

The Pest Control & Varmint Edition

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# **AIRGUN HUNTING**

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# AIRGUN HUNTING

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# Editors Corner

The first two editions of the Airgun Hunting Quarterly were well received, and had over 20,000 downloads from my website alone. There were also many downloads from the other sites around the internet that are distributing the publication. This illustrates the interest generated by our fast growing sport.

I am a bit late getting this edition out, caught between a busy personal and professional schedule. My apologies to those of you that have been waiting!

I'd also like to thank those of you that have contributed to our ezine, and especially to Randy Mitchell and Robert Hamilton, both of whom have made major contributions to every issue to

date. I'd like to again encourage you to write up a review of your favorite guns or share a hunting experience, give it a go! Your fellow airgun hunters would appreciate the chance to share it with you.

This quarter we'll take a look at the use of airguns for pest control. Next to plinking and target shooting, pest control is probably the main reason behind most airgun purchases. As much as I enjoy big game hunting, this is still my favorite aspect of airgunning.



**Next to plinking and target shooting, pest control is probably the main reason behind most airgun purchases.**

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# PEST CONTROL; THE CENTRAL MISSION OF THE AIRGUN

Jim Chapman

The application for which most airguns are purchased domestically would be for plinking and target shooting. However looking at guns purchased with the intention to shoot quarry, without a doubt they are most frequently used to shoot vermin and pest species. This can range from shooting the squirrel or starling raiding the backyard bird feeder to professional pest control removal of roosting pigeons in factory buildings or rats raiding feeders in the farmer's barn.

Most states permit the culling of pest species with an airgun, and even allow some game animals to be taken out of season under a depredation permit when they are causing damage to property.

Some species by their very nature are considered pest animals, ones that are vectors for diseases or cause damage to property such as brown rats. Other animals are usually not a pest species, but due to population explosions caused by an abundance of food or lack of predators, become pest. The most common pest species shot with airguns are rats, ground squirrels, sparrows, starlings, black birds, pigeons and other animals causing a nuisance or depredation on private property. Under certain conditions, a small game animal such as cottontail rabbits on a golf course or tree squirrels in the attic become a pest animal .... Once again you need to check your local ordinances.

Shooting pest animals makes a lot of sense as the other options are either setting traps or laying poison, both of which have many negative attributes. They are both indiscriminate, you don't want to poison the barn cat along with the rats, and you don't want your dog sticking his nose in a rat trap. Shooting can also be more effective allowing several individuals to be culled in a single session and a whole population eradicated over a short period of time. To be successful the shooter needs to keep the pressure up, as these animals tend to breed very rapidly and can quickly build the population back up if allowed to.

It should be understood, the objective of pest control is to kill as many animals as possible, effectively removing the population from a specific area. It is not hunting in the pure sense of the word, you are not interested in sport or giving the animal an advantage, only in removing them (or significantly reducing their numbers) from the ecosystem. In this context, the pest control shooter should not hesitate to cull young animals or females, and unless there are local regulations there should not be a concern over season. Speaking of pest control and seasons, one of the strangest sets of regulations I know of is in Louisiana. Nutria are a huge pest that cause a great deal of damage to the levees and waterways; the state has a bounty on them and sometimes the problem gets so bad that the police have to cruise the canals popping the mega rodents with rimfires ..... But there is a season! Go figure.



My point is, the purpose of true pest control is to remove every member of the pest specie that you can. As a matter of fact, if a farmer or facilities manager gives you permission to shoot his property, it is your responsibility to clear every varmint you can.

When I talk about pest control, I mean real pest control; a pasture that has become dangerous to livestock because there are so many burrows they are in constant danger of breaking a leg. Pigeons that are nest in a factory and spreading a layer of guano over people and equipment, or blackbirds and crows causing crop damage. There is another type of pest control, which is justifiable but not for the same reasons. Let's face it, the squirrel raiding your bird feeder is not causing that much damage (though if he gets into your attic or chews through the air-conditioning cables that could change), nor is the sparrow or starling in the backyard really causing real loss. The justification for this type of pest animal is simply that, they don't belong in North America. Every English sparrow, starling, or pigeon that lives here is eating, taking nesting space, and breathing the air required by native species and should be eradicated for that reason.

Using airguns to shoot these pests makes even more sense, as they are uniquely suited to the task. They are powerful enough to humanely dispatch a pest animal at 30 yards, and the guns that we discuss and recommend in this book are capable of tack driving accuracy. If you do happen to miss, the guns will not cause excessive damage to surrounding equipment or buildings. And lastly, the guns are quiet, and with a shrouded barrel can be almost silent. This means that you will not become pest specie to your neighbors as you move around the yard clearing out the starling populations, your pest might be their cute little bushy tailed squirrel ... so stealth has its place



# BUILDING THE BETTER HUNTING PISTOL

Jim Chapman



A lot of hunters that start off with rifles, transition to handguns over time. There are several practical reasons to consider a handgun, they are more compact, and can be carried in a holster to use for opportunistic shots that present while hiking or working the property. But the real reason for their popularity is that they are a challenge to hunt with; harder to shoot accurately and with a more limited range they force the hunter to work his quarry. I've taken more feral hogs with my Colt Anaconda than just about any gun I've ever owned.

So when my airgun hunting took a turn in this direction a few years ago it wasn't that surprising. And while intuitively knew hunting with an airgun would be a challenge, I was caught off guard by how difficult it was to find an air powered gun to hunt with! There were (and are) literally scores of CO2 powered guns readily available, but very few are suitable for hunting. So the first gun I selected to hunt with was a multi-pump Sheridan in .20 caliber that was producing around 7.5 fpe. This was effective as a close range pest control gun, but took too long to cycle between shots..... So I kept looking.

One day while surfing the web about five years ago, I stumbled on one the

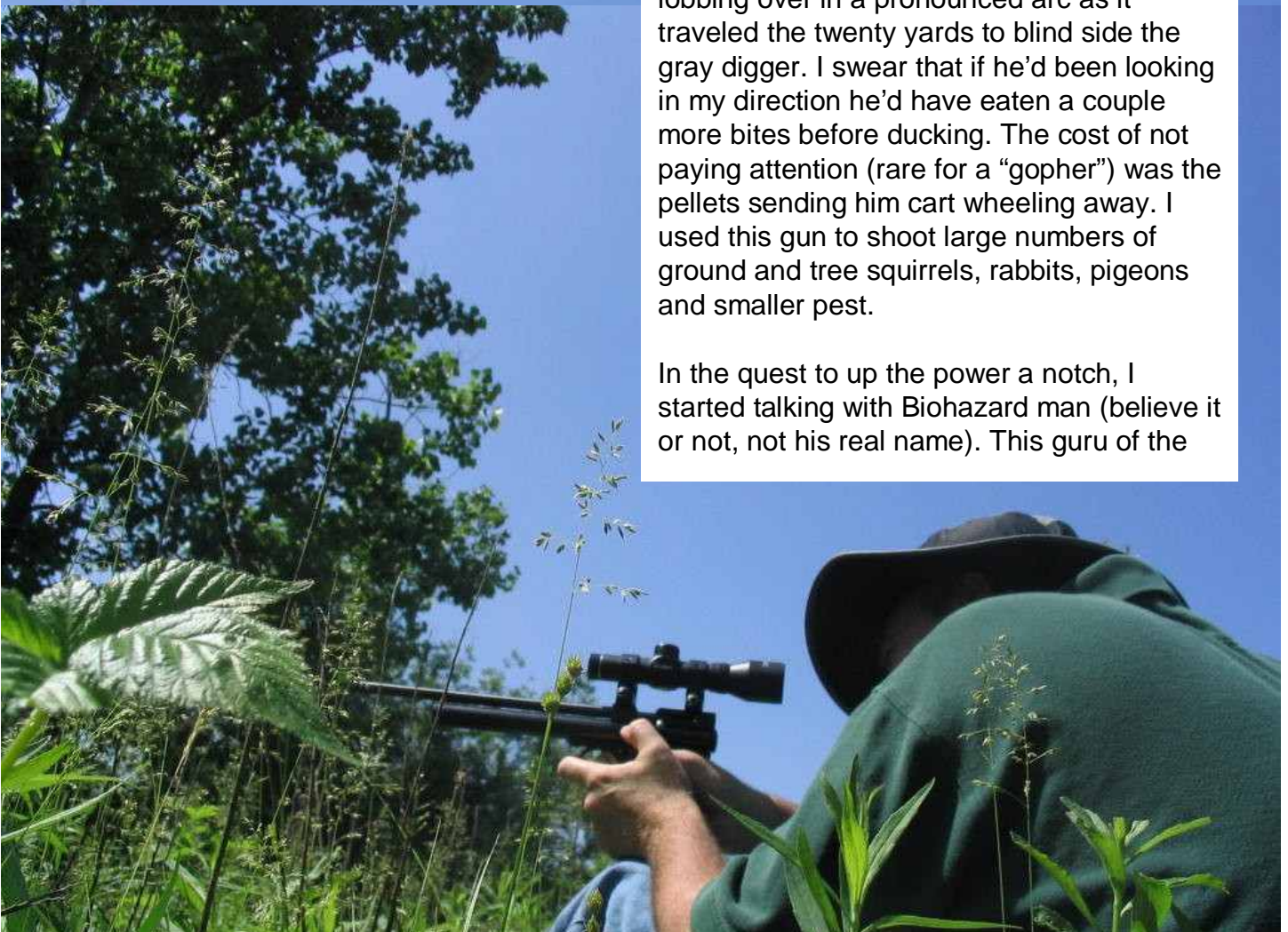


airgunning websites run by a hobbyist that was tuning the Crosman 2240 CO2 pistol. And as I studied the modifications these early modders were doing, thought that this was something I could do as well. I'm not the greatest when it comes to things mechanical, but the valve, the trigger, and everything else on this gun looked pretty "Jim proof" so I went down to the local sporting goods store and laid my \$40 down and left with a new project gun. And this led me on to purchase and build another twenty or so pistols over the next couple years. I have made my own grips, modified triggers, rebuilt higher capacity valves with better flow and bought all types of aftermarket parts; various receivers, exotic wood grips, valves.

After a year or so of tinkering, I was speaking with Dennis Quackenbush about a rifle and mentioned that I wanted an airpistol for hunting, and he mentioned that he was making a number of .25 and 9mm barrel/receiver assembly's. Yes thank you... I ordered one of each on the spot.

To obtain optimum performance with this gun I increased the capacity of the valve, improved the airflow through the transfer port, balanced the hammer and valve springs and got both guns just under the magic 10 fpe mark. I have to confess that while I liked the idea of the 9mm, with CO2 I obtained much better results with the .25. I remember the first ground squirrel shot with the 9mm, watching the brick like 9mm pellet lobbing over in a pronounced arc as it traveled the twenty yards to blind side the gray digger. I swear that if he'd been looking in my direction he'd have eaten a couple more bites before ducking. The cost of not paying attention (rare for a "gopher") was the pellets sending him cart wheeling away. I used this gun to shoot large numbers of ground and tree squirrels, rabbits, pigeons and smaller pest.

In the quest to up the power a notch, I started talking with Biohazard man (believe it or not, not his real name). This guru of the







Crosman 2240 had been working on an new high capacity valve and agreed to make a couple for me. This monster of a valve was especially designed to drive the larger caliber offered with the Quackenbush uppers. This was before Dennis got so busy with his legendary rifles, and every now and again he could indulge his creative urges on something beside a backorder of guns being pined over by their future owners.... With this gun I could reach out to twenty five yards and anchor a large jackrabbit on the spot. I hunted the DAQ/Biohazard .25 for jackrabbits in Arizona, cottontails in California, and squirrels in Indiana. Topping the gun with an inexpensive Tasco 2x long eye relief shotgun scope, I was consistently deadly on small game.





About the same time, Dennis built me the first Outlaw pistol in .25 caliber. I used these two guns; the DAQ/Biohazard and the DAQ Outlaw PCP with a takedown stock to build a compact traveling hunting kit. I found that I ended up using the Outlaw more as a carbine, as the size and heft made it easier to shoot this way. I lost count of how many rabbits dropped to this gun, and with this setup I could stretch the shots out to thirty five yards. I had the gun tuned to produce about 870 fps with a 27 grain pellet.



But what I really wanted was a high power pcp that was compact enough to be comfortably used as a pistol. So starting out with a Quackenbush 9mm upper, I started bugging the Canadian custom airgun builder Walter Glover to work up a pcp lower for me. I'd seen the gun he built for Randy Mitchell and had to have on in my collection.



The resulting marriage of the Quackenbush upper with the Glover lower is a pistol that is a superb shooter. It gets a 77 grain eu jin pellet moving at about 520 fps, yielding over 40 fpe. I've reworked the trigger to break at just a tease under 2lb, and have topped it with the same Tasco shotgun scope used on earlier guns. The grips are a beautiful blue laminate fabricated by Ricks Grips, that not only makes the gun fit perfectly in my hand, but gives the gun character.



On an early trip out with this gun I saw a big groundhog sitting at the edge of a field. Using all available cover I started a half hour stalk to get into range. When I was about halfway he disappeared, but I kept walking in. Just as I was about to give up, I saw a motion right at the base of a nearby tree, and looking closely saw that the whistle pig grazing and unaware of my approach. Kneeling down I dropped the crosshair on his head and squeezed the trigger. I heard the thump and as the scope came back down saw him laying on his back with feet in the air.

Instructions to modify the Crosman 2240 can be found at:  
<http://www.americanairgunhunter.com/crosmanmainpage.html>

Things have never been better for handgun hunters, there are a number of guys building custom hunting handguns right now. Everything from PCPs, to multi-pumps, to CO2 guns. There are also several sources for parts aimed at the DIY crowd. Building my own hunting pistol has been one of the most fun and most satisfying projects I've done, if you have a little time, a few basic tools, and can follow simple instructions, it is something you can do!

# My Squirrel Hunting Battery

Randy Mitchell

Now that the deer season is over here in KY, I am once again focusing on the art of the squirrel hunt! Putting the bigbore airguns aside until there is a need once again for them, I once more pore over my small-bore collection to see which one I will use for the next hunt.

The guns I am choosing from for the late season are as follows: I've got a dandy Prairie Falcon 25 that is a .22 caliber. It is about the most accurate gun I've ever shot and will flat put the hurt on a squirrel in a hurry. Another up-and-coming contender for my hunting attention is the Joe Bontrager QB-78 PCP. Joe has recently started making bigbores as well, and if they are as good as this PCP conversion he made me, then we'll have another good home-machinist as a supplier for our bigbore airgun addiction. And the other two guns I'm looking at are the BSA Supersport with a gasram conversion for a powerplant, and a 1939 Crosman 101 "Clickless" model that Dave Gunter worked some magic on some time ago.

Each of these airguns provides adequate power for squirrel hunting, albeit at different ranges. Of course, the two most powerful are the Falcon and the QB-PCP, putting out near 30 fpe if not a little bit more using Kodiak pellets. The QB allows me to enjoy the feel of a classic bolt-action rifle, while the Falcon provides a more refined, upper-end sort of experience with the nicely patterned stock and svelte looks that this gun brings to the table.

On the lower end of the power output are the BSA Supersport and the Crosman 101. The BSA shoots in the upper 600 fps area, and with the gasram, provides a quick firing action that can be cocked and left cocked for extended periods of time with no spring fatigue. It also provides a faster follow-up shot in the event my first shot goes awry. Now the Crosman gives me that same effect as I get from hunting with a blackpowder rifle.....I've stepped back in time just a little bit and am relying on tried and true engineering from the golden years of Crosman's rifle-making. It doesn't give me a fast second shot, but it is a pure joy to carry in the woods, and the peep-sight allows very good accuracy within 30 yards or so with my eyes.

When I go out on a hunt, I almost always try and bring along a backup gun of a different powerplant. What if I go hunting with a PCP and it springs a leak? Or worse, my tank leaks and I have no way to refill a reservoir after shooting for awhile? That's why I opt for a backup gun of either the spring-piston variety or the pump-up variety. At least I still have a workable tool for the hunt if plan A doesn't work out right!

With the leaves off the trees, and visibility available almost as far as the eye can see, I resort to ambush techniques rather than the stalking techniques I employ earlier in the season. While deer hunting a few weeks earlier, I make notes of how many squirrels I see, where I see them, and the routes they are taking in their daily jaunt around the



woods. Squirrels are creatures of habit as well, and they have a routine they follow that I can exploit. Water sources are noted, available food locations are put in memory, and the agricultural events of the area farmers are also in the back of my mind. If there is a soy-bean field that has recently been harvested, patrolling the perimeter of that field can, and has, led to success in bagging squirrels. When they are on the edges of a field, I also have less obstacles between myself and my intended prey, making the shot easier in some respects. Corn crops are also a fantastic way to harvest those late-season bushytails. When ambushing, I sometimes take a pop-up blind from which to shoot. This is also a great way to introduce my children and new hunters to the sport. Their movement is less of a problem, and it also helps bear the brunt of colder weather. Brush piles can substitute when I can't bring along a blind. And quite often I elect to simply sit still at the base of a tree in a likely spot. Movement is your main enemy, and wearing some camouflage can enhance your chances.

A tactic I intend to try more this year is to hunt late in the day, a couple of hours before sundown right up until darkness settles in. I've noticed in the last few days of deer season that the squirrels were scrambling for the last bit of food and frolic before heading to their dens. The last day of modern gun season for deer here in Kentucky was spent sitting in a fold-out chair surrounded by 5 squirrels within 25 yards of me, some in the trees, but most on the ground searching through the fallen leaves. More than once I wished I had brought along an airgun pistol as a small-game getter while sitting there. So those are the guns I'll be focusing on for the rest of the season unless I get something new that begs to be taken to the field. Read the rest of this issue for a squirrel hunting story featuring one of the guns mentioned in this column.





# PRAIRIE DOGS!

Prairie Dogs are rodents that look like ground squirrels on a high fat, high carb, low exercise regiment. They are heavy bodied with broad, rounded heads, hairy tails and short legs. Prairie Dogs can weigh up to 3 lbs. The head and body are 11 to 13 inches long, with a short tail about 3 to 4 inches long. Prairie Dogs have short ears which are often hidden in the fur. Prairie Dogs eyes are positioned on the sides of the head and are adapted for detecting movement over a wide arc. This allows Prairie Dogs to detect predators (i.e. air gunners) with greater success and make them a real challenge to get within range of.

The most common sound issued by a prairie dog is a high-pitched bark, but they have a large number of other vocalizations to identify various types of predators, which include just about every carnivore in their range (hawks, owls, eagles, ravens, coyotes, badgers, ferrets and snakes). When threatened the prairie dog raises the alarm with a bark and disappears quickly down a hole. Prairie Dogs are active only during the daylight hours, so one strategy is to get to your blind before daylight. Though most species are dormant for short periods of cold weather, on a recent trip to Colorado I saw large numbers of dogs out sunning themselves on the snow drifts and running from burrow to burrow.

When a predator or hunter approaches, the sentry gives a sharp warning call, bobs up and down, calls again and then plunges below. The danger signal is a 2-syllable bark. Other sentinels farther from the danger zone take up the watch, monitoring the course of the predator. The favored habitat







of the prairie dog is short and medium grass prairies and plateaus where the sentry standing on his haunches has an unobstructed view. I have hunted this quarry in South Dakota, Colorado, and Oklahoma and find the preferred terrain looks very much the same in all of these places.

Because they can take a real toll on a ranch's forage, prairie dog eradication programs have been underway for decades in the American West. There is extensive private and public land on which these animals can be taken with an airgun.

Many ranchers prefer to have these varmints shot rather than resorting to poisons, which can cause damage to other

species not requiring management. I have found some ranchers that charge a fee to hunt their property will give a deeply discounted rate to the airgun hunter, and allow you to hunt areas requiring a cull but too dangerous to use firearms in. This is a real win win situation.

Like ground squirrels, prairie dogs are susceptible to bubonic plague, acquiring it from fleas infected with plague bacteria. More recently prairie dogs infected with monkey pox have been turning up. Most public health officials believe the chance of contracting plague from prairie dog fleas is very low, but flea-borne disease can wipe out a colony. I do not handle my kill bare handed, as a precaution. I would



recommend you not handle your kill, if you need to move the carcass use a shovel or some long handled tongs.

There are two airgunning methods that I have used which have proven successful. The first is to hike out early in the morning before daybreak and set up a blind before the dogs start moving. I typically use camouflage burlap in sandy coloration and find a slight rise I can lay prone on. I throw the camo sheet over my body and wrap it under my legs and elbows. I have not had good results using my pop up camo tent, I think it is too bulky and they seem to know it is a structure that shouldn't be there. My rifle is also camouflaged; I prefer to use one of the side lever guns as it is easier and less obvious to cock than a break barrel while in a prone position. A bipod is used to stabilize the gun in this shooting position, and I'll equip it with a variable power (typically a 3-9x) scope. I generally use a .177 hollow point for the flat shooting characteristics and accuracy of the load, and find that a head shoot is very effective. However I've also used .20 and .22 with good results. As the prairie dogs start to come out I'll usually take the first one I see, and wait a while for more to come out. As I shoot they eventually tend to become alarmed and dive down their burrows, but in the face of no apparent predator in the area they'll start to pop back

up after a while. This type of shooting can get hot and uncomfortable, so I am usually only good for an hour or two before I need to stretch.

Then I move on to my second method, which is to glass the gentle hillsides to locate a group, and find natural cover that will allow me to quietly stock within shooting distance. When hunting with an airgun I try to stay in areas with more hills and cover than a firearm varmint hunter would. There are several good airgun hunting grounds in Colorado that I've found over the years. One advantage with an airgun is that you can hunt areas where the prairie dogs don't get a lot of firearm hunting pressure. The range and low noise level of an airgun means that you can hunt near barns and livestock, areas that are unsuited for firearms. The dogs are a little less wary and I get shots I'd never get close enough for on heavily hunted public lands for instance. Having said this, it is still not as productive as hunting from a blind. No matter how you try to sneak up on these wary creatures, it is very hard to slip past the prairie dogs defenses.

I have had trips with my centerfire rifles in which so many shots were taken, we needed to let our rifle barrels cool down. If I can take ten prairie dogs in a day with my air rifle, I consider it a good days hunting.





