COPS AND RABBITS

This month Ed Cook catches more than rabbits when he is employed to clear a golf course of coneys

This summer has certainly been busy. We have been carrying out rabbit control projects in all corners of the UK. I can even say I've caught rabbits in three different countries in the same week, which is something I never thought I'd be able to say.

One of the jobs we were contracted to do was a golf course in Wales. The place certainly held a healthy population of rabbits despite the efforts of others. Rabbit grazing wasn't the problem, but it was their digging. I'm no expert on golf, but it's obvious that rabbits digging on a well-manicured green causes costly maintenance. Rabbits digging scrapes everywhere also cause trip hazards and can make the area look unsightly.



Ed was despatching rabbits from 20 yards to 120 yards

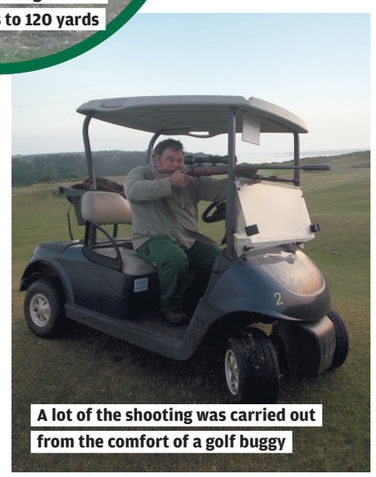
Cost effective

The area consisted of nearly 200 acres which was strewn with large gorse patches and various areas of grassland related to the game of golf. Ferreting would take a considerable amount of time and this would push-up the overall cost. So we decided that a combination of thermal imaging, night vision and the .17hmr was going to be the most cost effective option.

We arrived about two hours before dark and once all the golfers had left the area we proceeded to make a start. Dusk is often a productive time to bag bunnies in the summer months and you can bag a load of rabbits without night vision if you shoot straight.

We were soon zapping rabbits from distances that varied from 20 yards to 120 yards. This was carried out from the comfort of a golf buggy, which suited the job well. The rabbits had become used to its presence on the course and thought it wasn't a threat. The buggy was also very quiet which meant we could move about the course stealthily. It also had a compartment to carry the rabbits... or golf clubs if you so wish. One of us drove and the other shot. By the time it was dark we'd shot 20 or so rabbits, which I was happy with on our first outing.

We headed back when it became too dark to shoot without night vision. We dropped the rabbits off and by this time it was dark enough to use the night vision on the .17hmr.



A lot of the shooting was carried out from the comfort of a golf buggy

Night vision

We headed to our designated spot on the buggy and then wandered around on foot. I use an Archer night vision monocular fitted to the back of the scope on my rifle and a Nightmaster infrared (IR) illuminator. But, I use a Guide thermal imager spotting scope to find the rabbits before I start shooting. I find this combination very effective and have used it successfully in various situations with various calibres.

Once again we were soon filling up the bag with bunnies and we quickly needed to go back with the buggy to drop off a substantial bag. We did this several times before we decided we needed to go back to our truck parked in the car park to drop them off. We counted them into the truck and placed them in orderly rows. Some say I'm a bit OCD because I do this, but I believe it's good practice.

Different type of quarry

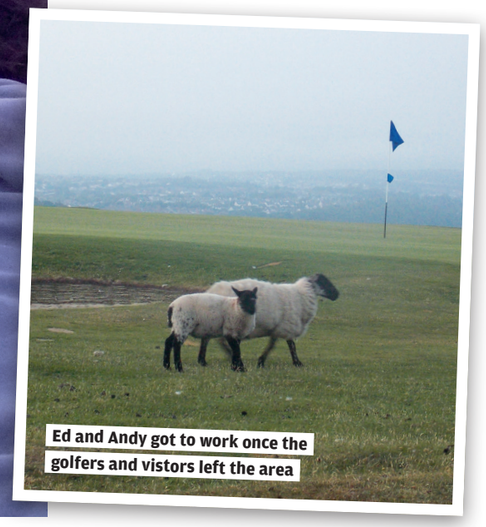
As we were busy getting things in order I heard a car struggling up the hill towards the car park. It was 3am, so I was confident it wasn't golfers. I was expecting the lights to suddenly illuminate us in the car park, but the car stopped short of the entrance. I'm a gamekeepers son and have inherited such traits, including being suspicious of most folk. I grabbed the thermal imager and sneaked along the edge of the car park until I could see the car. Four lads soon got out and it was apparent they were up to no good! I said to my mate, "Andy, we need to call the Old Bill!" Three digits later and we were guiding the police to the suspicious car. By now two of the lads were in the car park armed with what looked like a crowbar and a bat. Being no more than 50 yards from us at this stage I was a tad nervous, as was my mate.

We crept back towards the truck keeping an eye on the pair while we were still on phone to the police operator. They lurked in and around the buildings checking doors and windows and then vanished behind a building for several minutes. By now I was on the phone to an officer who was nearly on the scene. She asked how I could see so much in the dark, so I told her about the night vision gear.



Rabbits digging on a well-manicured green can cause costly maintenance

"Dusk is often a productive time to bag bunnies in the summer months"



Ed and Andy got to work once the golfers and vistors left the area



Ed's shooting partner, Andy, taking aim in the golf buggy

Face-to-face

Suddenly the intruders came around a corner of the building and were just feet from us. My mate lit them up with a lamp! To say they looked surprised was an understatement! But they also looked a bit "handy" too. We exchanged a few choice words and they bolted down a bank into the night.

The police were at the bottom of the driveway by now. They stopped the intruders' car and the passengers bolted. The police were there in force and had dogs. The driver was arrested but sadly the three others managed to escape.

Merits of night vision

The merits of thermal imaging are obvious and it's scary that you never know if someone is watching you be it day or night. The evening was certainly a success. We saved the clubhouse from being broken into, helped arrest one of the scum and shot 61 rabbits. The down side was that despite my efforts no officer wanted to buy any fresh and local sourced rabbit! **SG**