in a chestnut tree; once again, down he came courtesy of an H&N.

I made my way through the wood as slowly and quietly as I could back to the clearing and witnessed one of the strangest things I've seen whilst out hunting. I'd just got into position behind the fallen tree when a small squirrel fell out of a tree in front of me! I was a little concerned that somebody else might be shooting near me and as none of my shooting mates were with me that morning it could mean a trespasser. It wasn't as sinister as that though, the young squirrel had simply lost its footing and taken a bit of a tumble and was now laying dazed in the brambles. The 5 yard zero I'd worked out earlier came in handy and he too went in the game bag. I did feel a little mean shooting such a young 'en, but he would have grown very quickly and the farm has to control squirrels as part of the Natural England Higher Level Stewardship scheme.

## Super squirrel!

Another parakeet came in above me and went down thanks to my 'invisibility' - the Sneaky Camo was earning its keep, especially when a rather large squirrel leapt into view over to my left. A slow swivel round on my beanbag had him in my sights and at less than 20 yards it was an easy shot between his eyes. When I retrieved him, he most definitely was a 'he'; he had the biggest testicles I've ever seen on any small mammal. Whether the size of his gonads meant he was the local stud I don't know, but he wouldn't be sowing his seed any more.

I was very pleased with my morning's pest control outing and my equipment performed perfectly. I had to pack up and be gone before visitors started to arrive at the farm, which was rather annoying, as I'd have liked to stay all day. Who knows how large my bag would have been?

# Here comes Summer

*Pete Wadeson looks at the quarry species to target and tactics to employ for successful sport during the warmer months...*

In summer the trees and woods are in full leaf the wooded areas are not as productive as they previously were due to anything up aloft being hidden amongst the foliage. However, though a safe haven for many quarry species, it's not only avian pests that still need to leave the woods to feed. Rabbits are often found feeding just on the outskirts of the wood – sometimes not being as wary due to their proximity to heavy cover. During the day, if you are allowed to walk around the farmyard and outbuildings, this can be very productive due to the amount of flying pests that visit to sun themselves on roofs or grub around looking for grain.

## In Your Sights – Rabbits

Waiting up near warrens, known feeding areas and/or passing points will result in you eventually spying rabbits that hop along to take their first or second sniff of the day as they graze near their burrows or start to go about their daily routine. You can use a hide screen to shoot from and most prefer to shoot off a bipod. If so you'll need a rifle with sling swivel studs fitted to accommodate the fore-end mounted 'pod' of choice and any quality PCP will be up to the job in hand.

If you think you might try stalking a few then I recommend a rifle that's easy to carry so use a carbine. A single-shot break barrel or under-lever action rifle will suffice but a PCP will still give you the edge due to its lack of recoil.



## In Your Sights - Wood Pigeon

Armed with a few decoys and a well-built hide you can with practice tempt woodies down to the decoy pattern and some will stay still long enough for you to get a shot off at these tasty pie fillers. This is very challenging shooting as hardly will they touch down than they'll be suss to the inanimate pretenders down on the deck. The best chance of being on target as quickly as possible is to wind down the magnification on your scope so you have a wider field of view. That way you'll find it quickly in your sights. As soon as you see the bird commit to landing amongst the decoys, carefully follow it down with the rifle so you can be sighted in and on target as soon as its legs have touched terra firma. That doesn't mean rush the shot but don't be a ditherer either. A high level of marksmanship is required when using this method but you'll soon get into the swing of this testing technique.

## In Your Sights - Crows & Magpies

Though mainly targeted in spring before they breed and winter when they're easy to bring to baiting out techniques, there should never be any reprieve given to these egg thieving and chick killing corvids. If you find a field crows are visiting naturally don't discount trying a few crow decoys. However, don't use a 'pattern' common to decoying wood pigeon. You only need to use half a dozen at most, flocked half-shell bodied types or FUD decoys are ideal for this. Set a couple together then others close by in an irregular pattern. I also often use one magpie decoy set further away – this can be on a grass field used for grazing or on a fresh tilled and sown field. These are opportunist



times as during the early summer months crows will be in loose flocks. Just make sure you build a very good hide or use one of the many instant 'pop-up' types now available to fully conceal your shooting position.