# Sparrows; The Gateway Species

Sparrows are cute little songbirds to some, but in fact are non-indigenous pest that multiply in huge numbers, they are native to Eurasia and Africa and learned long ago to live closely with humans. Homesick immigrants to North America deliberately introduced it to the continent in 1854 as a reminder of their homelands. Because of human introduction, the house sparrow has an almost worldwide distribution. They have mostly brown plumage and are about 5.75 inches in length. The house sparrow is common throughout its range, but is most abundant near people and their structures. In some situations house sparrow populations can reach true pest proportions. Adults primarily feed on seeds and grain. They are one of the dominant species at bird feeders--where they feed on millet; and canary seed found in commercial wild birdseed mix. House sparrows will eat other types of seed as well: including wildflower seeds, sunflower, and safflower seeds, and tree seeds especially from sweet gum. They will also feed on grain products such as breadcrumbs and livestock feed. The willingness of the house sparrow to feed close to people can cause problems at picnic shelters and outdoor restaurants but makes them susceptible to baiting. The nest of the house sparrow is an untidy mass of dried grass, leaves, pine straw, string, paper, and feathers. The nests are usually built in bird houses, attics if they can get in, behind signs, behind or above pipes and ductwork entering buildings, in crevices into wall voids, behind shake siding, in or on the rafters of large buildings like

**Jim Chapman**



warehouses, barns and livestock buildings and in the forks of branchy trees. House sparrows can breed year-round in warm climates, but most clutches are laid between March and September. They can have several clutches per year. Each clutch contains 3 to 5 heavily speckled white eggs. The incubation period is 10-14 days. The young remain in the nest until they are almost the size of their mother; about 15 days. All of this leads one to understand how this innocuous little bird can become a nuisance very quickly. The primary problems associated with house sparrows are caused by their close proximity to people. The unsightly nests and white droppings are generally messy and the dry plant material in the nest can be a fire hazard, especially inside lighted signs. When birds occupy a warehouse and defecate on stored goods there can be financial ramifications. This mess is also unsightly and can damage the finish on automobiles. Large populations of sparrows in agricultural situations can cause economic losses due to consumption and contamination of livestock feed. These birds can be carriers of several diseases such as Salmonella, Tuberculosis, and others. I have heard sparrows referred to as a gateway hunting species, in that they are often the first quarry a young hunter goes after. Hunting sparrows is a pretty informal affair, find a place where there is food and nesting available and there will probably be sparrows around. I find them around factories, barn buildings, and railway buffer areas in large numbers where I live. I generally don't go out to hunt sparrows, but

if I'm working an area for pigeons or starlings and come across a sparrow I'll shoot him. Head or chest shots will quickly put down a sparrow with any caliber. As I usually take these birds while I am hunting something else, I use whatever gun I happen to have with me. On the occasions that I do go out with the intention of shooting sparrows, I select a different type of airgun altogether. These birds are light bodied and about the easiest pest to kill. A .177 wadcutter or hollow point shot through just about any gun generating 400 to 600 fps with good accuracy will work. There are three types of gun I use; the first is a Crosman 1077 CO2 rifle,



Besides being a vector for disease, these seemingly innocuous little birds breed and compete for food so successfully that they displace native species.

which is a repeater, topped with a Daisy 808 4x air rifle scope. I'll shoot sparrows out to about 25 yards with this rig. The next group of guns is CO2 pistols with and without optics, my preference being a Crosman 357 with a red dot mounted. Shooting with a hand gun is challenging and a lot of fun, and I find this 8 shot repeater to be quite accurate out to about 10 – 15 yards. Pistols are inconspicuous and can be carried into industrial areas where a rifle might draw too much attention. Sparrows are considered a pest species in much of the country and in most regions they can be taken anytime and there is no bag limit. As usual, I would caution would be pest exterminators to check local regulations. Also, if it is permissible to shoot sparrows make sure that is what you are shooting. There are several native songbirds that are English sparrow look alike, and you do not want to shoot those.





# Starlings; The Unwelcomed Invader



Randy Mitchell

## **Starling Control** - European starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Starlings are pests, pure and simple. There isn't a wildlife department that I am aware of that encourages the propagation of this introduced species, and all of the regulations in states that I hunt actually are written to encourage the destruction of this species in the United States. The reasons are many, but they boil down to the fact that the European Starling is a fierce competitor for nesting sites of cavity-dwelling species, which brings them into competition with the beautiful martins, bluebird, flickers, the wood duck, and the many species of woodpeckers. They also are a carrier of several diseases via their droppings, and let's face it, they don't care where they poop! When their droppings are deposited on bridges and other structures, there are problems with the acidity of the deposit, which corrodes surfaces and makes them unsightly as well as weaker than the engineered norm. In addition, they contribute to unsightly messes in public places since they seem to dwell exceedingly well in close proximity to man, since we provide them with the most nesting sites due to our building practices.

The starling is an excellent target for the airgunner who enjoys shooting all-year round. It is always looking for nesting sites during the late winter and early springtime. If you have any trees around your house with hollows in them, you will receive a visit from the starling, and they will come in several at a time. In the winter, the starling flocks together in enormous groups that will literally darken the sky when they all take off. I've seen flocks of over 5000 birds here in Kentucky, and I'm sure that many of you reading this have seen larger flocks. If the flock of wintering starlings is found around an airport, the trouble is magnified. In 1960, an Electra aircraft collided with a flock of starlings soon after takeoff, and crashed with 62 fatalities. The danger of the birds being sucked into the engines is a very real problem, one with fatal consequences.

The European starling is susceptible to being drawn in to baits. I have scattered old popcorn in my backyard and enjoyed having multiple targets come winging in within a short time. You can train the birds to come to a feeder on a regular basis by offering suet-based baits during the winter, which is high in protein and energy, something sorely needed by the birds during the winter. If you have a dog or cat, and feed them outside, I would suggest you watch the feed bowl and see how often it is raided by the starling.



It is a very aggressive bird, and extremely bold in securing food! They are smart, inventive, and determined.

Some of the diseases that starlings carry are histoplasmosis, a fungal disease that attacks the respiratory system, and TCE (transmissible gastroenteritis virus), which is of particular concern to swine producers. During the severe winter of 1978-1979, a TGE outbreak occurred in southeast Nebraska, with over 10,000 pigs lost in 1 month in Gage County alone. Starlings were implicated because the TGE outbreak was concurrent with large flocks of starlings feeding at the same facilities. The starling's role in transmitting livestock diseases isn't fully understood yet, but there is no doubt that they contribute to the spread of diseases, some of which are cross-transferable to humans.

Crop depredation is also a serious concern as well. Starling damage to winter wheat in a study of 218 fields in three regions in Kentucky and Tennessee averaged 3.8%, 0.5%, and 0.4% respectively, with the most serious losses (more than 14%) occurring where wheat was planted late and fields were within 11 miles (16 km) of a large starling roost. Bird damage to grapes in the United States was estimated to be at least \$4.4 million in 1972; starlings were one of the species causing the most damage. Starlings, as well as many other species of birds, also damage ripening cherry crops. A 1972 study in Michigan found 17.4% of a total crop lost to birds. Notice how long ago some of these studies were done, and then realize that the starling is even more widespread than they were then.



It is estimated that there are over 140 million starlings in the United States alone.

On my website, [www.adventuresinairguns.com](http://www.adventuresinairguns.com), I kept an unofficial register of how many starlings the members of my airgun hunting forum were able to shoot. It was a simple affair, not meant to impress anyone or generate any meaningful information. But I noticed that, without even trying very hard, several members were able to kill over 500 of the pests on chance encounters alone. I'm going to challenge the membership this year to quadruple the effort and see if 2000 or more of these ecological disasters can be removed from our respective areas this year. And concentrated efforts to rid an area of starlings could benefit agriculture, livestock operations, and our own indigenous avian wildlife, as well as provide excellent shooting opportunities for airgunners.



# Hunting the Masked Bandit

There are many reasons  
and many ways to hunt  
North Americas raccoon;  
they are at different times  
and different places  
predators, fur bearers, or  
varmint





I was recently asked by a friend if I could help him thin out the pest species on his hobby farm. An out of control population of raccoons was starting to cause substantial damage on the property, damaging a couple of the out-buildings and getting into the poultry yard. In a few weeks of night time raids these coons had managed to almost depopulate their hen house. My friend wanted to address the pest control issue, and it was agreed I'd make a trip out to take a look around.

Arriving onsite at about 4:00 am, I spotted a big possum moving across the road about thirty yards ahead. Hopping out of the car and switching on the light, I lined up on the head in profile and let the pellet fly. The shrouded barrel on my gun reduced the report to a whisper, and the sound of the pellet slamming home was louder than the shot. Parking the car I looked around and found a likely place to set up. Hunkered down with my back to a tree about forty yards from the hen house I sat in wait. After about a half hour I caught the outline of a small coon on his way to a chicken and egg dinner, barely visible in the dim light of the approaching dawn. Leaving the light off but switching on the illuminated reticle I was able to

make out the silhouette of the raccoons head, and the glowing crosshairs allowed me to center my shot. Squeezing the trigger I heard the thud of the pellet hitting home followed by a momentary thrashing, then silence. I sat a while longer to see if any of his kin would follow him out, but there was no further activity. As daybreak was now on the way, I decided to head





down by the stream where a strip of woods about a hundred yards wide separated two corn fields. Finding a place to sit where I was partially hidden by a fallen tree limb, I waited about ten minutes and started blowing a baby squirrel distress call. Nothing happened, so I waited a few minutes then repeated the call. This time there was a response; a very large raccoon was making a beeline for me. Stepping over a fallen log he paused for a moment, giving me the opening to make a shot that knocked him off his feet. I find that raccoons will often come in on call, and have had particular success with the baby squirrel and woodpecker distress calls. Raccoons approaching a call are not overly cautious, and it has been my experience that they usually move straight in. One of the advantages of these evening/early morning shoots is that you never know what you'll come across; any time you're in raccoon territory there is a

reasonably good chance a possum, skunk, fox or coyote might put in an appearance. All but the coyote are fair game with the .22 and .25 caliber guns I favor for mid sized quarry.

These guns are capable of killing a coyote, but in my opinion they are not powerful enough to ensure a clean kill. The .308 and .50 caliber airguns for coyote are another story, but we'll visit that subject at a later date.

The airguns I use for taking these mid sized animals are all hard hitting and accurate. I have killed many raccoons and possums with .22 caliber guns, but have a preference for the mid bore .25 caliber in a precharged pneumatic air rifle. They provide a bit more reach, and if a head shot isn't possible requiring the body to be targeted, the larger caliber is more effective. A .27 grain 25 caliber pellet traveling at 900 fps generates about 50 fpe which will anchor a raccoon on the spot





even with a body shot. As most raccoon hunting takes place in low light conditions, a scope with good light transmission characteristics is a must. Lately I've been using a scope with an illuminated reticle, as it helps in picking up the target when there is low ambient lighting. I also like to use a tactical flashlight with a pressure sensitive switch mounted on the gun, as it provides optimal mobility.

Conventional high powered airguns offer a practical means of controlling mid sized pest species such as raccoon, possum, and everything up to fox. Keep the range to around fifty yards; use a heavy round nose pellet in .22 or .25, and take head shots when possible. These guns are fairly quiet, but if your rifle has a shrouded barrel or integrated moderator all the better, you can use them in populated areas without disturbing the neighbors. As I frequently mention, adding an airgun to your hunting battery will allow you to expand your hunting opportunity while providing a means to rid your property of pest animals without having to resort to poison or traps.



# SPOTTING SCOPES

JIM CHAPMAN

## Spotting Scope

A spotting scope is a useful piece of kit when shooting long range. I especially like to use on when shooting prairie dogs or ground squirrels, where I'll be set up in a shooting position for a long time and will be taking a number of shots. A hunting buddy and I will take turns using the high magnification scope to call each others shots, allowing the shooter to make windage and elevation adjustments as needed.

Although you can use a pair of high power binoculars such as 20x80 for many of the same tasks that a spotting scope will be used for, binoculars are fairly useless when you're laying on the ground to view prairie dogs dashing around between burrows. Binoculars simply aren't designed for the specific needs of the long range hunter and a spotting scope is generally a much better choice.

A spotting scope enables the shooter to view the target to determine where the last shot impacted. It can be used when testing loads at the local range, when spotting for a fellow hunter, or when either competing (looking at your own target when you are in the prone position on the firing line) or when spotting for a shooting partner at a High Power or Long Range BPCR match.

There are several spotting scopes for the airgun hunter or target shooter to choose from when it comes to price, features, quality, and size. Most of the major

manufacturers of camera lenses, telescopic rifle scopes, and binoculars also make a line of spotting scopes. Scopes made by such names as Nikon, Bushnell, Leupold, and private labels for Cabellas, Bass Pro Shop, and Gander Mountain as well as several other sources.

Before buying a spotting scope, do a little homework to determine which spotting scope and stand is best for your intended use. The magnification power, light gathering capabilities, for the airgunner should be optimized for use in side of 150 yards. I think a scope with a variable 10-50x magnification and a fairly large aperture is the way to go for airgunning field use.

Not all spotting scopes are not sold with a stand, though the lower priced package that work quite well for airgun hunters will come bundled with a stand. I would not recommend the small table tops tripods that are often packaged with scopes, as they are not flexible enough for the many positions a hunter will need to work from.



A photograph of a woodchuck, also known as a groundhog, in a field of tall green grass. The woodchuck is positioned in the upper right portion of the frame, facing left. Its body is light brown with darker brown stripes running down its back. The background is a soft-focus field of green grass.

# Woodchucks

**Jim  
Chapman**

## **Wood Chucks, Rock Chucks, And Marmots**

Woodchucks belong to the rodent family, which includes squirrels, prairie dogs, and chipmunks. They are widely distributed in North America and are particularly common in the east where they are found from the Deep South to the far northern regions. In the west, their range extends northward to Alaska, through southern Yukon and Northwest Territories. Within this large group the woodchuck is considered one of the marmots. A close relative of the woodchuck's, the hoary marmot lives in the mountains of western North America, from Idaho northward into the Yukon. It inhabits tundra, alpine meadows, and rock slides in mountains. The rockchuck is found in California, Texas and New Mexico Northwards to British Columbia and is another close woodchuck relative. Where the woodchuck is brownish this somewhat smaller cousin tends to be yellowish. The point is that no matter where you live, there is a likelihood that the airgun hunter will be able to pursue these big rodents.

Woodchuck populations have increased across most of the country because of deforestation and agriculture, and woodchuck numbers can be found among the woodlots, pastures, and cultivated fields of their range. These areas are ideally suited



for airgun hunting, as human habitation butts up against their environment. Among North American rodents, only beavers and porcupines are larger than these stocky animals with a flattened head. They commonly weigh 4-10 pounds, and large ones may be heavier in the autumn. They measure 40-65 cm total length, including a short bushy tail about 15 cm long. There are a large number of color phases for these animals, dependent on location. Because woodchucks/rockchucks/marmots are burrowing mammals, their feet have sturdy claws and their legs are thick and strong. They escape from enemies by diving into burrows.

Woodchucks seem to prefer open areas such as fields, clearings, open forests, and rocky slopes. They generally dig their burrows in areas where luxuriant grasses and other short-growing plants provide food. Burrows usually have a main entrance, one or more "spyholes" for added safety from enemies, and separate toilet and nesting chambers. The airgun hunter has to really keep a sharp eye out to get into shooting range before he is spotted. On one outing I could not figure out why the woodchuck did not return once I got myself situated behind a rise overlooking the field, until I realized I was in full view of one of the escape hatches and was being observed the whole time! The same nest is used for sleeping, hibernation, and as a nursery. Rock chucks, as their name implies, prefer rock piles and lava flow that they can burrow under. They are often seen perched atop an elevated pile of boulders surveying their surrounds.

Many farmers consider woodchucks to be nuisance animals, because of the vegetation that they eat, and because the piles of earth that they throw up while digging interfere with haymaking. Woodchucks do compete on a small but significant scale with farmers'

cattle for food, and occasionally get into people's vegetable gardens. Many landowners want to remove woodchucks because they dig holes in pastures where horses can step in and be injured, and when burrowing around buildings and structures can undermine the foundations. To many hunters, particularly in eastern North America, woodchucks are valuable game animals. Some hunters simply dispose of the carcass of the animal they shoot, but some do find them palatable. Late summer and early fall is the common woodchuck hunting seasons.

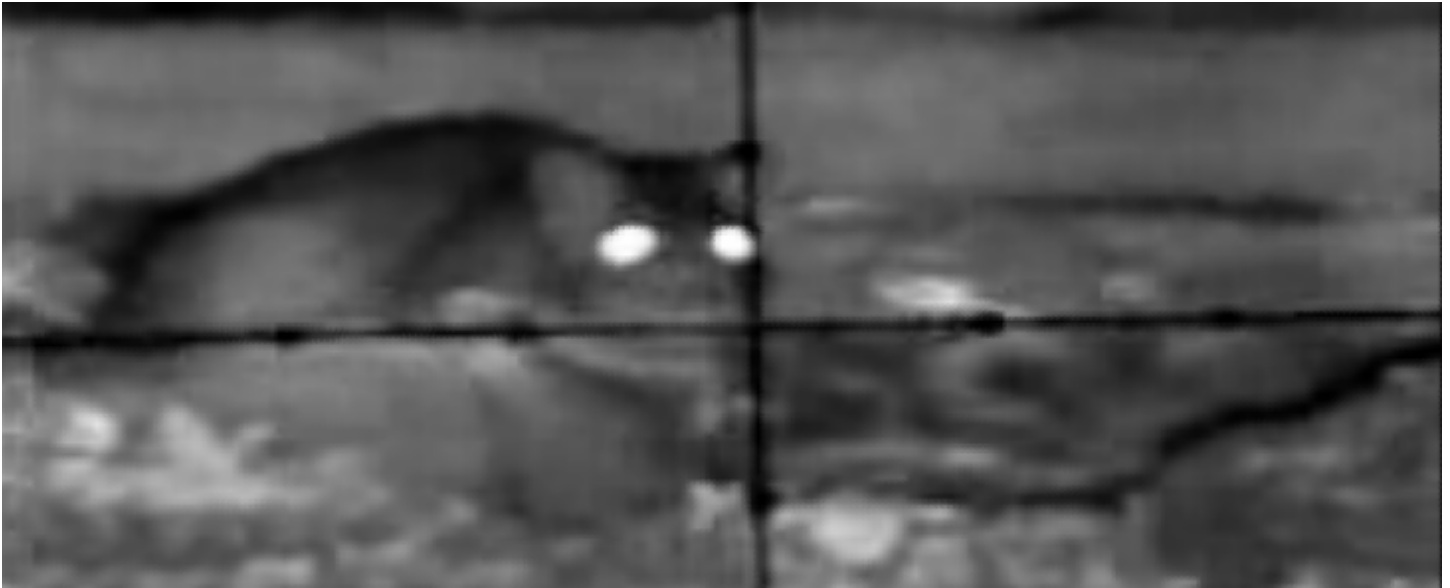
There are several ways to hunt Woodchucks, they can be spotted from a distance using a spotting scope or a high magnification binocular and the area in which the woodchuck has been spotted, the location of the den and the feeding area can be determined. Once the animal's routine is known the hunter can plan his approach to move within shooting range. The airgun hunter should carefully and quietly approach the den site and set-up 30-40 yards from where the chucks were spotted. I like to use shooting sticks or a bipod to steady my aim, and wear camouflage to help conceal my movements. I also like to have the sun at my back if possible. Watch out for escape holes and back doors, as the cautious animal may spot you from a place you didn't expect him to be.

When the chucks emerge, and begin to move about, the hunter needs to be patient and allow the varmints to settle in on their sunning spot. Once he has chuck become comfortable with his surroundings, the airgun hunter can take careful aim, and deliver a killing shot. Woodchucks, rockchucks, and marmots are big game animals in the context of airgun hunting. Precise pellet placement is required to humanely kill them. A well-placed pellet into

the varmint's brain will "anchor" them on the spot. At one point in my woodchuck hunting learning curve, I would try not to take a chest shot unless I had no other option, and even then only when using powerful airguns generating over 25 fpe. I've loosened up on that stance a bit since then, I had one season where I had the opportunity to shot dozens of these animals, including some monstrous examples, and found that a well placed chest shot worked very well. However, even after a well placed chest shot the animal might run a few yards before dropping, so if close to the whole I'd stick to a head shot, However if he had moved away from the burrow and out in the field while grazing, I'd be just as likely to hit him broadside. But in most cases, a headshot should be your primary objective, and will usually come if the hunter is patient. Considering a marmot's size and the distances at which shots are taken, only powerful air rifles should be used to hunt them. No rifle shooting less than 15 or 20 fpe should be used, and accuracy is paramount. I would consider air rifles shooting around 25fpe to be good chuck rifles, and .22 caliber is probably the smallest caliber which should be used. Having said this, I know of hunters that routinely take these animals with the .177. As has been often stated in this book, a well placed shot with the right type of pellet is probably more important than the caliber. I have taken quite a few whistle pigs with the Prairie Falcon, the Evanix AR6, the Career 300 which are all high power .22 PCPs. I have also used the Career Infinity in .25 and the Dragonslayer .50 with excellent results. What all these very different guns have in common, is that they are on the upward range of airgun power and they are all very accurate at the ranges I used them at. When hunting any critter from a camouflaged ambush setup, a pre-charged

pneumatic or gas ram equipped rifle is probably the best choice. A PCP can be pre-loaded and cocked, ready to fire when the chucks emerge. As previously mentioned, because of potential spring fatigue, a spring/piston type air rifle shouldn't be left cocked for long periods of time. If the hunter chooses to use a spring/piston air rifle, he must cock the rifle when the rock chuck appears, and not before. If the hunter's blind affords good concealment, a spring/piston air rifle can be used successfully. I have used an R1 in .22 to take woodchuck from a well situated blind that afforded my adequate cover for cocking the rifle. A hunter that I know in Idaho uses a Career 707 in 9mm for rockchuck, and swears this is the perfect gun for this application. Because woodchucks, rockchucks, and marmots are such large varmints, and shot opportunities often come at long range, pellet selection depends somewhat on the power of the hunter's airgun. If a chuck hunter is using an airgun on the lower end of the scale (15fpe), it may not have enough power to drive a deformed hollow point or flat head style pellet through the heavy hide and bones of a big chuck. If the hunter chooses to use an airgun in the 15-20fpe power range, I advise taking brain shots and sticking with a heavy weight round nose pellet. If a chuck's brain is the only acceptable target, accuracy becomes the key factor. With that in mind, a hard domed style pellet will likely be the hunter's best option, as they penetrate well, expand fairly well, and out of many guns are quite accurate. They will also retain more energy to deliver on target at greater distances. Woodchuck hunting is a challenging and fun, and is one of the "airgunning big game" species. Whether you hunt in the mountains, rocky wastelands, or Midwestern farmlands there is probably a chuck of some type available to hunt. Grab a gun and give it a go!!





