

ED COOK

A DEADLY AFFAIR

When it comes to the tricky task of controlling rabbits during the summer months, there is something of the night about Ed Cook



Airguns are a much safer alternative to a .22 rimfire, especially on smaller land

The summer tends to be a more relaxed time of year in my line of work. I use this downtime to carry out my hobbies, but this year has been different. Work has been rolling in thick and fast.

Generally, summer is a tricky time of year to carry out rabbit control due to the abundance of vegetation. It provides more food and hiding places for rabbits compared to the winter months, when everything dies back.

That said, it is possible to control rabbits at this time of year, with the correct equipment. After all, if a customer wants it done, it has to be done. That's what keeps the roof over my head and pays the wages.

The way to do it

So what's the best way to approach summer rabbit control? That depends on a considerable amount of factors, including habitat, land use, neighbouring land, and so on, for each job. On very few occasions can you rely on just one method to control rabbits where a landowner will be satisfied.

This year, I have been using my firearms certificated air rifle (FAC) to good effect in a variety of places, ranging from gardens to golf courses. Yes, I can hear you say, "why not use a .22 rimfire instead – it will be more powerful than a poxy airgun?" The reality is, however, that rimfires are also more likely to ricochet and cross the boundaries of the land you are working on. This is why I often opt for an airgun as a much safer alternative.



The summer provides more food and hiding places for rabbits

Photography: ED COOK, ISTOCK

On a really small bit of land, it is often best to use a legal limit airgun because the relatively low power means you can ensure that your pellets remain well inside the property's boundary.

The legal limit of a non-FAC air rifle is 12ft/lbs, which is plenty good enough to kill rabbits at 30m. An FAC version can "whack" a rabbit over 60m away being, on average, three times more powerful. That said, you do still need to point it in the right direction and head shots are preferred.

Practice makes perfect

An airgun pellet drops a lot more than a .22 or 17hmr bullet, so you need to learn that at certain distances the pellet will drop by a certain amount, so you have to allow for that (hold-over) and hit your target. All this comes with practice. Once you have mastered this, a legal limit or FAC-rated airgun can be deadly.

I've carried out a lot of work in the evenings this year. Rabbits often opt for the relative safety of low light conditions to feed. My colleagues and I have worked through the night "plinking away" with nightvision helping us to see our quarry. During summer months, however, rabbits don't tend to be out feeding much between 1am and 3am, but this changes the closer you creep towards September.

The tool for the job is a FAC-rated Air Arms S410 in .22 calibre. When darkness falls, I fit a nightvision monocular (I seldom use rifles for lamping these days) to my scope along with an infrared (IR) system. This, combined with a thermal imager as a spotter, is a good system for rabbit control after dark. This combination is also a useful tool for eradication projects.

Accuracy problems

The biggest problem I find with nightvision combined with an airgun is judging range. For accuracy with airguns this is an essential skill because of the "loopy" trajectory. Looking through the scope you don't know if it is an adult rabbit some way out, or a baby rabbit close to you. This isn't an issue when using a .17hmr because they have a much flatter trajectory than an air rifle and your aim point at 50m is the same at 150m.

I recently bought a device to overcome this issue – a rangefinder. Nothing new about that I hear you say, but this one fits on the gun, making it much less cumbersome than the hand-held devices. Now it doesn't matter that my airgun has the trajectory of a banana because knowing the precise range means I can make allowances for the pellet drop with my hold-over.

My new rangefinder cost around £140 and fits to the side of the scope. It can be zeroed to the crosshairs of the telescopic sight. I get the distance read out of my target on a small LED screen. This has made controlling rabbits in the dark with an airgun a deadly affair. **SG**

KIT USED

- **Air Arms S410 FAC-rated air rifle in .22 calibre**
- **Air Arms Diablo Field Pellets** www.air-arms.co.uk
- **Guide IR517 hand-held thermal imaging monocular** www.scottcountry.co.uk
- **Weapon mountable laser rangefinder 5-700m** www.customriflescopes.com