## Back At the Farm

All manner of species visit the farmyard. In and around the barns you'll often find collared doves and don't be surprised to see jackdaws flitting around looking for spilt grain. Feral pigeon will be around sunning on the roofs or cooling in the shade - some even sitting on the beams



inside the barn. Species that are usually more wary such as the crow can be less cautious as it sits cawing out its territory or to its new family. It can even get so used to people working around certain areas they get careless to the point you might just catch one or two out sitting on high vantage points of buildings.

The wood pigeon is another that you can catch napping as you carefully look around corners and scour rooftops. But don't limit yourself to mobile tactics. Try sitting in the barn in the gloom and let some of the previously mentioned pests nip in to nose around. Suitable armed, you'll give them the lead when they least expect it. Even stay at home rats can often be seen during the day inside barns close to feed storage areas or just boldly ambling around the farmyard close to the base of walls or other structures.

Try building a hide from natural materials out in the yard itself, but let the farmer know what you're doing and his workers know where you are. You can quickly make a well-hidden shooting position with a few pallets of wood and old fence posts to use for extra concealment. Use the sun to your advantage and stay in the shadows – you'll be surprised at what will come to perch on telegraph poles and the apex of roofs.

## And Remember

Summer is possibly one of the most pleasant times to just wait out with an air rifle/scope combo and enjoy an evening near an established warren. Alternatively, during the day stealthily go exploring the farmyard carefully doing the rounds including making a point of inspecting the interior of barns and outbuildings looking for whatever might be unlucky enough 'not' to realise you're there...

# The High Life

*Pete Wadeson targets rabbits that feel safe in cover but with the aid of a high seat gets a clear view of their comings and goings...*

Today I thought I'm going to get high! No, not what you're thinking - I was intending shooting air rifle from a 'lean-to' high seat. I know, the high seat is more associated with deer and fox shooting but for the open-minded airgun hunter it can be a solution to certain tricky shooting situations. Let me explain... The rabbits I was going to target are dug into an embankment across a slight but continually deepening valley. The warren stretches from top to bottom and runs quite some way down this natural vale at the start of an old wood. It wasn't until early spring that I'd noticed many more rabbits than usual dashing into the corner of the wood as I crept along the edge in hope of a shot at an early morning woodie or squirrel. I spend as much time as I can at this wood through autumn and it was last year I first saw the extent of the size of the warren.

## Summer shooting

As we now move into 'summer' it doesn't take long before you can't target rabbits moving around from burrow to burrow. But 'get elevated' - to get above the ground foliage - and you can spot the rabbits moving and more importantly get the chance of a clear shot.

First job was to position my lightweight portable Panther lean to high seat (available from [Bushwear.co.uk](http://Bushwear.co.uk) on 0845 226 0469) at the upper end of the valley facing the warren at an angle to give me a good arc of fire. I must mention that under no circumstances should you ever rush putting up a high seat and pay attention to all aspects of safety at all times. I can't stress the importance of ensuring it's fully secured at the seating area to the tree with a suitable length of strong rope. When possible I set up the day before, then creep down early morning or evening and get into place.

On the morning of the shoot as I made my way to the area a few rabbits had run in virtually straight down the



slight banking the high seat was positioned adjacent to. So I'd at least got it in the right position. When shooting in this manner, just like hide shooting, you need to be comfortable and prepared for a long wait.

After slinging the BSA Scorpion T-10 over my shoulder, I made my way up double-checking with every step the seat was completely stable and safe. Once up aloft and comfortable I rested the rifle in the general direction of the area I was observing and waited. At first it did seem very barren but I was confident this would change. Eventually a few very young rabbits ventured out closer to my position, I got them in my sights should a larger more sporting target present itself as this wasn't a termination job, just challenging. Eventually one of its larger brethren suddenly lolloped out to be met with a Bisley Magnum knocking it off the ledges the rabbits have created outside the warren entrances. It landed on a lower bare patch near another entrance hole. It's when shooting like this you need to



be extremely confident in the accuracy of the rifle and of course your own ability as a rabbit can easily take a few 'adrenalin fuelled' kicks and disappear to die of a wounding in the closest hole or under a tree root. Not a thing I ever like to see, and I'm glad to say that aided by the precision PCP I didn't.