# RAT PATROL

Rats are great targets for pest control shooting. They nest in burrows that are usually situated near a food source. They will emerge from drains at night in order to look for food in houses, fields, barns, anywhere they can find it. Brown Rats are very territorial and will not tolerate any other rodents sharing their food supply. If they find another animal in their territory they will always kill or chase them off. The Norway or common rat is generally found in agricultural areas, creeks, sewers, and developed neighborhoods, actually just about anywhere they can find something to eat. The Norway rat is larger and more aggressive than most other indigenous species of rat. Its eyes and ears are smaller than the palm rat's and the tail is shorter than the combined head and body length. This species usually lives in underground burrows, and feeds on garbage, pet food, cereal grains and vegetables, they can often be found in burrows around walls (or in walls), under air conditioners, holes under shrubs and bushes, in rock piles, and wherever they can find a dark protected area near food and water. Locales that contain a rat population are identified by finding droppings and urine marked areas. Visual sightings on utility cables or in trees are common. In Southern California we often see rats in the fronds of palm and citrus trees. They move from tree to tree on telephone wires and can be picked off when they are exposed at these times. Rats are omnivorous and can be baited with chocolate shavings, peanut butter, or pet food, something with a strong odor that cannot be carried off. Rats must have a source for water. Norway rats readily

accept fresh meat and fish and as a matter of fact they usually prefer baits higher in protein and fat than their normal diets. A tin of cat food or sardines with several holes punched into it, then tied to a solid object will bring in rats and hold them, as they are unable to haul away their booty and unwilling to leave it. Find a shooting position 15 – 20 yards from the bait which is partially hidden behind hay bales or equipment, and if there is a permanent low level light source (to which the rats have become acclimated) or a means of mounting a red lamp, you are set for some fast and exciting shooting. Rats travel in the dark in search of food and water. They do not often leave their established pathways unless the environment or food and water supplies change.



These rodent pests do not travel any farther than necessary to reach food and water. They are social animals and, within the same species, will use the same food, water source, and runways and often nest close together. Find one and you are likely to find many. They range, if necessary, as far as 150 feet to get food and water but prefer to travel much shorter distances if food and water are available.

To hunt for rats you need to find a place where they occur in numbers, go to the local dump and listen for the cans to rattle, put a spot light on the source, and nail them. You can also put out baits in a garbage bag and listen for them to come in and take the bait. If you can get access to a working farm, such as a hog farm or chicken farm, you can invariably find signs of rat activity, though you obviously need to make sure that you have clear shooting lanes and adequate back stops to preclude damage to animals or equipment. Around the feed troughs and feed storage areas are often productive areas. Farm buildings and old stables are great too; take your favorite air rifle and a tin of hollow points and listen for them moving about. You can mount a light with an under barrel mount so that when you swing your gun around you light up your quarry. Placing a dim light near the food source works well, the new LED lights are ideal for this. Red or orange lights do not seem to scare them as much as a white light does.

Airguns used to take rats do not have to be exceedingly powerful; I'd want something that generated at least 9-10 fpe, was very accurate, and either a multi-shot or a gun that cycles rapidly. There are a lot of guns that fit this bill; however I think it is one that the modified CO2 guns such as the Crosman 2240 are perfect.



# My Reintroduction to Airgunning: A Love Affair Rekindled

Randy Martin

I, probably like the majority of you, grew up around guns. My dad was a competitive handgun shooter and taught me at an early age how to shoot, and how to reload ammunition for his handguns. The only hunting he did was an occasional bird hunting trip, but by the time I was old enough to go hunting he had gotten out of the sport. We still continued to reload and take the handguns to the range every couple of months. Dad bought a Marlin/Glenfield .22 bolt action rifle when I was 10 years old and that was my gun, although I was never allowed to handle it unless we were going to the range.

That same year I got the ubiquitous Daisy Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas and was allowed to take it out in the backyard and woods around the neighborhood. That was in 1974, when no one thought much of a few kids roaming down the street of the neighborhood with BB guns in their hands. My friends and I spent many enjoyable hours shooting at the little green plastic army men out in my backyard or out in the woods shooting at gum balls, pine cones, just about anything. We knew our BB guns weren't powerful enough to kill birds and rodents, so hunting was not a consideration, though I did shoot many a Carpenter Bee while it was hovering over our deck. I graduated to a Benjamin Model 347 .177 caliber air rifle when I was 14 and boy I thought I was hot stuff then. Many rats, mice and chipmunks fell to the withering fire of the Benji, though it was still the army men that took the brunt of the shooting. I never

really considered shooting birds. We had mostly song birds around our house and I didn't know about English Sparrows and their destructive nature at the time. After high school and a couple of years in college, I just slowly drifted away from shooting, being occupied by other pursuits. The Benji sat in the closet virtually unused for years.

Jumping forward about 15 years, I'd gotten married and my wife and I bought a house. We just couldn't see buying a new house with the way builders strip the land during development these days. We wanted established shade trees and some woods around the house for privacy, so we got a 25 year old house in an older neighborhood. All was well for the first 2 or 3 years, then the open farm land all around us began to be sold off and developed during the housing boom that had begun in the late 1990's. Well, that presented several problems, but the biggest was the wildlife that had been living peacefully in the fields and woods began to seek new habitat. There's a drainage easement that runs through our neighborhood and out into what used to be undeveloped land. It made a natural highway for all manner of wildlife. Coyotes, foxes, raccoons, and the worst of all RATS! Our neighborhood was overrun with them; they were in all our basements and attics. That brings me back to airguns.

I was in our basement one day and heard a scratching noise as I was working on something at the workbench. After hearing it a couple of times I began to

investigate and soon discovered the noise was coming from something scrambling around on the foil backed insulation on the heating ducts. I soon spotted the culprit, a big Black Rat, or Roof rat as they're sometimes called. I carefully moved away trying not to spook it any more, and went upstairs to retrieve my old Benji. I found it in the back of my closet along with a tin of 20 year old pellets, pumped and loaded it and crept back downstairs, grabbing a flashlight on the way. The rat had disappeared but I sat and waited, listening intently for any sound and was rewarded shortly with the claws on metal sound again. I traced it down and stood on a folding step stool to get a look at the top of the air duct. I shone the bright flashlight on the rat and froze it just long enough to get a shot on it. Thus began my rekindled romance with the airgun.

Within a month or two the basement showed signs of serious rat infestation and I soon discovered that we had squirrels in our attic in addition to the rats having found their way up there. Sealing all the openings I could find around the house and setting out rat traps along with the steady shooting pressure soon cut the rat population down to almost nil, but the squirrels continued to get into our attic from some overhanging branches. Some of the more acrobatic ones would jump from our deck railing, grabbing the gutter and scrambling up onto the roof. While the Benjamin would do the job on squirrels, a couple of less than stellar shots left me thinking I needed a more powerful airgun. I did some research and found a good price on a .22 caliber RWS48. It's a powerful and accurate air rifle, but I soon discovered that it was way more than I needed for shooting squirrels at the close

and went upstairs to retrieve my old Benji. I found it in the back of my closet along with a tin of 20 year old pellets,





range I was encountering them, usually under 15 yards, and occasionally at about 15 feet. A through shot on a squirrel at about 25 feet one day hit my neighbor's A/C unit. Fortunately there was no damage, but it reminded me of something I'd momentarily forgotten. Always be aware of what lies behind your target. That's especially true in an area with surrounding buildings or roads. That led me to the Beeman R9 in .177, an absolutely wonderful air rifle with a little more energy than the Benjamin at eight pumps and a whole lot less energy than the RWS48. Having less power is no substitute for being aware of your backdrop, but in this case it added an additional measure of safety. The addiction by then had taken a firm grip upon me and an HW95 in .22 soon followed, along with a couple of QB78's and an R7.

We haven't had any more rats in the house for almost two years, though I did catch one on a bird feeder one night recently. I had the limbs trimmed back away

from the roof and the gaps and holes along the roof line covered, so aside from an occasional squirrel raiding the bird feeders on the deck, and a recent explosion in the chipmunk population, the house and yard are pretty much free of pests. I leave the squirrels alone unless they're on the deck, but the chipmunks are burrowing under our driveway, and deck pilings, so its open season on them. I still don't shoot birds. I see Starlings once in a while, but have not had a gun handy at the time, and no English Sparrows have been spotted.

While I've amassed an impressive collection of firearms over the years, its hard to plan the time to take a day and drive out to the country to shoot them. The airguns fill a much needed niche, allowing me not only to safely eliminate pests around the property, but also giving me a quiet and safe way to get target practice in just by walking out the back door or going to my indoor range in the basement.

# AIRHOG

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Squirrels

## **Ask & You Shall Receive!**

Take The Plunge, You May Like The  
Results...

Last year, I approached a pecan shelling plant & asked if possibly they might know any pecan growers who were having problems with crows. The question was immediately answered with another question, “What about squirrels?” After speaking with a farmer & making a phone call, I picked up my first pest control farm. It is a beautiful, little pecan orchard with a nice live oak grove on one end of the property. Surrounding that property is a forest with moderate ground cover. Needless to say, the squirrels in the vicinity are living the good life. I took about 40 bushy tails out of that property last season. I was told recently that I was very welcomed back this season & that I hadn’t made a dent in the population, so any time I wanted, the hunting grounds were at my disposal. The

farmer, Mr. T was quite pleased with my work last year, which led to the procurement of my second pecan orchard. Like the first, it is about 40 acres, but is surrounded by an extremely dense forest with heavy ground cover. This land differs in the fact that it is teeming with wildlife other than squirrels & that makes for other adventures down the road...

## **You Do The Math!**

( $2+2=\text{the square root of } 16$ )... Does Math  
Have To Be This Difficult?

**I have never had a problem when returning to my old childhood hunting grounds with putting in the bag as many as fox squirrels as I saw fit. The difference in weapons is the old days I used a .22 rim fire & have now replaced that with a precision air rifle. My hunting habits stay as they always have. I would rather stalk a 25 to 35 yard shot than take a shot at 50 yards or better, so an air rifle is perfect for me & the youths that I teach to hunt. If I wanted 3 squirrels, consider it done. If I wanted to kill my limit, then getting that or pretty close was a matter of putting in the time. I now shoot a very limited number**

**when I return to my old grounds, as I tend to save the critters for my sons or nephews & just enjoy the outing with them. Pest control is different. We as hitmen have an obligation to the farmers that we are helping to take care of their property & to rid them of the pests**





**Orchard #1 Cuttings**

**The  
Hotspots**



**Orchard # 2 Cuttings**

that are so damaging to their livelihood. Even though, Mr. T was happy with my work, I wasn't quit as pleased. Though I never struck out on a hunt, the numbers in hand were not quite as expected. Most hunts produced 2 or 3 fuzzy tails with the occasional single bagged critter & even more rare, 4 in the bag & never, more. My first 2 trips to orchard number 2 seemed to produce the same as my first orchard; 1 on the first trip & 2 on the second. No different in squirrels in hand but a true mystery about to unfold. I have always considered myself to be a pretty good woodsman. Stealth is a far better quality in my possession than accuracy in shooting. With this being said, I seemed to be scaring squirrels away from a particular area that Mr. H reported as a hotspot. Every time I spotted a scurrying squirrel, I would take a different approach on the next attempt to rid the area of the nut-stealers. This was several times per hunt & no matter how cautious I was, I still spooked the little thieves. I just didn't understand...

### **A Change In Philosophy**

If You Find Not What You Seek, Look Elsewhere...

Scouting orchard #1, I realized how much information was overlooked from the previous season. I started as I had last season, wandering through the orchard looking for signs of squirrels as opposed to the squirrels themselves. I looked for cuttings under trees that would surely house the little boogers, but did not find what I would call a true feeder tree. The areas in which I found cuttings seemed to house a squirrel or 2 but not quite what I was hoping for. Then it came to me. "Yo!!! You Big Dummy!!! Look At Me!!!" Okay, the tree didn't really say that but I was drawn in the direction, just the same. A fairly young tree, loaded with pecans, but not any more than others I had seen. It was off in the distance by itself & appeared to not be very prime for squirrel housing. I made the short trek & when I arrived, I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!!! The buffet leftovers were incredible. Cuttings piled up as deeply as I have ever seen. It reminded me of orchard #2 where I spook squirrels each time.

I looked for a spot within 35 yards & went to sit down, not to shoot, but to contemplate what I was seeing. The only thing that I was sure of was that I was trying to hunt this place like my childhood hunting grounds and that was all wrong. The similarities were few and far between, however my 2 orchards were quite similar...

### **Simple Math**

(2+2=4) Now That's More Like It...

**As I sat under the tree looking at my new, found hotspot, I wondered what the attraction was. Thoughts ran through my mind that made no sense at all; big, beautiful, bearing trees in the middle of the orchard with little activity & a scrub tree with more activity than Grand Central Station. Suddenly, the pieces started to fit.**

The similarity in this scenario & orchard #2's hotspot was clear. They both had accessibility from protected woods to the feeding area strictly by tree. Though the pecan tree was away from the orchard, it bordered a nice oak tree with a small patch of woods and ground cover. It was also accessible to the little tree climbers without them ever having to touch the ground. That's got to be it!!!

**My thoughts then drifted back to last year when Mr. T told me that the no good crop thieves crossed the street from the woods, grabbed a prize & ran back. He reported that they crossed back & forth all day long. I considered him to be ranting & didn't think a squirrel running back & forth was a very good target for an air gunner. The problem is that I didn't pay attention to the true signs right in**





**front of me. Mr. T gave me the key & I turned it into an equation over & above what was needed. (2+2=4)**

It's that simple. I proceeded to scout the trees bordering the orchard closer to the woods. You can guess what I found. Not quite the amount of cuttings as the trees accessible strictly from above, but definitely more than the middle of the orchard. I began to create the theories that I hoped would improved my take...

### **Weird Science**

To Prove or Disprove a Theory or Two...

The first theory that I had to disprove was my inability to sneak up on these little boogers. All those years of hunting meant nothing to these spooked greys as they had been eluding me and of course this put my manhood or squirrelhood as it were, at stake.

Is the proposed hotspot just that because it offered the most protection with the dinner table accessed by treetop?

Do the trees closer to the woods, but a short distance away, warrant a look?

Can I associate orchard's 1 & 2 with the same conclusions?

**Agriculture** (Don't know about you, but this was a class where I went to school)

On To The Farm & A Little Hunting...

### **Orchard #2**

**Daybreak wasn't quite at hand yet, as I needed my flashlight to get setup in orchard #2's hotspot. "My Baby" was zeroed & loaded, as she could not possibly be blamed if the day went awry. I waited about 10 minutes for daylight to break. It took only 10 more for the action to begin. The first squirrel crossed what proves to be the main squirrel bridge from the deep woods at a blazing pace. As I tried to scope him, his intentions**

**were clear and I wasn't part of his plan. He grabbed his pecan & headed for the deep woods so quickly that I believe my scope went back in time. Within seconds, a younger, yet just as wise, grey repeated the process.**

"YAAAAAAYYYYY!!!!" This blasts my first theory apart, as my woodman ship appears to be intact. I wasn't scaring them away at all. They had their own agenda & sticking around was not part of it. They returned to the woods to finish their prize and started the process again. Fearing that the bushy tails were much wiser than me, I tried a couple of quick shots & you can imagine the outcome. Finally, I decided to be a bit more patient as the feeding grey presented me with the target that was more to my liking.

For the next couple of hours this hotspot became a shooting gallery. It was like a duck roost with the same results. While you were trying to take a shot, a better one would present itself resulting in the only conclusion possible, another miss. Finally with one of the few breaks in action, I decided to give the squirrels & myself a rest. What a success story! With my first theory disproved like I needed, it also proves that that my second theory seemed to be fact. I picked up 5 tree-dogs with another ten or so missed. Oh well, nobody's perfect and I definitely proved it on this day...

It was time to test theory #3. As I left my new favorite shootin' gallery, I went to check a few trees a short run from the woods. Finding fresh cuttings, I scanned the woods closest to the orchard. At 37 yards & as still as a rock was the biggest black squirrel I had ever seen. Within seconds, acquisition & a controlled squeeze sent the lead torpedo to its target. The big black squirrel took what looked like a power dive to the ground with a thump that sounded like it was right next to me...



Orchard #2-5 Greys In The Shootin' Gallery + 1 Big Black Fox Edge Of The Woods

**Physics** (OK, I Just Have To Shoot Better Than That)

Back To Orchard #1...

I was feeling pretty good about myself with my newfound knowledge. Of course that doesn't help my shooting prowess, but I set out on this hunt with a more relaxed state of mind. It was time to test my last theory, hoping to apply my updated information from orchard #2 to orchard #1. Again, beating daylight by just a few minutes, I sat enjoying the waking & singing of the birds. After about 20 minutes had passed, the first pecan thief appeared & without a pause, ran from the woods, through the big oak tree, right behind my head. I sat there & took my chewing out without any movement whatsoever. Five minutes later, a first year grey followed suite & came within 4 feet of me, cursing like a barroom brawler. As I shifted my weight,

he lit out for the orchard, out of site.

Sitting as quietly & as still as possible, the next hour & a half passed with a few birds being my only visitors. As I contemplated a failed theory & changing locations, the few extra minutes finally paid off. A grey appeared under the oak tree, frolicking in & out of cover without giving me a shot. As I peered through my scope several times trying to locate the critter, a large male cat squirrel dashed into view with his pecan.

He paused long enough to present me with the shot that ended his thievery. Another grey appeared near the frolicker, chattering an intrusion. The chase began & a minute later the standoff. I sent the first shot successfully & the curiosity of the second, gave me my chance. Three shots 3 down.

Not bad, but not done yet. A forth bushy tail





appeared unaware of the gauntlet. "My Baby" slid into my shoulder smoothly & a split second later sent the lead pill for supper. I ended the hunt with a bit of stalking & added 3 more to the bag... My final theory also proved to be fact. The final analysis, however is this:

If I am going to hunt exclusively with air rifles like I intend to do, then this old dog had better learn a few new tricks, curb the cockiness & welcome a bit of luck whenever it decides to visit. Be Safe & Happy Hunting...



**Orchard #1 7 In The Bag/Theory 4 In Tact**

# Pigeon Pest Control

A session with Dutch to thin out the hordes of flying rats at his shoot on a Midwestern horse ranch. Guns, gear, and methods!

## Dutch

At the start of a hunt I zero and load up a few guns, carbon fiber tank, too many pellets, laser range finder, empty plastic Wal-Mart sacks into the trunk. And with some good tunes playing on the radio I head out for some classic pest control.

The ranch I go to has 400 acres of grasslands and contain horses ranging from \$25,000-2,000,000. You have to be aware of your surroundings at all times. You have to know where your pellets are going to land. Be it a 12 foot pound or 30 foot pound airgun, you have to know where your pellet is going to travel after it goes through a pigeon or skips across the flat land of the pasture. You definitely don't want to hit ranch hands or livestock. You don't want to hit buildings or vehicles either. Its better to pass on a shot and get another one later than to cause damage and ruin a good pest removal hot spot.

The majority of the pigeons fly in from Springfield, Illinois to feed at the ranch. They arrive in the hundreds to feed on the freshly spread oats about 9:00 am. They hang around until the latter part of the afternoon turns to evening. I used to walk the place dressed in camouflage, but they learned that funny dressed guy was around when their buddies were getting blasted. So now I put on some jeans and a t-shirt with a ball cap. I look just like any other ranch hand. That's been very effective.

Now the pigeons that I kill are pests first and foremost. They eat the oats meant for the horses walking the ranch. They leave disease-carrying droppings on the ground with the oats, on hay used to feed the horses, and they are carriers of west Nile virus that has caused illness and death for the horses on the ranch. Now west Nile is spread by mosquitoes that bite infected birds, become infected and are carriers, and bite livestock as well as humans. Also mass quantity of pigeon droppings collected on the top of rafters or the tin roofs of pole barns can produce a bacterium known as histoplasmosis. This bacterium enters the respiratory system and causes severe damage resulting in removal or partial removal of the lung lobes. Pigeons are from England and are also known as rock doves, Henry the VIII used to have 3000 of them prepared for his feast. They have much more meat than a morning dove has to offer, but you won't catch me eating those flying rats. They need to be thinned down, and I am the man to do the job.

Pigeons get dispatched on the flat ground of the pasture, on the crest off rooftops, and when they are lined up on a fence line. Sometimes there is no wind what so ever and doping for the wind is nil to very minimal, but then there are other times that the wind is extremely strong and will cause significant pellet drift. When this is going on,



guns to group within a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " sticker dot with the exception of the Falcon 8" action pistol but I will discuss this pistol down a little further on down. Zero your guns every time you hunt with them. Airguns can be somewhat temperature sensitive, and its just good practice to check your zero before you go out critter shooting.

Getting well versed in your gun's behavior as it shoots is essential. To do this practice punching paper and focus on getting as tight of groups as possible. Pigeons have a large kill zone, but you want to have the satisfaction of placing the pellet where you wanted it to go.

Knowing where your gun hits is easy to do when you have a laser range finder and a mildot scope. You can easily discover the relationship by shooting at small objects such as rocks or dirt clumps. Aim dead on and see where the pellet hits in relation to the vertical dots on the y axis of the mil dot scope and adjust to see where you hit. Laser the distance and make note of the distance and where to holdover within your mildot scope. The scopes that I use are the Tasco 2.5-10X mildot and the Bushnell Legend 5-15X mil dot. The Tasco doesn't have distance between the dots so it stays on the Falcon 8 pistol. There is a Bushnell Legend on my ZM (Alan Zasandy Modified) Career II 707 long gun in .22, ZM Rapid MKII in .22, and Falcon 12. The dots in this scope are placed further apart. And the further apart your reference points or mil dots, the further distances you can shoot.

The guns I primarily shoot are as follows the ZM Rapid MKII, Career II 707 long gun, Falcon 12, and Falcon 8. My favorite of rifle

## **RWS/HAMMERLI 850**

One of the newer CO2-powered guns that is suitable for small game hunting is the RWS/Hammerli 850. This bolt-action, 8-shot repeater has captured the attention of quite a few air gun enthusiasts, and has already been recreated by many of them and christened the "poor man's Rapid". This has been accomplished by obtaining an adaptor to go between the 9 oz. bottle and the gun. You won't need the slip-off forearm if you elect to use a bottle, and what you will have is a very good small game rifle with a ton of shots on tap. And you will save money over buying the 88 gram AirSource cartridges that the gun was designed to use.

I was fortunate enough to review one several months ago, and I have to admit that the 850 starts out in stock form where many of my guns end up at after some modification. And the price is very economical, with the added benefit of being a repeater. Fast follow-up shots are sometimes needed in hunting situations, and the 850 is the next-best thing to having a semi-auto airgun in your hands. The accuracy derived from the German-designed gun is exceptional, and hitting your target is all about the shooter, because the gun is going to deliver! If you would like to read the review I did of this gun, go to Airgun Depot and browse through their blog. Here's a link to the review itself:

[http://site.airgundepot.com/blog1/product\\_reviews/rws\\_hammerli\\_850\\_airmagnum/](http://site.airgundepot.com/blog1/product_reviews/rws_hammerli_850_airmagnum/)  
Put this gun on your watch list if you don't already have one. And visit the 850 Resource section of the yellowforum.com, where you will find an entire forum of enthusiasts with advice on modifying and enjoying your new RWS/Hammerli 850.

is the Rapid MKII. It has a 12 shot magazine and can send a 16 grain round nose JSB pellet 965 feet per second for about 60 shots. It removes ¼" sticker dots @ 50 yards with ease and is extremely flat shooting. My longest laser range finder confirmed kill was 164 yards. It took three shots to walk the pellet into the pigeon. I had to hold one dot to the left and to where the thin line meets the bold line below the 4th mildot to hit the pigeon with a 1 shot 1 kill. This gun also shoots Kodiaks very well, but the 21.1 grain pellet is not as flat shooting as the 16 grain pellet. This makes no difference from the muzzle to 80 yards but when shooting on the other side of 120 yards, this is where the difference is noticed. The .22 Career II 707 long gun is my longest owned precharged pneumatic airgun. I started out with it and a hand pump and then graduated to the 88 cubic foot carbon fiber tank. This rifle will stack the Beeman Crow Magnum pellet @ 45 yards. Its flat deep hollow point doesn't offer good wind resistance for long ranges, but it's an ideal pellet for close range vermin and small game. The 14.3 grain Crosman Premier pellet pushing 1015 feet per second is very good in this gun as well but with a strong crosswind the pellet with drift approximately 1 foot at 92 yards when the 935 feet per second 21.1 grain Kodiak only drifts 6 inches. With Kodiak pellets this rifle will take pigeons reliably out to 120 yards. Currently I shoot it for 24 shots at approximately 35 foot pounds of energy.

The Falcon 12 is a fine carbine rifle in .22 with match trigger and long moderator. It is light-weight, extremely quiet, very compact, easy to handle, and with a sling you don't know its there. This gun shoots Crosman

Premiers, JSB's, and Field Target Specials. I currently shoot JSB's in the rifle, but I think it really favors the Field Target Specials. The longest laser range finder confirmed kill with this rifle is 105 yards. This gun gets 20 shots with 20 foot pounds of energy. I carry a 4500 psi aluminum carbon fiber wrapped tank inside the carrier for a camel back hydration pack to compensate for the low shot count.

The Falcon 8 in .22 caliber has taken the most pigeons. This gun uses the Falcon long moderator and has a match trigger. This pistol is set up for 12 foot pounds of energy and gets 26 very consistent shots. I use a Tasco 2.5 x 10X mildot scope. I zero with the top mildot hitting dead on at 15 yards. The crosshairs will hit dead on at 31 yards, and the bottom dot will hit within a golf ball sized area at 41 yards. When the action of this pistol is in a pistol grip stock it will consistently kill pigeons at 68 yards, and when the action is within a carbine stock it will consistently kill pigeons at 74 yards. The great thing about this gun is its stealth. When the pellet hits a pigeon, it doesn't make a loud "thowack" noise. I can shoot 4-5 pigeons with this pistol and the flock of birds is never none the wiser.

It is very difficult in our times to find a pest removal area. I found this one by word of mouth. I used to shoot sparrows when my friend had a hog lot. He mentioned that I could take care of some pigeons to the ranch owner. I have been shooting there since October of 2002. I think the reasons that I am still there are that I don't put holes in the buildings, I police up the dead pigeons when I can, and I have never hit a horse or a ranch hand. If you're fortunate enough to



# HOUNSLOW SAFARIS

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have a landowner let you to use airguns to eliminate pests on their land, you have to treat the property with the utmost respect. Good luck and good shooting.

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# Discovery .177

Randy Mitchell

## The Benjamin Discovery

There has been quite a bit of excitement lately over Crosman's new PCP offering, the Benjamin Discovery. Owing quite a bit to the Crosman 2260 CO2 gun, the Discovery features a relatively low-pressure (2000 psi) reservoir that is easily filled with the pump that comes with the gun as a package.

Jim Chapman has been testing the .22 version for some months now, and I was able to get my hands on a .177 caliber prototype. Jim will be commenting on his impressions of the .22, and I will focus on the .177 version.

When I opened the package, I was struck by how light the gun was when I picked it up. The 5 lb. gun is very easily handled, and will be a delight for the younger shooter or shooter of smaller stature. Even for the average-sized airgunner, it will make carrying your air gun in the field a pleasant experience. It balances well and at 39" long is easily carried into thicker brush when pursuing your prey.

The pump required little in the way of assembly.....a few screws and a Phillips-head screwdriver, and I was done. I was able to refill my reservoir with 60 or so pumps after plinking for 30+ shots, and the pumping effort was very easy. I'm not sure how many pumps are needed for a totally empty gun as I used my air tank for the initial fill. The quick-detach fill port is easily accessed, and the included air gauge gives you a general idea of where you stand pressure-wise. I was unable to test the CO2 fuel in this gun, but I understand that you get many more shots at lower velocities.

The .177 served me well in a brief squirrel hunt I managed to get in between some really awful weather. Thankfully, the squirrel season here in Kentucky is longer than some places, and after deer season is over, you pretty much have the woods to yourself! I snuck up on three squirrels playing, and bagged two of them, one right after the other, with a single shot each at a stepped-off 30 paces. The accuracy the Discovery provides is excellent, and the scope rail machined into the receiver is the common 3/8" that fits so many mounts these days. The smaller scopes are ideal for this gun, and I expect to have another very fine hunting gun in my collection to play with once the factory versions arrive.

Velocities from the .177 were in the high 800's to low 900's with Crosman Premies, and the RWS Superdomes that I like quite a bit gave an average 90 fps faster with their thinner skirts. With a power range of about 12-16 fpe, this is a very good small game air gun for someone looking to get into the PCP world on a budget. And the ease of cocking the bolt only adds to the gun's attraction for the up-and-coming young shooter eager to try their hand at small game hunting.

Give this gun some serious thought. Doubtless, the hardcore airgun modifiers have already planned their Frankenstein creations based on this gun, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, in stock trim, this gun already has a lot to offer. I will be adding one to my collection, and I seriously doubt I'll have it modified, at least not for a while. The only thing I would consider modding from the outset would be the trigger. It isn't bad, but there is room for improvement. But like I said, there isn't anything wrong with the gun as it comes from the factory. So enjoy it!





# A Shoot Through the Trees

Whether shooting uphill, or downhill, you always need to shoot lower than if you were on a level field. This is due to the actual flight path of the bullet being shorter in vertical than linear distance. In essence, gravity affects the bullets as it travels in a horizontal direction,

Jim Chapman

## **Shooting Uphill or Into a Tree**

Shooters are sometimes confused about the pellets path when shooting uphill or downhill. For instance, does it strike high when shooting downhill and strike low when shooting uphill? From a practical standpoint, this is an important issue to understand. Spend a day hunting squirrels and you'll see what I mean, my poor grasp of this skill drove me crazy during my first season of serious Midwest squirrel shooting. I hadn't spent a great deal of time shooting up into trees, but I found myself that season going days at a time without a ground shot. Lucky for me, firearms hunters have done extensive testing on shooting uphill and downhill and had some answers for me. They explained that the true vertical pellet drop is the same for level fire and uphill or downhill shooting for the same range. The vertical drop is the same regardless of whether one is shooting uphill, level, or downhill when shooting at the same distance. The pellets velocity is also the same whether shooting over a level range or shooting uphill or downhill. In other words the pellet does not slow down faster in uphill shooting than with level shooting and the bullet velocity does not increase when shooting downhill.

A rifle zeroed in at level range will shoot higher when shooting uphill or downhill. For a given angle of fire the pellet will shoot high by the same amount whether shooting uphill or downhill.

The theory as to why the pellet always shoots high for uphill and downhill shooting is based on the projectile's path in relation to the pull of gravity. Gravity works perpendicular to the horizontal line. It's the horizontal distance traveled by the bullet that is important rather than the actual linear distance traveled.

According to the rules of trigonometry the cosine of THETA is equal to the horizontal range divided by the slant range (hypotenuse). By rearranging the terms, the

horizontal range is equal to the slant range (hypotenuse) multiplied by the Cosine of THETA.

Assume we have zeroed a rifle at 30 yd on a level range and we are shooting at a target on a slant range of 30 yards. Assume the slope angle THETA is 30 degrees. The cosine of 30 degrees is 0.87. The horizontal range for the bullet is only 26 yards ( $30 * 0.87$ ). In order to hit the target we should hold the gun as if the target were only 26 yards away not 30 yards. If we shoot where the scope crosshairs intersect the target we will shoot over the target. When squirrel hunting, you won't know the actual slant range or the slant angle of a squirrel sitting in a tree staring down at you. Just remember to always aim lower, because any slant range shot, either downhill or uphill, will be higher than if it were a horizontal shot.





# BIG BORE JACKRABBIT GUNS

Jim Chapman

## Desert Bigbore Trip

I was scheduled to fly out to Las Vegas for a conference that would last for a few days, and the way the schedule was arranged I was able to wrangle a weekend to work my way out to the desert for a hunting trip.

There's a spot we've been hunting for years that's about a two and a half hour drive from the airport, loaded with jackrabbits, and lord knows I needed a break from the snow and ice storms we'd been enjoying at home. Squirrel season was over, there was no skiing in the flat Midwestern landscape, and as a result winter had lost its charm. The chance to hunt didn't require much thought, and neither did the question of which gun to take.

For several months I had been reading about the large bore air rifles being produced by the master airgun designer/builder Dennis Quackenbush, and had decided that I had to get one for my collection. The only problems were deciding

which one to get, and waiting in line to get it once that decision had been made. Dennis's guns are so popular that they are sold before they are built, and he doesn't take orders until he's ready to build a series of rifles. After looking at his Bandito .50 caliber rifle and the Exile .308 designs, I found that the .308 appealed to me. I also decided that as this was going to be a rifle which would be carried in the field to hunt with, I'd be willing to give up a little bit on shot capacity to achieve a more compact kit. I spoke with the designer on a few occasions about parts





he manufactured that I needed to build up 9mm and .25 caliber hunting pistols, when the conversation gravitated to the rifle I wanted. Dennis mentioned that he was going to be building up his next series of rifles and would probably be able to include an Exile for me in the carbine length barrel, and would notify me when the gun came available. I was out on a business trip when the email came asking if I was still interested in the Exile, to which I gave an immediate yes! Finally after a couple weeks of waiting, the gun arrived at my house. Speaking with my wife from the office that day she told me a package from Quackenbush arrived, and I couldn't wait to get home to see my newest acquisition! When I arrived home and saw the shipping case, my heart sank. The box was much too small to contain my rifle! But when I opened the box I found that the barrel assembly and stock were wrapped separately, and once I had the gun together I was very pleased with it indeed!

My Exile .308 carbine has a 20" barrel and an overall length of 37", weighing in at about 7 lbs. The gun is cycled for firing with a two step process; first the bolt action is used to load the .308 bullet; this puppy does not use conventional pellets but cast 160 gr bullets. I had obtained these as a gift from Eric Henderson at MDA, and was grateful to him as I wouldn't have made the hunt otherwise. The gun is then cocked using a knurled cocking lever that is positioned right below the bolt. This cocking lever takes some energy to pull back and is a bit rough in the fingers after twenty five or thirty shots in a row, but under normal hunting usage is not bad at all. The air reservoir is a 1" tube filled to a pressure of 3600 psi, and yields four full power shots after which the decreased velocity will result in vertical stringing. The fill probe Dennis uses on his guns is included, and I mated it to a male Foster fitting for convenient use with my tanks and hand pumping rigs. Because I was taking this gun on a traveling hunt requiring air travel, I





opted for the manual pump to fill the gun. The logistics of carrying a SCUBA tank and getting it filled is just too much hassle, especially when dealing with the time constraints I was facing. Charging the completely empty gun with the Hill pump required about a hundred and forty strokes, so when you finally start shooting you know you've earned each shot! With a full charge the gun puts out about 225 fpe, which is plenty of gun for anything from jackrabbits to small boar, in my opinion. With my plan of action decided, I packed up and prepared to head out the next morning for the airport, placing my guns in a hard sided golf case and tucking a ticket to Nevada into my jacket pocket.

I had awakened at 4:00 am to catch the 7:00 am flight to Las Vegas, and found the Indiana morning dark, snow covered and

bitterly cold. It was a good day to be traveling out west, as the weather forecast was partly sunny and a low of 56 degrees. Arriving at the airport I went through the customary exchange with the airline representative regarding the rifles, them asking me if they needed to be declared as firearms, and me explaining that it was up to them (it's kind of funny, but they invariably ask me what they should do) ... I had packed with the expectation they would be considered firearms. They then disregard my advice (this is also an invariable occurrence), and call the Transportation Security office. The TSA representative then gives advice on how to proceed, etc, etc, but eventually everything gets squared away. You cannot underestimate the frustration quotient on this part of the trip, the airline and TSA never seem to give the same story twice, so packing for the worst scenario



makes sense. I always pack my gear to the standards which would be expected with firearms as a precaution. Finally, after passing through security and making my way to the gate I boarded the small Canadair jet destined for Las Vegas via Denver. As I sat on the plane drifting in and out of sleep, the nagging thought that I'd arrive without my rifles arriving with me, kept pulling me back to consciousness. I only had the day of my arrival and the following afternoon to hunt, then I was tied up with business meetings the rest of the trip until I climbed on the plane and headed home. If my guns didn't arrive at the baggage claim when I climbed off, the hunt was over before it started ..... so I kept my fingers crossed and gave up on trying to sleep.

On landing I went down to collect my baggage and was heartened to see that my bags had both arrived. But taking a close look at my gun case I saw right away that TSA had not closed the case properly after they had inspected it. Unable to open the case for inspection at the baggage claim and fearing the worst, I grabbed my stuff and made my way to pick up the rental SUV. As soon as I got off the beaten track I pulled over and opened the case to find guns, tools, and the Hill pump were piled together ..... and the scope I'd mounted on the DAQ .308 before leaving home had been knocked off. However, as things were untangled and stowed away I saw there was no major damage; the only real problem was that I wanted to hunt but had to take the time to

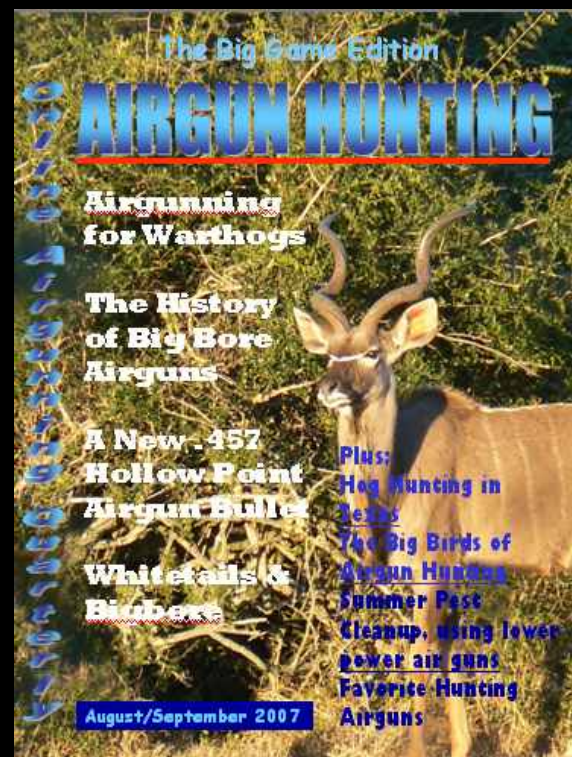


remount the scope and zero it over the hood of the car before getting underway. Twenty minutes later I was sighted in and driving back to my shoot.

Arriving at the site I had selected for my initial hunt, I loaded my rifle, slipped some extra bullets into my pocket, and headed off into the desert brush. The landscape was dotted with Joshua trees, various cactus, and creosote bushes that provided a dense ground cover. This is always a limiting factor when hunting the desert in the winter season, and really increases the challenge of stalking into shooting range. Hiking up the side of a hill strewn with volcanic rock punctuated by the occasional barrel cactus, I gained a good vantage over the desert spread out below. Breaking out my binoculars I started to methodically glass the immediate area. I paid special attention to scrapes under the occasional Cholla cactus as I have found this to be a favored cover of the big desert jackrabbits. I think this is because it gives them some degree of protection from the rear; it would have to be a mighty hungry coyote to dive head first through this fiendish plant. After a few minutes of glassing, I spotted the telltale amber glow of the sunlight passing through the ears of a rabbit tucked away under a Cholla about a hundred yards off. I picked a line that would bring me to a small stand of Joshua trees within 50 yards of the scrape, with the added advantage of keeping me covered along the way. Crouching low and walking in as quietly as I could to the Joshuas, I poked my head around until I could see through the branches, only to find the rabbit sitting bolt upright with ears held erect. As quiet as I thought I'd been, he'd obviously picked up my steps softly crunching the sand. There were some twigs that interfered with a headshot, however his position offered me a clean line to a profile

chest shot. Bracing against the trunk of the Joshua tree, and simultaneously feeling a sharp spine poking me in the shin, I adjusted my leg and lined up the shot. Placing the crosshair high on the big desert hares shoulder, I slowly stroked the trigger. The muffled thud of the pellet impacting right on target drifted back to me as the hare jumped once and hit the deck without a twitch. I paced off the distance as I crossed the sandy expanse between my hide and the downed quarry, and found the shot to have been about 55 yards. The bullet had penetrated all the way through the rabbit, providing a bit of anecdotal information for the penetration / expansion debate; put a big hole through the right place, it doesn't matter if it expands and stops or penetrates all the way though ..... it does the job

Hiking for the next three hours, I didn't come across any game but did see a roadrunner, a large herd of feral donkeys, a bunch of songbirds, and a lot of beautiful scenery. I love the desert and have never understood



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# CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRRELS

COMBINING VARMIN'T HUNTING AND  
PEST CONTROL THE FX MONSOON AND  
DYNAMIC TIN ALLOY PELLETS GET  
THE JOB DONE

CLIFF THARP





Unlike tree squirrels, California ground squirrels are not edible game animals. They live in burrows in the ground, are covered in dirt and are loaded with fleas. They are classified as a pest species, and are vermin the same as rats and mice. There is no season, or any limits on the number you can take. They cause millions of dollars in losses to farmers and ranchers each year. It's a constant challenge to try and keep their numbers in check. A female ground squirrel can have as many as 12 young in a litter, but I find that five or six is more typical. You do need a current California hunting license to take ground squirrels. Airguns are a very effective ground squirrel control tool. In the proper hands, they can be safely used around farm and ranch buildings, equipment, personnel, and farm and ranch animals. Unlike poisons, an airgun hunter is very selective by only killing the pest species. Sometimes adversity can be the mother of necessity. One of the ranches that I hunt ground squirrels on has banned the use of all ammunition containing lead. This includes airgun pellets. They have done this to keep the California Condors in the area from ingesting lead particles from the gut piles of field dressed game, or dead varmints left in the field. Needless to say, this took me completely by surprise. I have hunted this ranch for about 12 years, and have enjoyed every minute of every hunt. I had two choices, stop hunting California ground squirrels there, or by necessity, find a non-lead pellet for my airguns. I had never

given any thought to non-lead ammunition, and had no idea if such pellets even existed. I put my dilemma out to the airgunning community at AirgunAdvice.net, and received information back from one of the members about a company in England and their line of DYNAMIC tin alloy pellets. They were gracious enough to send a sample of the PCP 2's for me to try. I shot them in my FX 2000, FX Whisper, and FX Monsoon, all in .22. They performed beautifully in all three guns. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. I started by hunting with them in my FX 2000, and the FX Whisper. I knew we were onto something special when the first 5 pellets out of my FX 2000 went just under a half inch at 55 yards. The squirrels didn't know what hit them. Accuracy and penetration were superb. I decided it was time to put the FX Monsoon to work. If you're not familiar with the gun, the Monsoon is a 12 round semi-auto PCP built by the good folks at FX in Sweden. Mine has the synthetic thumbhole stock. It's in .22, and the accuracy is on a par with some of my bolt guns. It is very quiet and mine functions flawlessly. I can shoot three full mags (36 rounds) through it before I need to give her more air. The DYNAMIC PCP 2 pellet weighs 14.5 grains, and is made of a tin copper alloy. It shoots very well in most of my guns. I'm shooting the 5.54mm head diameter. They are also available in 5.56mm. I have the Monsoon sighted in at 55 yards. Most of my squirrel shooting is done between 50 and 70 yards, with some a bit closer, and a few longer. The Monsoon is the ideal late Spring ground squirrel rifle. The year's young have started coming

above ground making for a target rich environment. The semi-auto feature is perfect for those situations where you have 4 and 5 squirrels at a time hanging around the mounds. There have been many occasions when I have taken 3 or 4 squirrels in just a matter of seconds. The first time I hunted the Monsoon with the tin alloy pellets was about the middle of May. I drove into a small canyon that typically holds a large number of ground squirrels. I fully expected to find them in quantity, especially with this year's young now above ground. I wasn't disappointed. As I was four wheeling over to the jump off point for the days hunt, squirrels were running everywhere. I make it a rule to take my time getting my equipment out for the hunt. I like to let the area quiet down for 15 or 20 minutes after having driven through. The squirrels that went scurrying