## The kit

BSA's own-brand of 'SAS' silencer is a fine unit and muzzle report was minimal, but the commotion of the rabbit falling down a few yards through some nettles meant I'd probably have a longish wait until anything else showed at that position, but hardly had I cycled the cocking bolt in readiness of another shot than some movement further along and lower down the embankment caught my eye. This was another worthy target and one that wasn't in a hurry to go anywhere. This was a tricky shot that would mean I had to place the pellet not only precisely into the head but right through a downward fork in the overhanging branches above me, a bit like taking a shot up into a sitty-tree but in reverse. It seemed like an age before the coney got into a position where I could train the Mil-Dot cross hairs of the Falcon Optics 7.5 X 50 Menace scope to sight in on the target. Carefully allowing



for the longer range and downward angle I judged not much more than a ¼" low on the kill-zone would give me a perfect headshot with the .177 calibre rifle. Slipping the trigger was followed by a loud smack of lead hitting skull – the rabbit flipped into the air, a few twitches and lay stone dead belly up. Unfortunately as with hide shooting you can't keep leaving a high seat to retrieve kills, so I knew I'd not have much more targets appearing at that position either.

By now I'd fully masked and gloved up using a mix and match of camo from Deerhunter (01564 782234)





in Advantage Timber to the new Backland Adrenaline camo pattern gloves available from Rocky Outdoor Gear (Garlands) hiding my face and hands. That's one of the reasons I raise the rest bar of the seat at an angle as it gives some cover of the human form, as would a branch, and the full veil and gloves hide the glaring white of my face and hands.

As I cradled the rifles all-black ABS stock across my lap I also realised that the design combined with the inherent lightness of the rifle handling was spot on, as it was effortless to shift position for the awkward angle shots I was experiencing.

### And another one...

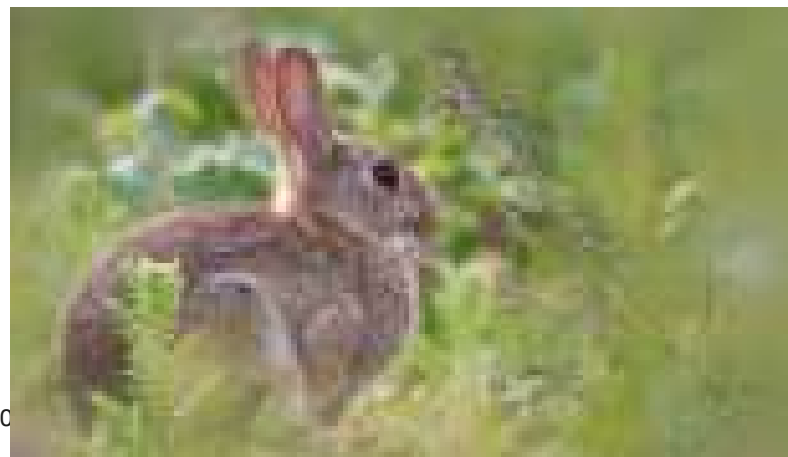
As I slowly looked around from my lofty perch, the silencer had proved its worth yet again as I noticed this time a couple of rabbits had ventured up the nearside banking to feed in the field to my left. Taking careful aim on the rabbit closest my set 30-yd zero, a slight squeeze of the T-10's 'LS' 2-stage adjustable trigger unit sent another Bisley Magnum on its way knocking yet another over with hardly a twitch. Suddenly out of nowhere and maybe due to the events occurring a pair of buzzards 'buzzed' the field adjacent to the wood sending rabbits scurrying for cover. It was a marvellous sight from my position to watch them marking small rabbits for a 'swoop and grab' but not good for the shooting.