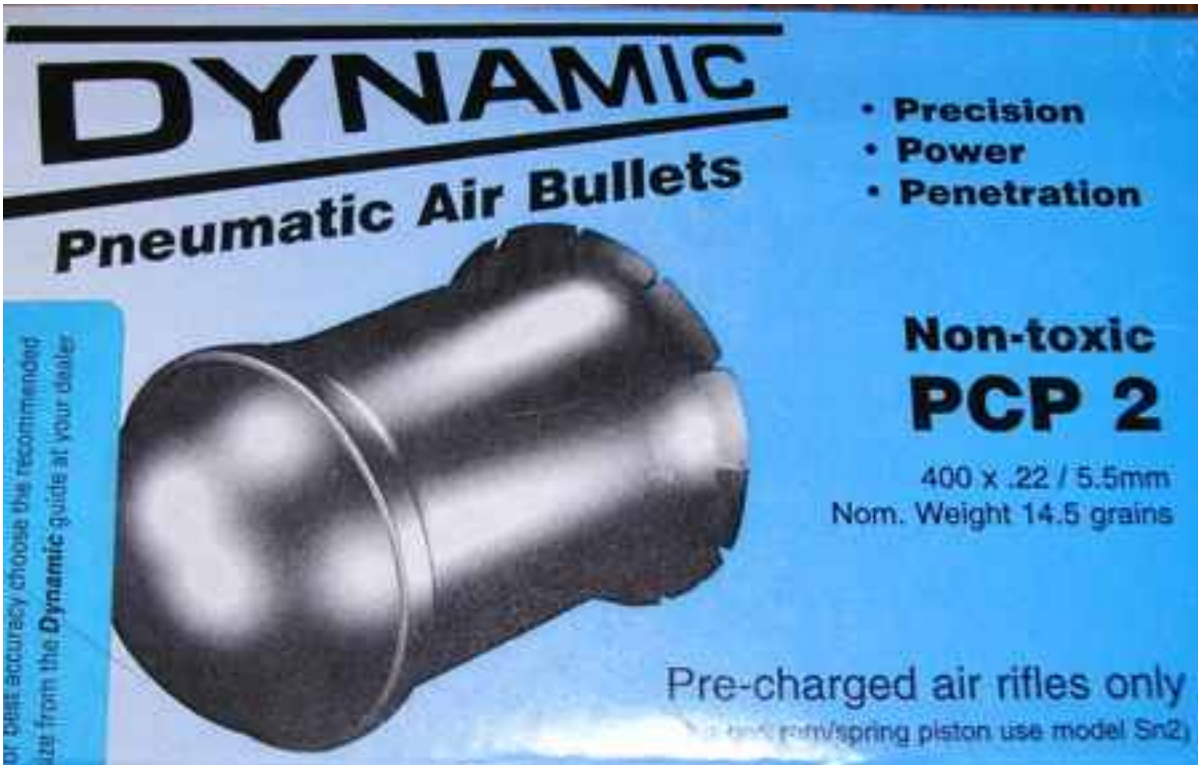
for their holes when I came by, are soon back above ground doing what they do, and some are watching to see what I'm all about. I kept glancing around as I was getting my gear ready, and there were several squirrels sitting on logs and stumps observing me. They were 50 to 60 yards away. I hunt with a good pair of binoculars, a quality laser rangefinder, and do most of my shooting from the standing position with the rifle rested on a Stoney Point telescoping bipod. I inserted a magazine into the Monsoon, rested the rifle on the bipod and with my right shoulder against a nearby tree, started taking care of business. The first squirrel was on a log a lasered 57 yards out. I simply put the crosshairs on his head, held just a bit to the left to allow for a slight left to right breeze and squeezed the trigger. Instantly, there was the telltale THWOCK that comes from a solid hit. I saw his head snap back



and he rolled off the log. There was another squirrel on a stump about 10 yards to the left of the first one. I swung the rifle over and picked him up. The laser said 54 yards. I used the same hold, squeezed off another shot, with the exact same result. When I first pulled in under a large oak tree to park, I had noticed a mound 40 plus yards behind me, that had five squirrels sitting on it. Four young and an adult. I now repositioned myself by the tree I was shooting from, so that I would have a clear view of the mound behind my truck. There were two young squirrels on the mound, and two more sitting in a small pile of dead brush a couple of yards to the right. One of the squirrels was sitting right on top of the brush pile. I decided to go for it first. The rangefinder said 47 yards. I put the crosshairs right between his front legs and squeezed the trigger. When the pellet connected, he dropped straight down into the brush and the two squirrels on the mound sat straight up. One was about a foot behind the other so I decided to take him first. When the pellet hit his head, the guy in front simply looked around to see his buddy kicking in the dirt. I sent another pellet toward the rubbernecker, and now they were both down. I swung back to the brush pile but number four was nowhere to be seen. I decided to hang out for a few minutes. Experience has shown that number four would probably be back. These guys are more curious than a cat. Sure enough, my patience paid off. A couple of minutes had passed when a young squirrel appeared on the mound and started sniffing the two that were already down. As I lined up the shot on the youngster, an adult squirrel's head appeared over the edge of the mound. I

decided to take the adult first, thus plugging the main hole and escape route for the one out on the mound. Two pellets, and a few seconds later, both the adult and youngster number four were down. As each shot broke, the Monsoon instantly loaded another pellet. I never took my eye away from the scope, or took my finger off the trigger. Not bad. I hadn't gone 20 feet from where I was parked and I had seven squirrels down in only a matter of minutes. I knew then that this was going to be a great day of pest elimination/varmint hunting. I refilled the magazine ( I hunt with three mags), topped off the air in the Monsoon, and started my slow hunt of the rest of the canyon. This particular canyon is about a half mile long and 200 yards across at its widest point. I hunt very slowly and spend a lot of time in my binoculars searching the stumps, logs, and brush piles. These guys blend in very well with their surroundings and a good pair of binoculars are a must to pick them out of their hiding places. For every squirrel that is easily seen, there are a half dozen others that I would have gone right by had I not been slowly glassing their typical hideouts with my binoculars. I usually hunt canyons from side to side in a zigzag fashion. It can take me an hour or longer to go 200 yards up the canyon, but the zigzagging may actually cover five or six hundred yards. I will occasionally see several squirrels lined up one behind the other at different distances. I can usually see them all in the scope at the same time. For conversations sake, let's say they are at 67, 58, and 50 yards, and all are curiously watching me. I will almost always take the one at 67 yards first, then the one at 58 yards, and the one at 50 last. By taking them in this order, the





ones in front do not see the one in back drop when hit. If I take the closest one first, the motion of it dropping when hit, will many times spook the others causing them to dive for their holes. I have used this method for many years and it has worked very well for me. I took about 80 ground squirrels that particular day, some as far away as 80/85 yards. I've included a picture of two that I took at 76 and 80 yards back to back. I took the one at 80 yards first, and as he was tumbling down the hill, I got the one at 76 yards. I have started calling the Monsoon and the tin alloy pellets THE DYNAMIC DUO! I am very pleased with the performance of the Monsoon shooting the tin alloy pellets. The DYNAMIC's are a very viable solution to the ban on the use of lead ammunition. If you would like to see the tin alloy pellets in action go to: [Imageevent.com/varmintair/videos](http://Imageevent.com/varmintair/videos), and view clips number 38, 47, 49, and 50. These videos were filmed while shooting the non-lead pellets through my FX 2000, and the FX Whisper. The digicam was mounted to the rifle scope while filming. California Ground Squirrels, shoot all you want, they'll just make more.

# Pigeons are a Problem

Mike mixes business with hunting pleasure, using his contacts to set up after hour pigeon shoots.

Mike Seely

My day job/business is landscape maintenance and repair yet I am always on the lookout for a reason to use my airguns to help remove pests from my clients properties. One day while talking with a client who has a five acre plot covered with livestock pens and storage buildings, I noticed a large flock of Pigeons sunning themselves on the roof of one of her buildings. Seeing a possible opportunity to bring my air rifles up and get some target practice, I inquired if she liked the pigeons being on her property (believe it or not some people do) to which she replied that she most certainly did not. Trying hard to control my anxious enthusiasm, I asked her if I could come and shoot them with my air gun to which she replied yes, but only if I promised to kill them all. That was all I needed to begin a couple of nights with little sleep as I envisioned the satisfaction of centering my crosshairs on a honest to goodness live target. I am somewhat like Sylvester the cat when it comes to hunting pest birds with my air gun. I remember one time when I was probably 7 or 8 years old, I had taken my Crosman 760 air-rifle with me while I was helping my dad shear our sheep in the hopes of shooting some ground squirrels. While we were eating lunch at the ranch of a gruff old rancher named Alex Urie, I spotted a starling sitting on a branch above where we were all eating. My mother had already threatened me with bodily harm

if I dared shoot any animal where someone might see me.

As I stared at the starling (to this day I will swear it was verbally taunting me) the temptation became so powerful that I finally had no choice but to head to the car, grab my gun, pump it up 10 times, and slither back to a concealed area where I was in range of the offensive starling. I quickly lined up the open sights on the upper-middle area of the birds breast and squeezed off a shot. The bird made a squawk, feathers flew, and the hand of my mother yanked me out of my place of concealment and marched me off to the car all the while muttering something regarding "What do you think other people will think of you?" At that moment I could hardly care less about what people thought of me, I was more worried about whether or not the starling had been mortally wounded. I later learned that the gruff old rancher had praised me by commenting, "He must be a good shot to kill that bird with one shot from a pellet gun!" I better get back to the subject Jim asked me to write about.

One of the big reasons that I am so enthralled with air guns is that these weapons can be such an effective method of pest control. Airguns are quiet, accurate and humane in the hands of someone who has invested the time to become proficient with their use. I digress for I know that I am preaching to the choir.



Almost every homeowner has encountered some type of pest problem, and would be glad to have someone rescue them by humanely eliminating the worrisome pest that has begun tormenting their property. Some pests dig holes or gnaw through walls or even eat the “Purina” out of Fido’s bowl, but only one that I have encountered has the potential to single handedly do extensive damage to person and property; this being the “winged rat” or the Feral Pigeon. I thought that a bit of background on pigeons and the problems associated with them to give us all some ammunition to assist in the crusade to eliminate the pigeon pest that infests our neighborhoods and communities

## HISTORY

The pigeon is not native to the United States, but was “introduced” from Europe a century or two ago having descending from the cliff dwelling Rock Dove which was brought here as a domesticated bird. Of course, many of these birds escaped forming feral populations that now infest farms, grain elevators, feed mills, parks, city buildings, bridges; or in other words, any area that will allow them to roost, nest or just loaf and make noise. Pigeons have learned to adapt to life near humans, scavenging when necessary even playing on the sympathy of the public to be fed.



## DANGERS AND DAMAGE CAUSED BY

Pigeons not only create an unsightly mess from their droppings, but they are carriers of no less than 30 different diseases that can affect humans, two of the most dangerous being pneumonia and influenza. As I said their droppings are unsightly, but also acidic. Erosion and other irreparable damage are caused by their fecal accumulation, and when dried out the dust from their spoor is what can cause the airborne infections that affect humans if breathed into the lungs. In essence they destroy the area that they inhabit and propagate so quickly and efficiently, that their numbers can quickly increase if left unchecked! In fact according to a study done in Indiana, one pigeon can consume up to 64 pounds of grain in a year, let alone the amount that is ruined by their excrement!

## THE HUNT

Armed with this information obtained from the all knowing internet, I planned my hunt. Due to the fact that I am self-employed, my wife is extremely sensitive about me not being involved in some type of income producing venture while it is daylight, therefore I had to plan to hunt while I was also working on the client's yard. That night I considered which gun I should use. Air Force Talon SS in .22, no too many houses close by and other buildings. Gamo .177 Hurricane 1250? No, still need to get new trigger, too unpredictable and I might miss. Evanix AR6? Would be fun but too noisy and a bit overkill. Finally I decided on my .177 Air Arms TX 200 which I had purchased and had tuned to compete in field target competitions of which I have yet to attend. I chose H&N Field Target match pellets which I chronied at approximately 930 fps, giving me about 16.5 foot pounds

which should nicely dispose of pigeon pests. The next morning I tried to quickly escape underneath the radar of my wife, not accomplishing that, I was allowed to leave after promising that I would finish my work first and then hunt the pigeons. After acquiescing with her request, I jumped in my truck and headed to hunt pigeons, errr mow lawns, yea that's what I meant.

It was late afternoon when I arrived at the Burgess' ranch. The day was warm for this time of year and the wind had not even begun stirring, truly a perfect day to hunt. I unloaded my lawn mowing equipment and began blowing the leaves onto the lawn when I noticed ten to fifteen pigeons sunning themselves on one of the storage buildings about 60 yards away. I literally dropped my \$450.00 backpack blower and ran to my truck to retrieve my gun and pellets. I walked around to the pool keeping out of sight and made my way to a horse trailer that was between me and my quarry. I peered around the back of the trailer and smiled like the Cheshire cat at the sight of so many pigeons at approximately 20 yards. Using my forearm as a rest, I looked through my 4x16x50 leapers scope and lined the mildot reticle upon a nice fat black one, let out my breath and let one fly. There really is not a more beautiful sound than that of a pellet connecting solidly with a target pest. That unmistakable "pop!" was followed by one deceased black pigeon nose diving into a dirt nap. One down. The rest of the pigeons were now air bound though they still had not seen me. I watched the flock make a big circle to the northwest and then head over to a corral to my left. As they circled many began folding their wings and gliding downward, a tell tale sign that they were going to land. I moved quietly behind the shed and could see most of the flock resting

on the metal pipe fence. I crawled across the sandy expanse until I was within 30 yards of the nearest pigeon. I cocked my underlever and inserted a pellet into the breech. Using my hand to cushion the forestock, I picked a grey and white pigeon and squeezed off the shot. Pop! The feathers flew and the pigeon crumpled and fell off the fence. The rest of the pigeons again took flight while the mortally wounded pigeon did a few back flips.

I did not retrieve the pigeon immediately, but instead waited to see what the flock would do now. They were again making a big circle and coming toward my position, my dark green coat and camouflage hat blending my outline into the shadow of the wooden livestock chute that I pressed myself against. Suddenly one of the pigeons folded its wings like a diving falcon and drifted in and landed on the fence about 25 yards from my position. Without hesitation I cocked and loaded my rifle and rested my gun on the crook of my left arm in order to fire from the sitting position.

"Twang" "Pop." The white and grey pigeon dove off the fence but did not die immediately, which was to my advantage because the rest of the fleeing pigeons again landed on the fence to see what had happened to their comrade! I'll take the bluish one thank you, I muttered as another "lead poisoned" pigeon fell almost on top of the last one that I had shot. I was nearly in tears from laughter spawned from my success. I watched as the circling flock went to a neighbor's barn and landed there bewildered at what was happening to them today. Unfortunately they had now spotted me so it was time to change my location and wait for them to return since I had not yet received permission to hunt on that person's property.

I moved to an area near a diesel tank and defunct backhoe and pressed myself into the shadows which was near a confirmed area that the pigeons roost in. I had learned that pigeons seem to have keen eyesight and will circle the area they intend to land on to make sure of its safety. I must have been there ten minutes when I heard the flap of wings and saw about eight birds begin an arcing circle over the shed I was near. On the next pass several of them folded their wings and glided like gently thrown paper airplanes to the top of the shed. I already had a pellet chambered and picked a dark colored pigeon and squeezed the shot and watched him fall to the ground in front of the shed. I continued to move from place to place and wait, which enabled me to "harvest" a total of nine that day and unfortunately, wound one who flew away like a fixed wing plane that had taken fire. Since that day I have killed 20 birds confirmed and the neighbors have all given me permission to hunt on their property without hesitation. The pigeons have become more wary and now are making me earn any success I obtain; therefore I am currently looking for other areas where pigeons might be a problem in order that I might be able to assist them in controlling these pests.

Once you find an area where there is an infestation, find the area that they roost in because they will always return. If there are neighbors close by and they consent to allowing you to hunt there as well, it may be wise to take a partner with you and have him set up wherever they congregate to after you have dumped one or two. Pigeons are not the smartest bird, yet they will become more wary as you begin to decrease the number of their flock and their vision seems acute so wear clothing that will

break up your outline. Move around once they have spotted you to a new vantage point and wait for them to return. Lastly, pick a powerful, quiet pellet gun which will be dependent upon how close the neighbors are and what livestock is near, for it seems pigeons like to pick undigested grain from farm animal's manure. Above all, pigeons are a pest and you are doing a huge favor to the owners of the property as well as their neighbors where they pigeons have taken up residence, for if left unchecked where food and shelter are readily available they will become very difficult to eradicate as well as a dangerous health hazard.  
Until next time,

## ***Crosmans Benjamin Discovery .22***

A few months ago I received one of the first prototypes of this new entry into the PCP market. The rifle was designed to bring more North American hunters into the fold with a gun that is accurate, powerful, and cost effective. I've hunted a lot with this rifle and found it to live up to the design objective. It is not the most accurate, or most powerful pcp available, but for less than \$390.00 you'll get a compact hunting pcp with a high quality airpump.

I spent the small game season hunting squirrel and cottontails in the Midwest and jackrabbits out west, with uniformly excellent results. To see more about this rifle check out my website

**[Americanairgunhunter.com](http://Americanairgunhunter.com)**





# FARM PEST HUNTING:

**THE NEW RANCH: 192 GROUND SQUIRRELS (July07 JF & NR)**

**SUMMARY: BEEMAN R9 VS. AIRARMS TX200. A GROUND SQUIRREL HUNT WITH EACH. WHICH IS THE BETTER CHOICE?**

**Robert Hamilton**

## **PRE-HUNT SCOUTING:**

When scouting for a new hunt spot, sometimes it pays to just drive around. But in this case, I knew where I was going. Another farmer had suggested I check out a certain cattle ranch and gave me directions.

So, a couple weeks pre-hunt, I drove out to this 2,500 acre cattle ranch. I parked the car under the shade of a willow tree near the ranch house, and knocked on the door. The rancher was, like me, an older guy. While it is great to be young, many land owners are not and it seems no disadvantage to be about the same age as the landowners, when I am there to ask permission to hunt their lands.

The rancher was polite, if reserved. At least he didn't laugh when, after telling me how his son could hit a ground squirrel at 300 yards, I replied that given low winds, I could do similar at 50 yards. True, given calm air and everything else being right, I could hit a squirrel a bit farther on occasion. But why brag? If the rancher called me on my claim, chances are that conditions would be windy and my support would be less than ideal. And I would miss and look like a blow hard.

The rancher gave me a gate key and allowed me to do a scout of the new hay barn and cattle corrals area. I walked around some, binoculars in use. The good news? Yes, it did have some ground squirrels. And a few pest birds. Namely, starlings around the hay barn/corrals area. The bad? The ground squirrels were located close to well-traveled public roads. But maybe that was why, despite the rancher and his son being skilled hunters, the near-the-roads ground squirrels were still there and acted un-hunted. Was this a situation where an airgun is more suitable than a firearm?

The rancher told me that he also owned a Sheridan pump up (.20 caliber pneumatic) and used it on ground squirrels around the ranch house, etc. The Sheridan is a handy pellet rifle to carry in the ranch pickup truck being compact, reasonably accurate and powerful, even without the desirable Tim McMurray/Mac-1 Steroid enhancements.

The rancher did not have a lot of free time and normally poisoned the squirrels he and his son didn't shoot. He said he had not gotten around to poisoning the hay barn squirrels yet this year though. I asked the rancher to hold off on the poison and give me a chance to kill enough squirrels so he didn't have to poison.

Anyway, the rancher agreed to let me have a try at least. Can not ask for more than that. This did not seem a rancher who was unfamiliar with people stopping by to ask for hunting permission. And my gut told me he was one who did not say "yes" a lot. The rancher told me that they had too many people with access to the ranch and so they had recently changed all the gate locks.

I was given a master gate key and told to return it before I left for the day. The written hunting permission slip was for the day only. These were not naïve people here. Small wonder. There was a million population city not too far to the north and a 150,000 population city even closer to the south. And the ranch was close by a major highway. I told the rancher I would be back in a couple weeks to hunt his ground squirrels. These were the big, tree squirrel-sized central California ground squirrels, not the smaller, more furtive, restless and so more challenging Beldings ground squirrels of northern California.

### **WHAT GUNS?**

I can not hunt nearly as often as I would like, so like anticipating a good meal, I can relax from daily stress by planning the coming hunt. The personal gear requirements have become pretty much cut and dried with the standard farm pest hunting kit of non-paramilitary hunting clothes, binoculars, range finder, pellet pouch, shooting glove, suitable footwear for the location, and hat. And air rifle.

But what air rifle?

I saw some starlings near the hay barn, as well as 20 or 30 ground squirrels. So I needed something low power for pest birds in and around the ranch buildings and the barn interior. But this was a windy area and many of the squirrels were in the cattle pasture lands where ranges were longer and lack of ranch activity meant higher power airguns could be safely and effectively used. A pcp would be a good choice here, but I am a springer guy.

I wanted to starling hunt using the .177 Beeman R7 (590 fps with 8.4 gr JSB Exact 4.52mm pells; Swift 4-12x 40mm scope@12x on BKL Mac1-drooped one piece medium mounts). On the other hand, I planned to ground squirrel hunt with the .177 Beeman R9 (870 fps with 7.9 gr CPLite#7 pells; Weaver mil-dotted v16 4-16x 42mm scope@12x on a BKL medium height one piece non-drooped mount).

And also spend some time hunting with the .177 AirArms TX200 Mk3/5 Thumbhole (920 fps with 7.9 gr CPLite#5 pellets; B&L/Bushnell 4200 6-24x 40mm scope@12x on BKL two piece double strap non-drooped mounts).

However, I left my cherished, farm pest favorite R7 at home and substituted the late production Weihrauch HW55 break barrel, recoiling, 10 meter match rifle (660 fps with Beeman pellseated 7.9 gr CPLite#7's; Swift 4-12x 40mm scope@12x on an English Sportsmatch/Beeman one piece, high mount adjustable).

Something wrong with the R7? Nope. The R7 is quieter, handier and just as accurate as my HW55 10 meter match rifles. I went with the HW55 instead of the Beeman R7 because the HW55 was sighted and trajectory plotted with the same pellet that the Beeman R9 and the TX200 was; 7.9 grain Crosman Premier Lites. When planning a multiple airgun hunt, it

saves a little time to be able to quickly switch from rifle to rifle without having to take time to empty and refill the pellet pouch with a different pellet.

### **BEST HUNTING PELLET?**

For some of my airguns, I use a Beeman pellseat to seat the pellet before firing. But my TX200 and Beeman R9 like the pellets fingertip-seated. The ball end of a Beeman pellseat tool reforms pellets with slightly bent skirts. Fingertip seating does nothing for fixing a pellet with a misshapen, handling-bent skirt.

Crosman Premier Lite pellet skirts are thicker, more robust in design than the thinner JSB Exact pellet skirts and so are less likely to damage from rough handling in the field. CPLites are made of a harder lead alloy as well. Thus my liking for Crosman Premier pellets in fingertip-seated, hunting airguns.

### **EVEN DUMB CROWS ARE SMART**

Ground squirrels get up with the sun, so why was I turning off the highway pre-dawn? Well, to try for crows. My route to the 2,500 acre cattle ranch took me right past the 1,000 acre vegetable farm. I had seen some crows previously in the area and crows in previous years had roosted in the willow jungles along the local river that formed one boundary of this veggie farm.

But the crows were early birds and started moving off their night time roosts at first light and flying off to feed. The easiest and most reliable crow hunting was to try for them at their assembly areas, not too distant from the night roosts. At the 1,000 acre farm, the crows tended to gather for a short time, in the trees along the river some hundreds of yards from their night roosts.

I thought I was being an early bird, but numbers of the Mexican farm workers were already working the fields and more cars were driving in. I kept my Weihrauch HW55 10 meter rifle out of sight whenever a car with field workers drove down the packed dirt farm road running down the top of the river levee.

About a half mile in from the farm entrance, with willow jungle on my left and extensive strawberry fields on my right, I spotted crows.

My Bushnell binoculars picked out a half dozen crows sitting about 30 feet up in some willow tree tops and 20 to 30 yards off the levee road. Farm vehicles and farm worker cars drove by regularly, so my car was just another and of little concern to the crows. Lucky me! Even better, there was a nearby group of about 80 crows, all sitting on the ground, along the roadside and part way into the strawberry field. Wow! Eighty crows! Most I have seen here for years. Was this going to be a crow slaughter?

Well, no.....The willow top crows paid me little attention as I eased my car to a stop and turned the ignition off. A car is hardly a substitute for a hunting blind, but these crows were used to vehicles. The problem with any blind is that it is hard to know how the wind is blowing, making the highly important art of successful wind doping hard. The wind was blowing west to east about 8 mph at the moment. I knew as I had stopped and gotten out of



the car to get the HW55 out of its hard case after I was a ways into the farm. When I had come to a stop along the dirt farm road and turned off the engine, the flock of crows on the ground and strawberry field adjacent had gotten bad vibes and in ones, twos and small groups, got up and flew off. But the crows perched up in the trees stayed, feeling more secure, due to their elevation.

I loaded a Crosman Premier Lite (die#7 of 2004 manufacture) and took aim at the closest tree-perched crow. Hard to miss at 20 yards and I didn't. Old 10 meter springers like the HW55 do not have much power, but there is a ray of sunshine in every rain storm. That being that low power springers do not have a lot of noise either. Consequently, the other tree crows did not immediately spook and I dropped two more at 25 and 26 yards before the rest flew.

For a few minutes, I had a dozen or so crows swirling overhead, calling alarm at the fallen crows, but they didn't land and flew off soon enough. It was light, though the overcast blocked sight of the sun. I left the 1,000 acre farm shortly after sunrise. The crow hunt done.

### **TOO EARLY TO THE RANCH**

The rancher had told me he would be up by 8 am or so. I got to the ranch before that. The ranch was more inland than the coastal 1,000 acre farm and did not have the coastal overcast. The sun was up and bright. But the rancher was not. I parked near the ranch house and sat in the car, eating some chips and reading a dime novel to kill time. This would be my first hunt here and I was hesitant to wake the rancher up.

Some black birds were flitting about the nearby cattle. But depredation shooting of blackbirds is only permitted when they are acting as a nuisance, causing a problem. Blackbirds are a native species and not huntable otherwise. The starlings I saw are always huntable. But I just didn't see the scattering of blackbirds to be a legitimate target here. A covey of quail were scratching for weed and grass seeds near the watering trough of the lush grass cattle pasture nearest the ranch house, and airgun legal, in season. But I was here for pest hunting. Quail? Who knows. Maybe, in time, if I earn my keep as a pest control hunter, the rancher might give me the nod for quail.

Or maybe not.....I called the rancher's cell phone, from my car near about 8 am. I had woken the rancher up. No problem he said. He had meant to get up earlier. He gave me the written permission and a gate key. The home ranch hay barn was about 1/3 mile to the north and I was there in minutes.

This ranch was inland some miles of the range of low mountains that border the Pacific Ocean here. Some of the ranch was flat land. Most of it was rolling hills, about 400 to 600 feet high, mostly Hereford beef cattle-grazed range grass, with patches of chaparral-type bushes and areas of oak trees. The tallest of the scrub oaks were about 35 feet. Most more like 30 feet high. The type of tree that keeps its leaves year round. Winters are rainy here, not snowy.

The ranch was mostly hills. Ground squirrels around here are not common up on the hills for some reason. They like the flats or bases of hills. And the big California ground squirrels I found here at this ranch were no exception. There were scattered ground squirrels from the hay barn about 1/3 mile distant from the ranch house and in and along the flat, public-road bordered cattle pasture that stretched from the hay barn back to the ranch house.

Well, great. A sizeable ranch and my luck that the squirrels were close enough to the well-traveled, paved, two lane country road that passing motorists would easily see me (and call the cops as anti-gun urban folks like to do). Most of the ranch was squirrel-barren. But that describes most land anyway. Go for a drive out in the country. Notice how most land is wildlife-poor.

The rancher showed me another part of his ranch that had ground squirrels, a couple miles distant. Good news. I must have seen at least 80 squirrels in the other site which consisted of flat, cattle grazing lands near a second hay barn and some abandoned ranch buildings. This other squirrel colony was bordered by the inevitable rolling, grass, brush and oak hills on the south. But on the north? Yuck! A busy highway full of cars and trucks. Maybe 300 yds away.

So much for solitude. So much for hunt privacy. How do I hunt these ground squirrel areas in clear sight of passing traffic discreetly enough the cops do not get called on me? After all, from a distance, a scoped adult airgun looks like a real gun. How?

### **RANCH PART#1: NEW HAY BARN GROUND SQUIRRELS.**

The early morning sky was clear, other than fringes of coastal overcast miles to the west. Only about 8 am but already warm and the day's high was predicted to be about 85°F. Wind only about 4 mph blowing south to north. I had unlocked the gate and driven in several hundred yards from the public road separating the ranch from the vegetable fields of the neighboring farm. I parked the car next to some newly rebuilt wood post and plank cattle corrals. The smell of creosote wood preservative still in the air.

Rural land use around here tends to be whatever use is most practical. The big vegetable farm across the paved road was composed of valley flat land. Good for farming. Adequate water from a small, local river and the soil dark and rich enough for intensive farming. A heavy tractor was cultivating the veggie farm fields.

The ranch land, on the other hand, was not good farmland. The cattle ranch held a narrow strip of flat, rich soil land about a half mile long and several hundred yards wide. It was the best land on the ranch and held the ranch's prize breeding bulls. The rest of the ranch was rolling hills of range grass, brush and oaks with a few small valleys and flats tucked between adjacent hills. The small valleys and flats held ground squirrels. The hills did not. Ground squirrels around here do not thrive up on the hillsides where the grass is sparser and water is a rarity. The rancher had commented about the lack of ground water in the hills, saying his Grandfather had drilled for water all over the hills west of the ranch house. And had found little.

Still, no water had not stopped a developer from turning hilly ranch land, a couple miles to the south into an instant town of McMansions. Water had to be piped in, from miles away. In our area, water is often scarce during dry years and residents are restricted in water usage. And overusing the ground water has been causing salt water intrusion. But when a big developer comes in and proposes a 5,000 or so home and business development project, which would make the water shortage problems worsen, the local politicians approve them anyway, anticipating the increased tax and fee revenue.

There wasn't much squirrel activity here, around the new hay barn and corrals. But it was where the rancher had wanted me and so here I was. I already had my farm pest hunt clothes on. The tan colored Orchard Supply Hardware long sleeved work shirt and pants. My heavy duty, high-top, brown leather hiking boots to give ankle support to the ankle still a bit sore from twisting it on the previous hunt. A tan, canvas, cowboy hat with ventilated upper, Bushnell 500 laser range finder, Bushnell Custom Compact 6x25mm binoculars, a heavy leather belt with pellet pouch filled with 7.9 gr Crosman Premier Lites, this pouch a new one with a zipper to prevent pellets falling out when bending over or fence climbing, padded glove on left (forearm) hand, and a .177 Beeman R9, Weihrauch's hugely popular mid-size, mid-weight, mid-power break barrel springer with mil-dotted Weaver slung on a leather carry strap over my shoulder. CPLites at 870 fps with good accuracy and low hold sensitivity makes for a good hunting airgun.

But was it hot ground squirrel hunting at and around the home ranch hay barn? No. Pretty slow. Two hours of steady, stealthy sneaking around the barn and the corrals on both sides of it netted only 13 of the big California ground squirrels at ranges of 35, 30, 35, 46, 30, 30, 15, 25, 35, 45, 35, 62, and 40 yards.

But there was a happy event..... Notice the one longer shot, the 62 yd shot? The Mexican ranch hand came by about mid-morning. It gave me a chance to practice my limited Spanish and for him, his English. While chatting, we noticed a lone ground squirrel half way up a 200 foot tall hill. Spotting it was easy as the dried out grass was sparse and low. I rested the R9 against his dusty, battered pickup truck and made an excellent, solid hit at 62 yards. The ranch hand was highly impressed. Nice to make a good impression on my first time at this place.

A few minutes later, the rancher drove up. The ranch hand told the rancher that I was a good shot. The rancher offered to show me more squirrels. I jumped in his pickup and off we went. Off the ranch and through the nearby local town.

On the other side of this small town, we waited until it was safe and crossed a busy state highway to the other side. There, the rancher had more land. Through another gate and in a quarter mile was the old hay barn, freshly filled with hay bales. There was a dilapidated, abandoned ranch house, a deserted shop building and an old shed or two. An old ranch site. Only the old barn seemed to be maintained and in use. It was feed storage for the range cattle on this southwest portion of the ranch. We saw a few ground squirrels around the old buildings. The rancher said there were more squirrels around, further on. He had to attend to other business and so we turned around and drove back.



Back at the new hay barn area, there were few squirrels around, but I did drop a starling off a line. Easy shot at 15 yds. The starling has not been born that can shrug off a center-punch by a Crosman Premier Lite (cplite) from a Beeman R9.

Looking south down the dried up irrigation ditch that ran back towards the ranch house, I saw three jack rabbits a couple hundred yards out. A ranch flatbed pickup truck was driving slowly through the cattle grazing lands between me and the ranch house. It looked to be the rancher kicking off chunks of string-cut hay bales for the cattle. I also saw that the low banks of the dried up, weed-overgrown irrigation ditch was dotted here and there with ground squirrels. And more squirrels along the fence lines. Unfortunately, all in easy view of the well-traveled two lane, paved public road that ran only a couple hundred yards away. The rancher had said that they had been getting strong afternoon winds regularly and that the new hay barn area with its 300+ foot hills to the west, was better wind sheltered than the more open flats of the old hay barn area. 9am and already the winds picking up to about 12 mph. I decided to go hunt the old hay barn area before the winds grew to full force.

## **RANCH PART#2: OLD HAY BARN GROUND SQUIRRELS.**

Mid-morning, I waited for several semi's and a dozen cars to pass by and drove across the state highway and onto the ranch lands the owner had shown me. I drove slowly up and down the twisting, snake-like, dirt ranch road, turning my head left and right as I searched for sign of ground squirrels. What with the range grass being one to two feet high in most places, there could have been numerous squirrels. But I wasn't seeing them. I saw a squirrel near the old hay barn as I came abreast with it. But just the one. And it disappeared into the tall grass, spooking at about 35 or 40 yards. Between the tall, lush range grass and the few squirrels visible, I thought it hardly worth the bother to slow down, let alone get out of the car and hunt.

The road descended again, down into the hill-surrounded vale of the old ranch site. I saw the other ranch buildings and maybe 3 or 4 squirrels over the several acre old ranch buildings site. But with so few sighted, and the dirt ranch road disappearing around a scrub oak-forested hill, my curiosity got the better of me, and I wanted to explore further. It was my first time here after all.

I had to detour in a couple places where fallen tree limbs had fallen across the ranch road, which was more of a jeep trail but thankfully not so rough that my passenger car hung up anywhere as long as I took it slow.

## **GOOD NEWS:**

Pay dirt!

About a quarter mile farther, and on the other side of the hills surrounding the abandoned ranch site, the terrain flattened out into a valley floor of about a half mile long by about three hundred yards in width. Tall hills with grass, brush and oak trees formed the southern valley wall. Lesser hills, with rounded grassy sides and tops to the north. This little valley ran east and west. Ground squirrels were very much in evidence. Not swarms of them, but good, huntable numbers generously scattered about. I'd estimate at least 75 squirrels over the length of the valley floor and edges. They didn't act heavily hunted either. Spook distance

was about 40 yards. Quite reasonable for a Beeman R9. That was the good news.

### **THE BAD NEWS:**

The bad news? Couldn't miss it. The highway that is. Only about 300 yards to the north, paralleling the ground squirrel valley, a little upslope. Many cars and trucks on it. I could see them. They could see me. If I just walked about in the open, as is my preference, I would have the cops being called on me in no time. No wonder the rancher and his son, despite their long distance, firearm varmint shooting prowess, had not yet dealt with these ground squirrels. I began to understand both the rancher's skepticism and willingness to give me my chance. These were squirrels he and his son could not effectively hunt with their firearm varmint rifles. I was being given a task they did not think I could succeed at. I had to hide. But I had no blind. More over, the squirrels were scattered thinly over about 5 acres. Hunting them would require that I move from spot to spot, as my requirement was to set up a hide within 50 yards of my targets. At 50 yards, the R9 poi (point of impact) was one inch low. Holding an inch over where I wanted the pellet to hit was child's play. Given a rest and calm air, that is.

### **HUNT BLINDS:**

Cabelas and other sporting goods outlets carry lightweight, portable hunting blinds. They do share common disadvantages. One disadvantage is that they are camouflage. When one is seeking concealment from cell phone-packing motorists who are anti-gun, a small tent-like hunting blind of military type camouflage color and pattern is not ideal. Such a blind shouts "shooter here!"

A pop-up camping tent would be better. But the other problem of a portable blind, whether it be a camouflaged hunters blind or a camping tent being used as a blind, is the wind. A portable blind/camping tent catches the wind like a kite. And we DO get the wind around here.

### **CAR AS A BLIND:**

Years back, my Dad and I hunted deer in the mountains. We hoofed it and looked with disdain at those who "road hunted". So, I grew up with a poor opinion of hunting from the vehicle. But now I had to re-think my opposition to use of the vehicle in hunting.

A call to my area California Dept of Fish and Game warden and I was informed that I could pest control shoot ground squirrels from my vehicle as long as it was on private land, I had the owners permission, the road was not open to public use and the vehicle was stopped and the engine off. So I was legal to use the car as a hunting blind. The ground squirrels on this ranch were used to ranch vehicles driving around, feeding livestock, fixing fence, or just checking around.

### **THE GROUND SQUIRREL COLONY:**

So there I was, slowly bumping over the twin tracks in the dirt, called a ranch road, though some of the time, off the road was smoother driving than on. I inched along until I had ground squirrels to my left, front and right as I looked out the drivers-side window. Then I stopped. Time to get started.

With the windows rolled up on the State highway side of the car, and keeping the R9 held low, I could shoot with minimal chance the passing vehicles on the highway a few hundred yards away, would see what I was doing. These ground squirrels had not been hunted and weren't too wary. I stayed almost completely hidden in the car and made no quick movements. I would shoot squirrels until I had mostly cleaned out a den area and then unload the R9 and drive 50 or so yards farther, putting me within my preferred 50 yard distance of another den or two.

As mentioned, another problem with blind hunting was that in a blind, be it one's vehicle or a formal hunting blind, the hunter is wind-sheltered, making wind doping harder. Mid-morning, the wind was already up to about 15 mph. By lunch time it was blowing about 20 mph and gusting higher. Typical for this area. At 60 yards, the pellets (evidenced by the dust kicked up) were wind drifting 4" to 5". At one point, I took some long shots at a ground squirrel at 75 yards. Then the pellets were wind drifting 12" to 14". Needless to say, the 75 yard squirrel did not get hit until I moved the car closer.

I spent four hours shooting and then re-locating the car. Shooting from the driver's seat, I was shaded from the sun, but it was still hot enough to have me dripping with sweat. At least I did not have far to go for a water bottle. I quit hunting this flat and hillside ground squirrel colony about 1PM. I had shot 49 ground squirrels, reducing the colony numbers by about 2/3's. The wind was high and I was not seeing many squirrels. Many of the survivors had gone down and stayed down, wising up. Due to the squirrels not being too wary and the need to take closer shots due to the strong winds, most shots were fairly close. The 49 squirrels had been taken at ranges of 15, 17, 52, 36, 20, 40, 28, 12, 12, 28, 52, 47, 47, 63, 62, 53, 34, 35, 35, 48, 32, 43, 53, 52, 63, 52, 45, 20, 20, 37, 28, 30, 52, 36, 28, 27, 22, 60, 45, 40, 31, 34, 35, 31, 31, 32, 32, 35 and 35 yards.

I drove back to the new hay barn and corrals area. It was windy there but the range of grazed range grass hills to the west cut the wind a little. But not as much as I had hoped for. Still a stiff wind blowing. Only in the winter time, does this area get a break from the wind.

### **RANCH PART#3: GET THEM ALL AT THE NEW BARN?**

There had not been a lot of squirrels around the new hay barn in the morning and there were fewer there in the afternoon. But the rancher specially stated he wanted the ground squirrels around the new hay barn eliminated, so I needed to follow his guidance.

I parked the car about 35 yards from the front entrance of the hay barn, got out and snuck around the sides and back of the barn, picking off the rare squirrel seen. There was one squirrel up on a hillside a good 70 yards away but what with the wind blowing pretty hard and the way it was spooking almost as soon as I started to move closer, he was safe.

I did get some shooting on partially visible cattle pasture squirrels near enough that I could sneak shots at them from concealment behind the cattle corrals wood plank fence. But the shooting was difficult as most shots were longer. The longest shot I made was 55 yards and I got that squirrel only by holding about 4" upwind.



### **COMFORTABLE BLIND HAZARDS:**

I decided to spend the last couple hunt hours staking out the front of the new hay barn, having seen some squirrels there earlier. The car was well positioned to observe the barn front and left side. The sun was hot and so I just sat in the car and waited for squirrels to show themselves, having several den holes within about 35 yds. And I did get some shots. Good opportunities too as where I was parked, the wind was almost a head wind, minimizing wind drift. And 30 or so yard shots at large ground squirrels are very doable. But I had been up past midnight the night before and had gotten up extra early this morning. Sitting in the car was comfortable. Shade, drinks, snacks, a book to read, soft gentle music on the radio. I fell asleep.

An hour later, I woke up. Two squirrels were feeding right at the barn front entrance. I shot one and later the other when it re-emerged. Another couple squirrels a bit later and it was time to go home despite missing my chance at two more squirrels by the front of the barn. The hunt ended with slow shooting. Typical. Most farm pest hunts are most productive early. But a slow, less productive afternoon makes it easier to say farewell and go home. Always plenty of chores to be done at home. I had gotten another 13 ground squirrels back at the new hay barn and corrals in the afternoon hunt back there again, at ranges of 55, 40, 40, 22, 8, 32, 25, 25, 32, 25, 38, 41 and 25 yards. A day's hunt total of 75 ground squirrels and a starling.

### **LESSONS LEARNED:**

-Again, I am amazed and thrilled at how my Beeman R9 performs as a hunter. I would have never dreamed it could not only equal my Beeman R1 as a hunter, but outperform it due to significantly less hold sensitivity.

- Hunting farm/ranch pests can require staying out of sight but not just from the varmints. Flat terrain and lack of cover put me in view of passing motorists. I needed to be concealed from people as well as critters. One thing that helped was, in absence of a suitable, portable blind that didn't shout "gun here" to the world, was to use the car as a blind. At the cost of the hunt being less fun and wind doping being made much harder.

-I hunted two of the three areas where I saw ground squirrels, the new hay barn area and the old hay barn flats and hillside squirrel colony. I didn't get to the breeding bulls pasture, but promised the rancher I would hunt it when I could come back. He seemed to be pleased and said he wanted me back whenever I could come back.

### **AIRARMS TX200 MK3 ZERO AND TRAJECTORY PLOTTING:**

The initial new ranch hunt was done all with my .177 caliber Beeman R9. But I had bought a like-new .177 caliber AirArms TX200 Mk3 underlever-cocking springer, a popular Field Target competition rifle and wanted to take it out on a ground squirrel hunt at the new ranch, and see how it compared as a hunter. Sort of a Beeman R9 vs. AirArms TX200 comparison. Which makes the better hunter for what I do?

### **THE MASTER SHOOTIST:**

I wasn't in the market for another airgun. Budget was tight and I was doing good just to be able to keep my airguns in pellets and parts. But some hours drive away lives Paul. I call him the "Master Shootist" though he doesn't see himself that way.

I have long felt that some of the most talented airgunners are not to be found on the online chat forums. Paul is one such. He is not really aware of how he stacks up with others and does not care. Paul is a guy, retired from a highly successful career, who in retirement redirected the talents that made him a top businessman, into his airgun hobby. Extremely smart, able to focus, detail-oriented to the point he makes me like a hay stem-chewing "good old boy" by comparison. And I am detail-oriented enough that a top USA springer tune kit supplier defined the term "anal" as "Hamilton", not realizing that effective and responsible farm pest hunting of little targets at longish airgun ranges requires precision that only serious attention to detail can provide.

Paul doesn't chat online, doesn't hunt, doesn't shoot competitively, does not get out to shoot with others. He is an airgun hermit. He shoots his beloved TX200's at his 20 yd basement range. Then, near weekly, he takes one or more apart and re-tunes them, experimenting with small changes in guide size, top hat weight and length, spring tension, lubes, pellets, etc. Chronying on a near daily basis. And then he is back down in his basement range, trying to see what performance effects he got.

Paul is a master of fine tuning TX200's. Twenty yards is really too short a distance to show tune change effects. There is nothing like 50+ yards to show tune change/pellet variation results. But 20 yards works for Paul to show effects of his handy work. Because Paul is a master target shooter. A 0.30" ctc group is a bad day for him. Paul routinely shoots 3 shot groups in the 0.04" to 0.09" ctc range with his TX200's. This is so far beyond my abilities, I feel like a pigmy standing near a giant. But he doesn't brag, nor post and competes only against himself.

Paul has multiple TX200's. Not long ago, he bought another TX200 Mk3 as a gift to himself. Impulse buy. This new TX200 got Paul's meticulous tuning. But he wasn't happy with its accuracy. There was a small dent in the compression cylinder. So he replaced it with a flawless compression cylinder. He installed a custom tune kit using a Maccari R6 mainspring and experimented with various power levels and other tune modifications. He still was not happy with its accuracy and offered it to me. A new, finely tuned .177 caliber TX200 Mk3 without a scratch nor dent nor ding to it!?

Paul: "Robert, want to buy my TX?" Robert: "Thanks, but I'm not in the market for another airgun." Paul: "\$100." Needless to say, I bought it. I was thinking that it was probably a TX200 with problems, but for \$100, what did I have to lose? Even if it was a dog, I could probably sell it as is for \$200.

### **THE TX200-NEW:**

Paul had had this recent production TX200 Mk3 in pieces multiple times, changing this and trying that. What amazed me, upon close examination, was not only were there zero scratches or dings, and I mean zero. But despite having been taken apart and tuned and re-assembled multiple times, the stock screws and other fasteners looked mint, like it had never been taken apart since the factory assemble?! Amazing! Swiss watch craftsman level of workmanship! The only way I knew for sure, was that each and every pivot/wear point had been lubed with just the right amount of moly grease, Maccari tar, etc.

Paul had left the new TX200 in his last experimental tune state. With a detuned Maccari R6 main spring. It cocked needing only two fingers, shooting 7.9 gr JSB Exact 4.52mm Express domes at 750 fps. It was sweet like sugar and mild like a Beeman R7. Yet fast and crisp in firing feel.

I took it out to the range. I shot groups every 5 yards out to 70 yards. I ended the target session frustrated. I had never worked so hard to get such mediocre groups. The TX was spraying. How did Paul get such good groups as the sample groups included with the gun? I was ready to give up on the new TX. Was the gentle tune something that worked well on the target range with a good rest, but not outdoors? Could this TX200 in its gentle, detuned state have too slow a lock time for my shooting style? Time to test the theory.