As the session progressed, less rabbits appeared and I couldn't draw a bead on any within range as they were now very twitchy. I was just considering admitting defeat when I noticed a squirrel virtually on level with my position

- sitting stock still in the cleft of a tree to my right. Inching the rifle over I placed the cross-hairs on its head and the last but not easiest shot of the day saw a squirrel crash through the branches, resulting in the final tally of the day being a hat-trick of bunnies and an over curious tree rat.

### Aftermath

The hardest part of the session came after leaving the seat to gather my game, as it was all quite scattered around and some partially hidden from view. Two rabbits on the far side of the ravine, one in the field nearby the high seat, and a squirrel it seemed to take an age to find because it had tumbled down the banking to rest half hidden amongst leaf litter. After a strenuous walk back up the 'hill' to the seat, I soon had it untied, folded down and set off to make the 150-yd or so walk back to the motor. As I said at the beginning of this piece - I for one realise the worth a portable high seat can have for the open-minded airgun hunter as this session surely proved - now if I only had wings...?



# First get your rabbit

*...to come to you; Pete Wadeson explains the technique of 'static' hunting' or how to ambush the humble bunny...*

Often termed 'static hunting', ambushing usually requires the airgun hunter to wear full camo clothing, use some form of hide and/or make use of natural cover – usually a combination of all three. The ambush shooting position obviously needs to be chosen or 'built' within effective range of where the quarry is known or expected to move, frequent or feed.

Ambushing gives the hunter the advantage of surprise and in most cases if you choose your shooting position correctly you'll also know the approximate range of the species targeted.

Observation and location are your initial concerns. If you've located the main entrance holes and runs to a large, well-populated warren this form of shooting can be very productive. Cover and concealment is your major concern. In many cases you should be able to position yourself under a hedge, behind some other cover within range of the target. If you've got a sling swivel stud attached to the forend of your rifle, and it's a PCP you can take advantage of this and shoot using a bipod or higher and more versatile Compact Tripod such as the Explorer from Deben. Alternatively, were the situation dictates use a camo rucksack as a rest - this can also help break-up your outline from the forward position especially if wearing a loose leaf mesh suit like the

LLCS system from Jack Pyke of England as shown here.

Whilst - by and large - ambushing is a set 'hidden and sniping' technique - sometimes you don't need any or only a little cover forward of your shooting position to pot rabbits as they emerge from a warren or a hedge line, as long as you keep low and very still. Alternatively sit with your back against a large tree trunk to disguise your outline, but be very cautious and aware of not only your movements but of anything that appears within range.

## Timing

Although knowing quarry movement around an area is essential to successful hunting, to reap the best rewards from this method, you really must know the movements and specifically the time of day most rabbit activity can be expected in the given area on the ground where you're planning on ambushing. You don't want to be laying or



sitting for hours on end with no activity. Often, you need to be up before sunrise to get into position and many times within the first half hour or so of daybreak you can have a couple for the pot. It goes without saying then that in summer when dawn breaks very early, only the dedicated regularly get up at such ungodly hours. By and large though when the sun is hot and up high in the summer sky, the fields aren't the best places for the airgun hunter, it's far better to wait until the longer evenings and then more often than not the rabbits will only emerge towards sunset.

However, whatever the time of day or season, it takes careful planning, fieldcraft and a disciplined shooting technique if you are to achieve optimum results. Note the use of the word 'discipline' as this is only second to patience in order of importance when ambushing. When you've stuck it out and waited three or even more hours and not had a sniff, it can be tempting to take on a 'dodgy' long shot or one that tempts you to try the impossible at an awkward angle. In the right circumstances in ideal conditions you might well be lucky enough to hit the mark. But luck should never be relied upon when you're at the moment of slipping the trigger. After sitting or laying for hours on end, then to thankfully at long last spot an opportunity it can be all too easy to grasp at straws. For instance, shooting rabbits as they emerge from hedge lines can be very rewarding but challenging. But you've got to drop the rabbit where it 'stands' as one kick off those powerful hind legs will see it lost in the undergrowth or straight down the hole it emerged from. Wait a while and it'll more likely than not move out that little further to present a clearer shot. That's the one to take and the one you should wait for.