### **FAC TUNE:**

My theory was that shooting outdoors, in windy conditions, with less stable field rests, a TX200 needs a fast shot cycle time. Time to try out a FAC/full power tune kit.

### **MACCARI TX200 TUNE KITS:**

Jim Maccari has made top quality springer tune kits and parts for a variety of airguns, English, German and even Chinese. Not too many years back, he made tune kits for AirArms springers. And fine kits they were. He stopped making TX200 tune kits unfortunately.

Years back he and AirArms had some issues between them and in response Maccari stopped making TX200 kits. A pity since Maccari's TX200 after market tune kits were truly superb. Luckily, in my spares kit, I found a 2001/2002 era Maccari TX200 FAC tune kit. The usual superior Maccari mainspring on a precision made Maccari set of guides. Not available to fellow TX200 and ProSport owners these days though. But why not?

Having had the TX200 Mk3 apart and various Beeman/Weihrauch and RWS springers apart, I can only say that the internals of the TX200 were better engineered and noticeably more precision made than either the Beeman/Weihrauch guns or the RWS guns.

In quality, I'd rate the RWS a "C", the Beeman/Weihrauch guns a "B", and the AirArms TX200 an "A". Closest comparison to the build quality of the TX200 I've seen in a springer was the Venom Lazaglide piston I bought from Mac1 Airguns, years ago, for my Beeman R1/HW80. I am speaking of a level of precision and engineering quality so good that it made me reluctant to put the TX200 back together because the TX200 piston, etc is engineered and precision-made to such a high level as to be a joy for my quality control obsessive and detail-oriented heart.

I get pleasure from just sitting and admiring quality design and manufacture, be it a classic Venom Lazaglide piston or that of a TX200. Yet a recent look at Maccari's tune kit offerings showed tune kits for Beeman, RWS and even some Chinese airguns. But no TX200 tune kits.



Tune kits for Chinese knockoffs but not for AirArms? Easier to believe the Moon is made of green cheese than that Chinese wannabes are better than the English TX200. Take a stroll down the firing line at any serious springer FT or other target match and tell me how many TX200's you see and how many Chinese?

Sure be nice to see the top quality Maccari TX200 tune kits available again. But unfortunately it appears that due to his past disagreements with AirArms, Maccari's business philosophy is to throw the baby out with the bath water. Anyway, I installed the Maccari FAC TX200 tune kit, which had the usual precision-made, precision-fit characteristic typical of his products. A bit of Beeman moly grease on the white synthetic guide. A thin coat of Maccari velocity tar on the 28 coil mainspring. Some moly grease on the piston seal sides and piston guide rings. Back together, the TX200 cocked smoothly. The firing cycle was fast, crisp without any noted twang or vibration. Typical Maccari. 7.9 grain Crosman Premier Lite#7's, after about 300 shots, were doing 890 fps. But better yet, back again on the target range, the groups were much better. How about 5 CPLites into a 1.0" ctc group at 60 yds? How about 5 CPLites in a 1 11/16" ctc group at 90 yds? How about a 2.0" ctc, 5 CPLite group at 100 yards?

And Paul sold it for unsatisfactory accuracy? Good enough for me, for sure! But I'm not in Paul's league so my standards are lower. But his other TX200's shot more to his liking, so he kept them. I got the discard. A return trip to the range gave me a 7/8" ctc, 5 cplite group at 50 yds. By Paul's standards this TX200 Mk3 was a discard, but not by mine.

### **CHEAP SCOPES:**

It is nice to have spare scopes. I never sold my Beeman/Hakko M66r 2-7x 32mm scope. A nice scope for low magnification needs. Fine Japanese optics.

A friend gave me a scope. It was an early production Swift 8-32x 50mm mildot scope. Tom Gaylord gave it a deservedly good review when Swift came out with them. In mint condition, it sits in my spares kit waiting to be called to service. More recently his Japanese-made Weaver v16 4-16x 42mm scope's crosshairs broke again.

The Weaver v16 is a good scope. This one has the fine target crosshairs with a tiny dot in the middle. It was Paul Watts' scope and I bought it used from him years back. I put it on my Beeman R1 and a few years ago, the fine and evidently fragile crosshairs broke. I didn't have the purchase papers but Weaver honored their lifetime warranty even without purchase paperwork and repaired the scope. That was then. But things have changed.

My friend had a Weaver v16 4-16x 42mm scope, a twin to mine except his had the standard duplex.

Well, he was mostly a target shooter and I was mostly a hunter, so we swapped. He put the Weaver v16 target version on his R1. Recently the fine, fragile target crosshairs broke again. He didn't want to bother repairing it and had bought some newer, fancier, high grade Bushnell scopes so gave me the broken Weaver. I contacted Weaver. They said they no longer would honor warranty claims without purchase papers. I offered to pay for repairs, but the Weaver scope repair outfit I was referred to, said they do not work on the Japanese-made Weaver v16 scope.

But ABO in Florida said that for \$50 they would repair the Weaver and for an extra \$33, would change the crosshairs from thin target to standard duplex. So off I sent it. Generous of my friend. Especially while I'm on a budget scope budget and was looking hard at a refurb BSA 4-12x 40mm scope for \$40. Budget scopes these days seem to be improving in quality, judging from a friend's BSA scopes. He buys fancy, expensive airguns and puts cheap scopes on them. No doubt from being out of funds when it comes time to scope his new, custom guns.

About three months later, I got the Weaver v16 back from ABO. Repaired, cleaned, centered, and now with standard duplex reticle. No fast service, but fine service. Nice work by ABO and not the first time. A few years back, ABO did a nice job of cleaning and overhaul of my ageing Beeman/Hakko m66r 2-7 32mm scope. I am pleased with ABO and glad of their service since I know of no one else working on Weavers.

### **CROW IN & SQUIRREL OUT:**

The new TX200 Mk3 was shooting the 7.9 gr Crosman Premiers about 895 fps consistently. I had a return hunt to the cattle ranch coming up and I wanted to make sure of the trajectory plot. Time for another trip to the 1,000 acre farm.

Calm air is a must for airgun zeroing and trajectory plotting. I was already driving down the dirt farm road, next to the extensive vegetable fields of the 1,000 acre farm and it was only 6am. This summer has been more windy than usual and even on a rare calm air morning, the wind starts to blow enough to mess up outdoor target shooting by about 8:30am. Still a mile or so from the 100 yard bare dirt clearing I use as a target range, I saw crows up ahead. There were about 15 of them. All perched in a low tree near the road, next to the strawberry fields. I slowed to a stop about 45 yards away, turned off the car motor and loaded my TX200. This was posted, private, no trespassing, no hunting land so I could legally do this (ref. my local Dept of Fish and Game warden).

I was almost ready to take a rested, solid shot at the nearest crow. Then three Mexican farm workers drove up and stopped to see what I was doing. Naturally all the crows flew away before I could shoot. I unloaded the TX200 and chatted with them. Pleasant folk. The farm workers drove on and after a few minutes so did I. All was not lost. A lone crow was perched up in a tree a few hundred yards farther on. It fell straight down upon my shot. Crosman Premiers are penetrators, not stopper/shocker pellets but they still do the job well enough. And not affected by wind drift quite as much as cupped or flat head pellets. I used to use pointed pellets almost exclusively, years ago, but sharp pointed pellet accuracy is hurt by any damage to the point, so they need care in handling.

### **REALITY VS. CHAIRGUN TRAJECTORY SOFTWARE:s**

At the est. 100 yards by 30 yards, seldom-used, farm equipment parking area next to some vegetable fields, a mile from the nearest public road, I set up an informal target range. My target was a 2 foot by 2 foot, former dumpster residing, cardboard box that I used a black ink marker to draw twenty black circles, each labeled with the distance to shoot at each one at. I do have official NRA target sheets, but the cardboard box was free and thrifty habits developed in childhood remain. So, I had black target bulls-eyes for 5 yards, for 10, 15, 20,

25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 85, 90, 95 and 100 yards. Smaller bulls-eyes for closer ranges and larger for the longer ranges. Each bulls-eye with its "to-shoot" distance marked next to it. Numbers drawn big enough so I could read them with my scope at 12x. I set up my folding camp chair and my Samsonite adjustable camera stand rest. Because I was already zeroed at 10 yards, I was ready to shoot a 5 pellet group at each distance, from 5 to 100 yards, never adjusting the scope's elevation adjustments, only the lateral if needed. The idea was to zero at 10 yards and then shoot all the other distances and use a ruler to measure how the point of impact (poi) differed from the point of aim (poa). Thus giving the real life holdover or holdunder for each distance.

That holdunder/holdover information, written down and taped to the air rifle's stock, for quick reference, was my real life, actual gun performance trajectory chart. And I trust such real life performance info more than the theoretical trajectory charts of a computer program such as Chairgun.

There was a small amount of wind. I hurried to get all the groups done. All 20 firing positions, from 5 to 100 yards. None of my five shot groups were exceptional, but the 50 yard group of five cplites was 7/8" ctc in size and the 100 yard group was 2.0" ctc. Good enough to remind me why the TX200 is such a popular Field Target springer. Below is the trajectory plot the shooting session allowed me to create.

Note however that each distance shows two columns of numbers for the holdover/holdunder for each distance. The first holdover/holdunder number is that generated by the popular Chairgun trajectory plotting computer program available from [www.chairgun.com](http://www.chairgun.com). The second holdover/holdunder number for each distance is my actual shooting results I got, as mentioned, by having zeroed my TX200 at 10 yards, and then, without any sight adjustment to the Swift 4-12x 40mm scope, shooting a group of five pellets at each range and then using a ruler to measure difference between the center of the black bull I aimed at and where the center of the group hit. That is, how much high or low was the gun hitting at each range, 5 to 100 yds? Shot and measured every 5 yards.

Chairgun, the PC/Windows-compatible computer program asks for your zero distance (10 yds for me), scope height (which I guessed was the distance between the bore and the scope middle: 2" in my case), muzzle velocity, and the BC (ballistic coefficient) of the pellet. Most sources give the 7.9 gr Crosman Premier Lite domed pellet a BC of 0.023, but to get my Chairgun-generated trajectory plot to most closely match my actual, at-the-range trajectory plot, I had to use a BC of 0.020.

Anyway, note how close Chairgun predicted the trajectory of my TX200, except for 85 yards, where my actual range numbers look suspicious and invite a re-shoot at 85 yds.

**TX200 Mk3-new**

**7.9 gr cplite#7, 2004 manufacture**

**895 fps, BC=0.020**

**Scope height=2"**

**Chairgun#'s vs. Actual Range #'s**



3 pt sit rest

Distance: Chairgun // Actual range shooting results

5 yds = -0.94" // -0.94"  
10 yds = +0.0" // +0.0"  
15 yds = +0.82" // +0.75"  
20 yds = +1.5" // +1.5"  
25 yds = +2.1" // +1.9"  
30 yds = +2.4" // +2.3"  
35 yds = +2.7" // +2.5"  
40 yds = +2.8" // +2.6"  
45 yds = +2.7" // +3"  
50 yds = +2.3" // +2.6"  
55 yds = +1.8" // +2"  
60 yds = +1.1" // +1.4"  
65 yds = +0.2" // +0.0"  
70 yds = -0.9" // -1"  
75 yds = -2.3" // -2"  
80 yds = -4" // -3.7"  
85 yds = -6" // -8.3"  
90 yds = -8.3" // -9"  
95 yds = -10.8" // -10.5"  
100 yds = -13.7" // -14"

I also (not shown here) used Chairgun to generate a trajectory plot for my early production TX200 Mk3 which has the same specs except cplites do 920 fps. Chairgun-generated holdover/under numbers for my early production TX200 Mk3 very closely matched my actual, at the range, results as well, giving me confidence in Chairgun.

My TX200's are not hold sensitive and so good choices for Chairgun trajectory software. For a hold sensitive airgun where the groups shift vertically when the airgun is held differently, I'm not so sure any computer-generated trajectory program is going to be a lot of help. Nor do I regard such a springer as suitable for serious farm pest control hunting.

I also like farm pest hunting with my .177 Beeman R9 and my .177 Weihrauch HW55. Unfortunately, I have been unable to get Chairgun to generate a trajectory plot that closely matches my real life, target range session-generated trajectory plots, such as that of my R9 below. A pity. Looks like Chairgun works well for my TX200's, but not for my breakbarrels. Why is that? Anyway, the new TX200 Mk3 was ready for a farm/ranch pest hunt.

#### **BEEMAN R9:**

Here is the actual at-the-range Beeman R9 trajectory plot by way of comparison, showing why I would choose my TX200 for 50+ yard hunting and the R9 for 50 and under yard hunting.

**Beeman R9**  
**7.9 gr cplite#5, 877fps**  
Fingertip seated  
(actual shooting range results)

**2 pt sit / 2 pt stand: rest,**  
**05 yds = -7/8" / -7/8"**  
**10 yds = -3/8" / -1/4"**  
**15 yds = +1/4" / +0.0"**  
**20 yds = +1/4" / +1/2"**  
**25 yds = +1/2" / +1/2"**  
**30 yds = +1/2" / +3/8"**  
**35 yds = +1/4" / +1/4"**  
**40 yds = -3/8" / -1/4"**  
**45 yds = -1" / -3/4"**  
**50 yds = -1" / -1 1/2"**  
**55 yds = -1 7/8" / -1 3/4"**  
**60 yds = -3 1/2" / -3 1/3"**  
**65 yds = -4 1/2" / -4 3/4"**  
**70 yds = -6 1/2" / -6"**  
**75 yds = -8" / -8"**  
**80 yds = -9 3/4" / -10 1/2"**



Done with the trajectory plotting, I headed home. About 400 yards prior to exiting the farm was a pile of boulders. A big adult ground squirrel was sitting on one of the boulders. A rare sight on this farm as the farmer is quick to poison any and all ground squirrels. The squirrel gave me an opportunity to test the new TX200 a bit more. One cplite at 40 yds put it down. I drove home. A couple weeks later, it was time to return to my new hunt spot, the cattle ranch.

### **BACK TO THE RANCH, IN WITH THE BULLS:**

The rancher welcomed me back and now aware of my liking to get an early start so to get the hunt going ahead of the local winds, had left the letter envelope with my written permission and a master key to ranch gate locks in the spot he mentioned. Good for me. This time I didn't have to wait by the ranch house until the rancher woke up.

The last hunt here was for the ground squirrels around the new hay barn/corrals area, and the old hay barn meadow flats area, on the other side of the state highway. During the last hunt here, I had noticed ground squirrels in the several, fenced cattle pastures that separated the new hay barn area from the ranch house and ranch buildings area, about 1/3 mile distant. I had not hunted the fenced cattle pastures area last time because the rancher's priority was the two barn areas with his concern about the ground squirrels getting at the fresh, rich hay that packed the barns from floor to ceiling. A reasonable concern since the last rain we have had was in March and the range grass of the surrounding hills was sparse and parched. Even in the most prime land of the ranch, the cattle pastures between the new hay barn and the ranch house, more lush and better watered by far than the hillside grasses,

the rancher still had to scatter hay bales daily for the pasture cattle. Other parts of the USA have had heavy rain recently. But not here. Dry, hot and dusty.

### **HIDING FROM PEOPLE:**

I was wearing my tan work clothes from Orchard Supply Hardware. They blended well with the dust. Still, that was not enough. The ground squirrels of the cattle pastures did not act hunted, despite the rancher and his son being skilled with a varmint rifle. The reason was hardly a brain teaser. The reason was the paved, two-lane, well-traveled public road paralleling the four long, rectangular cattle pastures I was to hunt. The road linked a nearby town to a bigger highway not far away and so got enough gun-fearing city people driving by as to make hunting near impossible. Conditioned by the anti-gun media bias, too many urban dwellers look at a hunter in a distant field and see a terrorist. Hunting the pastures, despite being legal in all ways, was near impossible. But I needed to hunt it. I could see ground squirrels scattered all over, especially near the old irrigation ditch that ran lengthwise down the pastures.

How then? It turned out to not be as hard as one might have thought. First, I called the Sheriff's Department and told them exactly where, when and what I would be doing. Plus description of me and the vehicle. So to head off 911 terrorist sniper calls. Second, I used the car as a blind. The ranch folk customarily drove in the cattle pastures to feed livestock, fix fence, etc. A routine activity. I could not emulate it exactly, but close enough to let me hunt. I covered the windows of the passenger side of the car. I would drive slowly through the flat and not too bumpy cattle pasture until I was about 40 yards from a den or two of ground squirrels. Then I'd turn off the engine with the window-covered side of the car blocking sight of me from the road. I even covered the back window and wind shield.

### **SWEAT CITY:**

Using the car as a mobile blind with most of the windows shut and covered over to keep my pest shooting out of sight of passing motorists had some down side. First, being in the car with all but the drivers side window closed and covered meant that wind doping becomes difficult. I tied a piece of orange plastic engineer tape to the car radio antennae and would check it prior to each shot, but watching a tape is not as good as feeling the wind on the skin. Also, though the day only got into the mid 80's, the inside of the car heated up and I was drenched in sweat. I might as well have been in a sauna. I was moping my face constantly with a damp wash cloth to keep salty sweat from dripping onto the TX200. The sauna effect cancelled out the benefit of the car keeping me out of direct sunlight.

There were five pastures to hunt today. The horse pasture and four cattle pastures. The cattle pastures were rectangular, fenced pastures of about 10 acres each. The horse pasture was smaller at about 6 acres and more square in shape.

### **THE HORSE PASTURE – MISSING WITH THE TX200:**

Today was the first try out of the new TX200 Mk3. Just a hundred or so yards west of the elderly, one story, stucco ranch house with the shaded back porch, was the start of the horse pasture. At the gate, several of the horses wanted to come out while I was trying to drive in. But they were friendly and accepted my declining to let them go out and crop the ranch house flower garden with good grace. In fact, "friendly" described the cattle as well. But



more about them in a little bit.

I counted five ground squirrels in the horse pasture. The low-cropped grass made ground squirrel sightings easy. The nearest was 65 yds, per my Bushnell 500 laser range finder. A wood fence post made for a secure standing position rest for the TX200. The trajectory plot I had recently made told me the poi was +1.5" at 65 yds. So, I put the 12x duplex crosshairs about 1" under where I wanted to hit. The air was dead calm. Conditions ideal. A gentle squeeze of the light, crisp TX200 trigger with the crosshairs held the right amount low and at the low noise level springer shot, the ground squirrel sat up and looked around, puzzled by the puff of dust that suddenly appeared slightly under it. It looked more puzzled and was getting alarmed at the next four pellets which kicked up dry dirt dust just under it. I missed all five shots. All hitting low. It was not until I gave up and approached closer that I hit anything. Somehow something was wrong with my trajectory plot. I did the rest of my horse pasture shooting closer and got five squirrels at 40, 24, 40, 38 and 20 yards.

### **BULLS:**

The cattle pastures held only prize breeding bulls. Brown and white Hereford bulls with horns. There was a handful of cattle in each pasture, all bulls of admirable appearance. And admirable behavior too. At the corporate farm I usually hunt, the Black Angus bulls are de-horned but aggressive. I am reluctant to enter a fenced piece of land with them. Too often they are snorting, pawing the ground and following me along the fence line, fortunately on the other side. Maybe that they are in with female cattle makes a difference. The ranch's Hereford bulls are a little smaller, but still clearly heavy duty bulls, and not dehorned. Yet they showed little interest in me being in the pasture with them. And even were willing to share the scarce shade of the few trees along the banks of the dried up river bank. I felt a bit like being a zebra around lions who weren't hungry. Later, I mentioned the unexpectedly gentle behavior of the bulls to the rancher. He replied that they have to be gentle, being show bulls.

Well, that explained a lot. No animal can ever be fully trusted, even my pet parrot bites me reasonably often, though sometimes without enthusiasm, as if she feels a need to simply keep in practice. But the bulls were barely curious as I moved around and among them.

### **COW PASTURES #1 – CAR AS THE BLIND:**

There were four fenced, rectangular-shaped cattle pastures. Three held bulls, maybe a dozen per pasture. I wondered how a simple barbed wire and wood post fence could contain such strong animals. I noticed a single wire a little out from the others, but didn't pay it much mind until I happened to accidentally lean against it. Wow! The bulls looked up at my yell. Well! An electric fence! Not wanting another shock, I was careful to avoid contact after the first zap.

I was able to drive into the lush but well-grazed range grass cattle pasture. Ground squirrels were popping their heads up here and there, in the middle of the pasture and along the fence line. And particularly along both sides of the raised banks of the dry irrigation ditch. Their spook distance was about 40 yds and the pasture was a little bumpy but flat which let me drive through the range grass to about 40 yards of a squirrel den and then stop the car and

use the car as a blind, the covered windows concealing what I was doing from passing cars. There were shorter and taller areas of grass. Some of my shots deflected by hitting tall grass stems partially hiding the squirrels. The squirrels around the watering troughs were easier as the grass was beaten into dust there and the squirrels up on the dry irrigation ditch banks offered clear shots.

On the west side of the long irrigation ditch, the hills began and ground squirrels had made dens in the slopes at the hill bases. These squirrel dens were not far beyond the dry irrigation ditch. So what I did was to park the car 30 yds east and parallel to the ditch. That gave me shots at about 30 yards at less wary squirrels on the ditch banks and about 45 yard shots to the squirrel den holes just beyond the ditch.

There was a pond of about 1 acre just a hundred or so yards farther west of the ditch, but I only saw two squirrels around its banks (shot one, missed the other).

The shooting was pretty good. The wind had started blowing by mid-morning but it stayed moderate at about 12 to 15 mph. To try to understand why I had missed the 65 yard horse pasture squirrels earlier, I sighted on a sizeable wood fence post 64 yds away and took 5 rested, careful shots. When I walked over to see where I was hitting, the group was decent enough, about 1 ½" ctc, but the poi was +1/2", not the +1 ½" that my trajectory plot said it should be. Also, the group was about 6" off laterally, due to wind drift.

### **CATTLE PASTURE#2:**

Next I drove north to the gate leading to adjacent cattle pasture#2 and drove though. It was about the same situation. Most ground squirrels were along the dry irrigation ditch and on the slopes just west of the ditch not many more yards. I glassed the grassy, round topped hills to the west of the pastures. No visible squirrels on the hillsides or hill tops. Why not?

By the time I was ready to try pasture#3, my pastures #1 and #2 tally was 55 squirrels, taken at ranges of 23, 45, 26, 35, 44, 55, 38, 50, 15, 15, 63, 16, 65, 65, 45, 46, 41, 35, 17, 41, 45, 46, 42, 42, 46, 42, 40, 12, 46, 42, 35, 50, 53, 41, 41, 25, 40, 27, 28, 45, 41, 47, 45, 47, 51, 62, 59, 46, 60, 61, 61, 42, 41, 50 and 72 yards. The 72 yard squirrel being one on top the pond dike and it took me a couple misses to figure out that I had to hold 4" upwind for this particular shot angle. Even when the wind is constant in speed and direction, shots opportunities are at different points of the compass, making each shot a unique wind doping situation. And the wind today was variable in both speed and direction.

Overall, I was shooting ok, but not great. My hit rate with this wind blowing was only about 50%. Fortunately the ground squirrels let me get 2nd and 3rd shots at them, or came back up after some minutes, as they had not been hunted by the rancher to my knowledge. That let me get most of the squirrels I got in range of.

All the cattle pasture#1 and pasture#2 hunting had to be using the car with its covered passenger side windows as a moveable blind. The price of thus keeping out of sight of passing urban dwellers with 911 on their speed dials was hours with sweat pouring off me due to the sauna-like atmosphere in the car. Despite the open driver's side window. And without the feel of the wind speed and direction upon my face, giving me trouble wind doping and so a factor in my missing about half my shots.

Cattle pasture#3, the next one over, did not have a convenient access gate. But it did have higher banks on the dry, grown-over irrigation ditch. The embankment top was about four feet up from the ditch bottom. And there were some tall weeds, the occasional tree and a few bushes to further help with concealment. By working my way slowly down this old, dry ditch, I was mostly concealed from the cars passing by, a couple hundred yards away. Afternoon traffic had slowed a lot and I tried to take shots only when no vehicles were in sight. And I was careful not to aim at squirrels such that I would be aiming towards the public road.

### **COW PASTURE #3 – INTO THE DITCH:**

The gate leading to cattle pasture#3 looked like it could be opened. But the single, electrically-charged wire ran along the length of the gate as well. Later the rancher told me I could have disconnected it, but it wasn't obvious to me at the time. The charged wire stood out from the rest of the fence and gate some inches, about 3 ½ feet above the ground, so it was simple enough to open the metal frame pasture gate and crawl under the one live wire. Besides, the dry irrigation ditch offered better cover here and I was glad to get out of the sweat box I called a car blind.

It was lunch time and I was pleased that winds were yet moderate at about 15 mph, however variable. Morning winds had been south to north. Now they were west to east. There were some ground squirrels out in the pasture, but far and away most were denned along the length of the irrigation ditch banks and the foot of the adjacent hill to the west. This worked out nicely.

With the squirrels ahead of me and to my left, as I slow motion hunted down the length of the irrigation ditch, my shots were either straight ahead or to my left. Though I was mostly concealed from view of passing cars, particularly when I kneeled down to shoot, the shots thus could be public relations-correct in not having the rifle point at the road. Good, just in case I was seen shooting. For sure I was not going to be heard shooting, not using a firearm.

Spook distance varied, but the ditch squirrels were unwary enough that they usually let me get within about 35 yards. The squirrels on the lower hillside slopes were farther away, but usually within 45 yards. That was good because to get closer, would mean getting out of the ditch and losing my concealment, little as it was when I was standing up.

With the Samsonite camera stand (bought at Circuit City) adjusted for sitting/kneeling position shooting and giving me as solid a rest as the uneven ground made possible, I was hitting pretty well, about 3 of every 4 shots. While a car or other easily moveable blind had been tactically necessary, being out in the wind and able to feel the breeze, made wind doping much easier and upped my hit rate.

By the way, on hill slopes my camera stand rest did not work so well. It is a tripod (3 legs) which is really only good on the level. A bipod type shooting rest is more practical for hillside slopes.



When I got to the end of pasture#3, I glassed pasture#4, the last pasture before the new hay barn/corrals area. It didn't look good. It was fallow and without cattle. The grass was over a foot tall in even the barest spots and two feet tall in the rest. There were even small bushes here and there. And I only saw a few squirrels. Maybe there were a lot of them. Hidden by the tall range grass. Or maybe there actually were few. The dry irrigation ditch continued through pasture#4 offering me cover as before, but pasture#4 did not look huntable.

I turned around and hunted my way back to the car, trying for the squirrels that had eluded me the first pass through. Not as many now, but still enough to make careful, slow hunting on the way back worthwhile. The Bushnell compact binoculars came in handy. With the grass so dry and golden brown most places, and the ground squirrels closely matching in color their backgrounds of dry grass and equally dry dirt, the little binoculars helped spot partially-hidden squirrels I would have otherwise have not seen until too late. Squirrels have to be spotted and shot outside their spook distances. Otherwise all the hunter sees is a glimpse of movement as they duck down their den holes. Some den holes are obvious. Built-up mounds. But many others aren't.

The bulls in pasture#3 were affable and willingly shared the few shade trees along the irrigation ditch with me. Such a nice change from the "I'm going to kick your butt" attitude of the bulls of the 400 acre farm. These ranch bulls had no problem with me within a few feet of them, taking shots with the TX200. Amazing.

The TX200 was shooting well enough. I was having to hold under a couple inches at the mid ranges, but by now was used to it, though I prefer holding over to holding under.

It was 2:30PM. The wind was blowing a little stronger now, but there were still some squirrels in sight. Huntable squirrels. But not for me, not today. I had to leave earlier than usual. Cattle pasture#3 had netted 57 ground squirrels at ranges of 20, 34, 34, 32, 18, 34, 43, 22, 39, 39, 36, 38, 38, 30, 50, 50, 50, 50, 50, 20, 60, 63, 38, 65, 15, 40, 20, 20, 20, 27, 33, 30, 30, 30, 15, 15, 15, 15, 29, 34, 38, 45, 13, 32, 32, 32, 32, 34, 26, 23, 34, 47, 47, 23, 30, 30 and 31 yards.

Back at the ranch house, I gave the rancher my report; 117 ground squirrels. He was impressed. I told him that there were still squirrels out there, but that I had gotten perhaps 60 or 70 percent of them and the next hunt there would be a lower kill count, mop up operation. The rancher surprised me. He replied that he had some other ground squirrel colonies he wanted me to take care of. He smiled and said, "I can keep you busy for a year." And wanted to know when I could come back. Well! Talk about a happy ending to a good hunt!

### **CONCLUSION: WHICH IS THE BETTER HUNTER, BEEMAN R9 OR AIRARMS TX200?**

The Beeman R9 was shooting 7.9 gr CPLites at about 870 fps. The AirArms TX200 shooting the same pellet at about 895 fps. Not much velocity difference, yet look again at the above trajectory charts.

Notice how much less mid-range hold under is required for the Beeman R9?

What this means is that while the TX200 has less hold-sensitivity (hits the same poi standing rested or sitting rested), the R9 is the easier gun to shoot for close to mid-range due to less hold-under needed. One can get on target and get off a shot a little faster when there is less elevation to hold under/over for when the distances are closer. Also, the R9 reloads faster

and so gets a quick second shot off faster. A missed critter is a spooked critter and less likely to allow a leisurely follow up shot. Dittos for a finisher shot on a hit critter. A multi-shot pcp repeater, of quiet report, would be superior yet.

But for the longer distances, when fast shots are not demanded, such as spookier ground squirrels at 50+ yards, the TX200 starts looking better and better.

Why the bigger mid-range trajectory difference between these two, classic guns? Both my R9 and TX200 have the same scope mount: BKL medium height, one piece mounts. But due to the dropped barrel of the TX200, even a medium height mount gives the TX200 a much bigger distance between bore and crosshairs. The closer the scope is to the bore, the less the need for mid-range hold under and the more the need for longer range holdover.

Consequently, for me, the R9 is to be the favored gun for short to mid-range shooting and the TX200 for mid to long range shooting. Given their 10 to 15 yard zeros. Good hunting to you all.

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### **Airwaves Cont'd from last page**

floating....really. He was perched at the end of a very narrow branch, and with the wind, was pretty much floating in the wind. So I waited for a calm moment and put a .20 caliber pellet from my '97 right under the eye. Best shot I made all day. One fuzzball down, and Harry and Lloyd still cavorting to an imaginary theme song I had cooked up for the two of them....."Oh yes, they call him the streak.....fastest thing on four feet" (Apologies to Ray Stevens!).

Another really stupid antic that my son and I witnessed one day took place in the dead of winter. We were sitting in the car, heater on, waiting for the school bus one cold winter day. We were watching a squirrel doing calisthenics to keep warm....running to the end of a long branch, turning under it, and going back the same way while upside down. No one was chasing him, he was just practicing. It didn't take long for the "Harry and Lloyd" gene to make its presence known. The squirrel ran to the end of the branch and forgot to turn under.....he just kept going! That was funny enough, but what was better is that there is a stream under the branch he was using as an exercise platform. It wasn't a very pretty dive.....his form was off. The splash was pretty awesome.....I gave him a 6 for effort. I'm pretty sure I've never seen a squirrel shiver, but if he had been a few yards closer, I do believe I would have witnessed my first squirrel in the throes of hypothermia! My son was laughing so hard that he almost tripped over his book bag on the way to the school bus as it pulled up immediately after the diving squirrel. The bus driver gave him an odd look, then looked my way for explanation. I was no help as I was trying not to snort coffee out my nose as my son sat down, the bus drove off, and the squirrel started all over again.

# HUNTING WITH CHINESE AIR RIFLES

## The Proposition

My typical gear for traveling hunting trips consists of a Daystate Huntsman with a Hill pump to charge it, and my Beeman C1 for a backup gun. I have used these great air rifles on many occasions, and feel confident with them. But one of the things I enjoy about being in the field is trying out new guns, and lately I've been getting in quite a bit of shooting time with the Chinese manufactured products.

Chinese airguns have received mixed reviews, and while a few years ago many of these guns were truly abominable, the manufacturing process in at least some of the factories producing the current generation of air arms has improved dramatically. It still pays to know who you are doing business with as consistency in product quality can vary, but the established dealers such as Funsupply, Compassco and Bestairguns are very good in standing behind their wares. I get a lot of questions regarding the use of Chinese air rifles for hunting on my website "The American Airgun Hunter", so I decided to replace my normal hunting rigs with a couple of equivalent Chinese products. I selected the new XS-B50 which is marketed in the USA by Xisico through Bestairguns. This rifle is the first PCP manufactured in China, and is a clone of the Daystate Huntsman which at the present time is offered only in .177. The rifle I selected to replace my beloved Beeman/Webely C1 (in my opinion one of the finest hunting springers in existence) was the B19, which I had purchased from Fun Supply Airguns. This rifle is based on a Gamo design and is one of the more popular Chinese springers. I often use .177 caliber

## JIM CHAPMAN

grrrifles when hunting jackrabbits, as I like the flat shooting characteristics for shooting longer distances in heavier brush. I don't like to deal with trajectory when having to thread shots through brush, as is often the case when taking a rabbit in its scrape.

## The XS-B50

I have been shooting the XS-B50 for a few months now, and am becoming more impressed with the accuracy and power of this rifle all the time. Practicing with the rifle on my basement range at 10 yards, the gun consistently produces one hole groups. There were initial problems with the light hammer spring that had been factory installed on the rifle, and had precluded me from charging the gun to the maximum 200 bar specified when I had used it on earlier hunts. But after the appropriate spring has been installed, which was considerably stiffer, the rifle could be fully charged. Once the rifle is fully charged, it is capable of yielding velocities over the advertised 1000 fps. The trigger is a two stage adjustable, which is even more responsive after being polished and treated with a small amount of grease. The dimensions of this rifle are; overall length 46" with an 18.5' barrel weighing in at just about 8 lbs. The gun comes without iron sights, and is now topped with a Simmons 3-9x 40 scope. The gun likes to shoot Dynamite Nobel Superdomes, which is good because I like to hunt with this 8.3 gr round nose pellet. They offer a good





*Figure 1. The terrain I hunted on this trip is dotted with Joshua trees, barrel cactus, creosote, and cholla cactus. I've hunted in forest, jungles, swamps, plains and farmlands – but have always been drawn to the vast openness and ruggedness of the desert!*



*Figure 2. The rifles used for this hunt are the Chinese manufactured B-19 (top) and the XS-B50 (bottom). Power is nice, but a precisely placed shot with a .177 does the trick just fine. Also shown is the gear I packed on this trip; a hydration pack, range finder, binoculars, emergency kit, and a tin of Dynamite Nobel Superdomes.*



*Figure 3. I took this jackrabbit lying in a scrape at 35 yards with the B-19. The gun pointed well, and delivered good hunting accuracy. I had no trouble anchoring these large desert hares even when I had to settle for a quartering shot.*



*Figure 4. Holding up a jackrabbit taken at just a bit under 55 yards with a head shot. The B50 was very effective in taking down these big desert hares, the right mix of power and a very high degree of accuracy.*



combination of penetration and expansion, along with the all important accuracy.

### The B19

I decided to order the B19, which carries a price tag of about \$90.00, specifically for this hunting trip. It arrived at my house about a week before I was scheduled to leave. This one did not come covered in goop like many Chinese guns I've received in the past, and made a positive initial impression as I lifted it out of the box. The stock was a solid piece of Asian hardwood, nicely figured and without flaws or fillers. The gun is advertised as propelling a .177 pellet between 850 – 900 fps depending on pellet weight. The overall length is 42.9" with a 16.5" barrel, and weighs in at a little less than 7 lbs. The trigger is a two stage adjustable with a fairly smooth pull. The iron sights are configured with a hooded front post and a click adjustable rear sight. I mounted an inexpensive 3-9x 32 variable scope (also of Chinese manufacture). The gun has a pronounced bidirectional kick common to many springers, which could probably be smoothed out with a new spring and a tune. The B19 fortuitously seems to digest

### The Hunt

Having picked my tools, I just needed a venue to test them. I now live in the Midwest, but my preferred hunting grounds are the Southwestern Deserts where I grew up. As luck would have it a business trip was taking me out to Nevada and California, providing me with a free weekend in between. Anybody who knows me or has read my book knows that jackrabbits are a favored air gun quarry for me, and I just happen to have one of my jackrabbit hot spots sitting out in the middle of the Mojave between Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Packing the rifles into my traveling gun case and catching a flight into Vegas, I picked up a rental car (an SUV actually) and hit the road. Stopping at Stateline for the night, I left the next morning after a good sleep continuing my drive well before daybreak. After a couple of hours I arrived at my spot, which had been found many years earlier on a reptile collecting trip while in college. I get out hunting here two or three times per year, and the rabbit population always remains high. I don't think anybody else ever finds their way back to my hidden hunting ground, and the self imposed limits we practice ensure the numbers remain high. I allow myself no more than a dozen rabbits per trip, and usually try to spread this out over a couple of days. Experience had prepared me for a difficult hunt at this time of year, early fall results in heavier vegetation that makes spotting and stalking into range a lot harder than during the summer months.

Jackrabbits have a well developed defense system in place; those big ears scan the surrounds and detect almost every sound, and their sense of sight can pick up the slightest motion. It is necessary to get inside of forty yards with the springer and sixty yards with the PCP. I try to find high ground for surveying my intended hunting grounds, but this can be a commodity in the flat landscape. The solution is to climb up on top of the SUV and glass the area from this vantage point. I let my eyes wander over the desert, paying close attention to the ground under the brush and clumps of cholla cactus. I picked up the

brownish glow of the sun passing through the erect ear of an alert jackrabbit about 100 yards away, and plotting my approach hopped down and started off. For the first rabbit of the day I decided to use the B19, reckoning that as I started kicking up the rabbits in the two or three square mile plateau they would get smarter and the shots would get longer. The decision was made to save the XS-B50 for the more difficult stalks later in the day. Winding my way through the brush I was careful to keep some distance between my bare legs and the abundant Cholla cactus. Making a direct approach using what cover could be found, I walked slowly and quietly, stopping often. I used my range finder and a Joshua tree as a landmark to move into shooting position without actually seeing the rabbit. At about thirty five yards I stepped out from behind a bush and could see my rabbit. He was facing away from me, so shouldering the rifle I lined up a quartering shot and stroked the trigger. The rabbit jumped straight up into the air and hit the ground with a couple of kicks and a squeal. Within a minute a huge jet black crow came swooping in out of nowhere and hovered over the dead rabbit for a few seconds until he saw me, then flew away but came back for a few more passes before taking off for good. The gun had performed well; the pellet had hit right on target and delivered sufficient power to anchor the big buck jack with a shot that had entered from behind the left front leg and passed into the chest cavity. A little later I spotted another rabbit and moved into position. It was a fairly easy stalk in which I repeated the process described previously. Again I lined up the shot obtaining a clear view of his head at less than twenty five yards; I had it in the bag. I took aim using the small trunk of a stunted Joshua tree to brace myself and started my ritual; breath in, exhale, breath in, partial exhale, squeeze the trigger. The pellet missed by several yards, I didn't understand it until I did a quick equipment check and realized the scope had walked back right off the dovetail. I missed by such a wide margin the rabbit hadn't even noticed, so dropping down I pulled my tool kit out of my pack and removed the scope. The rifle still wore the iron sights it came with, and I had sighted in with them when first setting up the gun. Lining up the shot again, I took him down cleanly. Next round was with the XS-B50; I topped off the charge on the gun and drove to the other side of the valley, driving by a herd of wild donkeys grazing on the short desert grasses. There was a wash I'd had success with over the years, and as I glassed the sandy bottom of the thirty foot wide depression I saw a rabbit laying in a scrape on the sandy ground. For this stalk I hiked along the side of the wash keeping it between myself and the blacktail. Making sure I wasn't going to be crawling over any cactus I dropped on my belly and crawled over the ridge. I'd popped up about 55 yards away, but had a wide open shooting lane to the rabbit lying under a creosote bush. He was facing directly towards me; I cranked the magnification up to 7x and put the crosshairs right on target. Pulling the trigger a thud drifted back to me as the rabbit rolled over. Quickly reloading I started to get up when a second rabbit that had been unnoticed, jumped out from behind the bush. Sitting back down, I rested th



# Airwaves

## **Dumb and Dumber.....and Shooting Fuzzballs**

In keeping with our small game theme for this issue, I will sign off with a note or two concerning how I witnessed the Harry and Lloyd of the squirrel world. If you remember the original film, Harry and Lloyd did some of the most incredibly stupid antics known to man in the movie "Dumb and Dumber". The film kept my attention the same way squirrels do, through some of their incredibly stupid antics.

On one occasion, I was trying to sneak up on what I thought was a lone squirrel that I had spotted over 100 yards off. I was hunting with my new HW97-K in .20 caliber, and wanted to get closer than is usually required when I hunt with my Prairie Falcon. That Falcon can really reach out there, and I almost refuse to remove the scope from that gun since I'm afraid I won't get it back in the right place to reproduce the accuracy I am currently getting. Since I had only worked with my HW97 out to 30 yards, I was intent on closing the distance. I worked for 20 minutes playing "super-sneak" and got within the range I wanted. I brought the '97 up and was about to try my shot when the fuzzball caught my attention.

What's a fuzzball, you ask? No, no....there's no relation to a dust bunny. You know what a fuzzball is.....a squirrel perched on a limb with his tail curved in such a way that his entire body appears as a giant fuzzball. Anyway, from the corner of my eye, a fuzzball came floating into view. It was much closer than the original squirrel I was targeting, so I changed my point of aim, took the shot, and subsequently missed. Sigh...I just love hunting with new guns. It invariably

takes me a few shots to figure them out while in the field, no matter how much target work I do before going hunting.

So the fuzzball morphs back into a squirrel with a jet engine attached to his rump, nearly leaving a trail of smoke through the tree limbs as he heads for cover. While he headed off away from me, his cousins Harry and Lloyd, two happy-go-lucky idiots of the woods decide his antics are a prelude to playing "tag". So they begin running helter-skelter, not going anywhere, just pretty much tearing up real estate. You've seen squirrels play chase, haven't you? They can turn a straight tree into an illusion of a barber pole as they imitate the stripes on the pole. Up and down, up and down, at break-neck speed....it's enough to make a person dizzy just watching them!

While they chased each other around, I snuck closer. Eventually, one of them would notice me, and they would stop abruptly and begin the tail-flicking and barking that squirrels use as an alarm. But one of them, either Harry or Lloyd, would eventually grow tired of being a responsible adult squirrel, and walk up to the other and smack him on the head, and the chase would begin anew, all danger forgotten. These two idiots bounced off every object in sight....trees, logs, rocks, each other.....they were exhausting to watch! I eventually leaned the '97 against a tree trunk and started enjoying the show since they wouldn't hold still long enough for a shot anyways!

After 10 minutes or so of this, I stood up to leave and noticed another fuzzball....remember, a squirrel sitting still? Something I hadn't seen much of this particular hunt? Anyway, this fuzzball was

on my knee and bagged another bunny. The XS-B50 is a hard hitting, accurate rifle that really proved itself in the field. The rifle put every pellet right on target, and I found the thumbhole stock well balanced and very shootable from a variety of positions.

#### Closing Remarks

Will I do away with my European rifles and switch to the Chinese guns? Well no .... I like my regular guns and I like to shoot a number of rifles. If I was limited in the number of guns or on a tighter budget could I get by with these guns? Absolutely! They do not have the same quality of finish, but in terms of performance they are more than adequate. I would add that both of these guns did benefit from a bit of work on the triggers. The B19 is a very shootable spring piston airgun, though it does exhibit fairly strong bidirectional recoil. I'd probably have this gun tuned by a pro to smooth its firing cycle a bit. I'd also put a scope block on it next time around, to circumvent a repeat of the walking scope incident. For somebody in the market for a low cost 35 yard hunting air rifle, the B19 might well be just the ticket. The XS-B50 is a strong vehicle for the Chinese to enter the PCP market, and the Daystate Huntsman was a great model on which to base their initial offering. At under \$300.00 it is attractively priced for those that want to move to a precharged air rifle. I would go out on a limb and say the rifle shoots as well as the original, but I would also have to mention that there were some problems with the hammer spring being too light, causing the rifle to fail at maximum charge pressures. This problem has been frequently reported, but is easily rectified by replacing the hammer spring with a slightly stiffer one. There have only been shipments of a limited number of this gun to the domestic market at the time of writing, and hopefully they will iron out this wrinkle on future production runs.

I had a lot of fun testing these two guns in the field, and am already planning my next outing with a couple of other models. Those of us that are serious airgunners have become somewhat desensitized to the sticker shock that comes along with fine adult airguns, but the availability of quality low cost products like those discussed in this article opens the door for new participants in the sport. And with more airgun hunters the likelihood of hunting regulations opening up to permit a wider array of game to be taken with air arms becomes possible.

*Side Bar: Jim Chapman is an avid airgun hunter that has spent much of the last twenty years living (and hunting) in Europe, Asia, and Australia. He currently resides in the American Midwest, but grew up hunting the Southwestern deserts of California, Arizona, and Nevada. He now hunts all over the country as his schedule permits, and has recently published his first book on airgunning entitled "The American Airgun Hunter". You can find out more by visiting his website at:*

[http://www.geocities.com/echochap/airgun\\_hunter.html](http://www.geocities.com/echochap/airgun_hunter.html)





# AIRGUN HUNTING

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