Even when you've chosen a suitable shooting position, the nature of ambush shooting means it can be very frustrating just sitting or lying in wait. In my experience it's best to allocate time spent ambushing - especially in winter - to shorter applied sessions.

Wait in the most comfortable and relaxed shooting position you can. It may sound obvious but if leaning on anything for any length of time, put padding between you and the hard surface. This is where a shooting mat or turkey seat is a godsend.

## Give it a rest

If using a pre-charged pneumatic rifle, a bipod is one of the ambush shooter's major and most practical of accessories. Therefore type of bipod, height capability and other features that can be adjusted while in use and certainly body positioning all need to be carefully considered for shooter comfort and effective use.

By and large bipods suitable for hunting can be put into two categories – one suitable for prone shooting and one for using kneeling or more usually seated. The prone shooter should be looking for a 'pod' that offers an adjustable 'leg' height of 9 – 13 inches while one that can be used shooting seated obviously needs to have more height adjustment, the largest I'm aware of is a Harris Bipod that will reach up to 27-inches. There are other brands that suit both 'styles' such as B-Square, Caldwell, RockMount, Versa-Pod, Deben UTG etc., in fact to name them all would be a page in itself as there are so many different brands available.

If you require the rifle be raised higher, then you're looking at a separate detachable rest be that mono-pod, double or triple shooting sticks or tripods.

A 'front' forend sling swivel stud is necessary for fitting virtually all makes of bipod to the rifle – however there are those that utilise weaver style bases and even 'in-house' own brands manufactured for a specific rifle's attachment point. Some rifles even have accessory rails running part way underneath the stock forend but even these use a stud adaptor, the rail allowing the attached bipod to be moved to the optimum position for the shooter rather than being clamped at a 'pre-determined' 'fixed' stud position. These rifles are often sold with bipod as specialised ambushing tools such is the popularity of the technique and often due to the shooting position have adjustable butt pads and sometimes height adjustable cheekpieces – the benefits of these being when lying prone you can tailor the stock to suit the prone shooting position. However, any quality PCP air rifle with bipod will be more than adequate. It does



demonstrate though that some companies realise the benefits of offering a 'true' sniper style ambushing tool in their range of air rifles.

Different types of bipod use various methods for attaching to the stud – the most common being an adaptor, twin arm clamps with spigots, or 'S' shape hooks. In all these cases, once engaged into the stud hole, they are screwed up tight to the base of the bipod to abut up flush to the underside of the rifle's forend with a large serrated edge thumbwheel. Once in position, they can be set with legs facing forward for transportation and left in place so if you do get a freehand shot on your way to your ambush position they don't hinder your leading handhold. But get into your ambush position and pulling them down easily deploys the legs and then height adjusted to suit the terrain you are shooting over. Also you have the choice of fixed or tilt and pan facility, and pods with notched extendable legs or straight telescopic – I prefer the latter in both cases. So those are the options, but how best to use them?

## Flooring it

If shooting out of a ditch or over the brow of a hill, there is one very important reason to use a bipod. You are already able to lie in a way that puts your upper body in a natural angle so you can comfortably look around the area you're observing. Also, the rifle is already elevated high enough off the ground so you're not tempted to lower the rifle (as could happen if holding it) too low to the ground when you take the shot. At longer range and certainly if well concealed there's no reason to keep yourself 'too' flat to the ground. If you do, the pellet could well be deflected



by something – a sod of earth or other such ground obstruction or foliage on the way to the target. Note also the importance of your body posture and position behind the rifle. Don't be tempted to overly arch or bend your back to lift your body to look through the scope. If you have to do this you've adopted the incorrect shooting position and height of bipod, even the wrong model. The strain might not be felt within the first hour but you'll pay for it when you try to move later the same or next day.

Optimum body position for bipod use is to lie with the forearm of your leading arm flat to the ground at 90 degrees facing across the body or as I prefer bent slightly inwards but slightly forward or at shoulder level to the ground. This supports the weight of your raised upper torso. The other hand can rest naturally by the side, underneath the rifle while waiting for quarry to appear.

Letting the rifle sit in your shoulder under its own weight, isn't good shooting practice. By angling your leading arm inwards you can allow it to take the weight and stabilise the rifle at the rear, simply by letting the lower part of the butt pad rest on it and when shooting prone this often will be high enough so the butt pad will also already be in your shoulder.

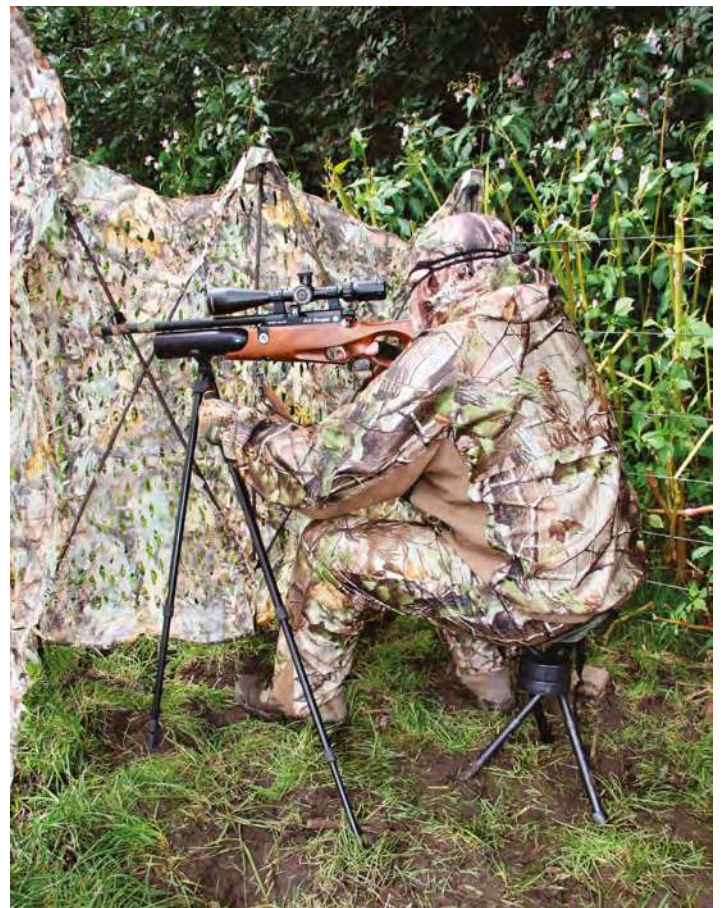
When a shot presents itself, all that's required is to slowly raise your trigger hand to take the grip, line up the scope cross hairs and now totally supported and steady - gently squeeze off a shot. Even though the front of the rifle is steady on a rest, your body behind this 'fixed point' needs to be equally stable to achieve the ever-important follow through. The theory and physics for firing a rifle always remain the same. Lock onto the target, squeeze the trigger and follow through the shot (remain still and on target) until the pellet slam strikes the quarry. Another tip for those having trouble in keeping the shooting hand steady is to bring the leading arm hand up to support the wrist of the shooting hand or preferably place the hand underneath the rifle at the grip therefore forming another format of steady rest for the rear end. You'll soon discover which works best for you.

Choose a lightweight bipod and it won't unduly affect handling when shooting off hand and you can still fit a rifle sling to the bipod's 'extra' sling attachment point.

## Bringing it all together

We've talked of finding suitable areas to ambush rabbits, kit to help you establish a hidden shooting position and accessories that help you shoot more efficiently and with more precision. I use the latter term because while ambush shooting you have a lot more time to compose and take the shot.

Of all forms of hunting, the airgun hunter setting up for a dedicated ambushing session can often take quite a bit of kit with him, the amount depending on the situation. But, thanks to modern day technology of manufacture the heaviest thing I'm carrying is the rifle in what I often now use for prone ambush shooting – that being a rifle bag cum



shooting mat. There are a few of these on the market, the bag is padded and opens out fully to double up to form a shooting mat for laying on - my preferred bag is made by AIM Field Sports.

Often rabbits will emerge to come out to feed alongside a hedgerow or a scrub covered banking that holds the warren. In other words, cover you've walked beside while opportunist shooting the fields is also typical cover you can use for hiding in or alongside while waiting in ambush. I'm sure after a few walkabouts you will have established where the warrens are, so you'll know where best to settle down to await your unsuspecting quarry.

Incidentally, if settling into position amongst foliage with nettles or on the deck if it's damp or muddy, avoid applying body pressure directly onto it. You'll now understand why I favour gunbags that fold out into shooting mats. This means you need only take one item not two as it doubles up as transportation for the rifle and a shooting mat once in position.

The route you take to the chosen shooting position is often overlooked and many hunters just clump through the area to be targeted then set-up. That in my opinion is the first major mistake because no matter how early you go to set up there'll always be a few rabbits out. If the area hasn't been shot over much then scattering a few back into cover isn't a disaster but you leave your scent trail as you walk alongside the very area the rabbits will emerge from. It may just be one factor relating to confidence, but wherever possible I always approach from where the rabbits are less active.

## Hides and concealment

Though I often rave over 'pop-up' hides, wherever and whenever possible when ambushing rabbits I opt to use a loose leaf hide screen, Garlands supply these as do others but the one I use from Garlands is high enough to shoot seated if the terrain dictates. In fact, I often swap over from a prone to a seated shooting posture to save on straining the lower back.

If using a hide screen alongside a hedge or some such terrain, form the front into an arc to prevent showing a straight edge on any side. Once the hide screen is up and the 'camo screen' the framework holds is pegged into the ground, then position the shooting mat behind it, deploy the bipod on the air rifle and make yourself comfortable.

Unfortunately there's no chance you won't disturb the area to some extent, as you invariably will, but once in position consider this. If you think it strange to chose an area for ambush that seems 'exposed' because you are alongside the entrance and exit points of a hedge line or shrub covered banking, consider that the fox that will lie up in this very same position just using its natural body colour as camouflage, awaiting a rabbit to emerge from the very same area. That should also illustrate one major factor, no fidgeting, rummaging around – so keep as quiet and still as possible.

Ensure shots taken aren't in danger of being deflected by long grass, twigs and the like. So when setting up, set the bipod at the correct height and a reason why it often pays to take a small hide stool and shooting sticks and a higher Tripod to use as a steadying aid for the shot as you can see from the two shooting positions shown in the illustrations.

That's why I prefer the higher type of camo screen as you need to hide or should I say shield your figure, so your upper torso or body isn't seen forward of your position no matter what shooting position you've adopted. Then, it's just a matter of waiting...

While holding up in ambush, always use your ears as well as your eyes. Rabbits will be heard moving through or underneath thickets, scratching or plucking grass from the surrounding area.

## What kit do you need?

Choice of rifle for ambush shooting is again a matter of personal choice. It's a static method and standard length rifles give extra shots, they also balance out nicely on a bipod, which we've previously looked at in detail. Carbines can also be used off a bipod and for shooting freehand, being much more manageable and quick to shift your aim.

This brings me nicely around to the subject of kit required. This should be tailored to suit each individual ambushing scenario. Many airgun hunters take far too much kit into the field when ambush shooting I'll admit, in the past I've been guilty of this myself.

If it's a long session you have planned then you will need certain extras, more hot drinks, food, even extra clothing (hence the need for a rucksack). The 'base' kit you use should relate to the type of area you are shooting over and therefore be kept to the bare minimum - remember, if successful, after the session you'll be carrying back rabbits as well so the load gets heavier on the way back and is still felt, even though you may well be feeling very pleased with yourself at your success...

