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**RUSS DOUGLAS**



# TRIGGER TIME AT LAST!

Russ Douglas is glad to resume overdue target practice, then discovers a new wintry permission

Like most of you, we northern shooters have really been missing the 'trigger time' at our local club, feeling the void left by the absence of our weekly banter and competitive challenges. I've still been getting out to do some essential pest-control duties, although intermittent back pain issues have really limited that at times. My local physio gave me some new exercises that are so far helping, so I'm

hoping that my pest control adventures will be less interrupted from here on. Read on to hear about my latest outing, touring a new permission (or two) with the help of the resident gamekeeper, but before that here's more on taking advantage of any opportunities to practise.

Last night, I headed back out to Grampian Air Rifle Club (GARC), keen to take advantage

of a forecast lull in the gale-force winds accompanying the current, unseasonal April Arctic blast. I knew from our online forum that one or two of my fellow pistol shooters were attending, so was keen to take advantage if there was any chance of some 10m pistol practice. Everything's perfectly socially distanced at our range, thanks to our club official's sterling efforts to keep everything both



District Full-Bore Club (ADFBC) for all their efforts that made this possible'.

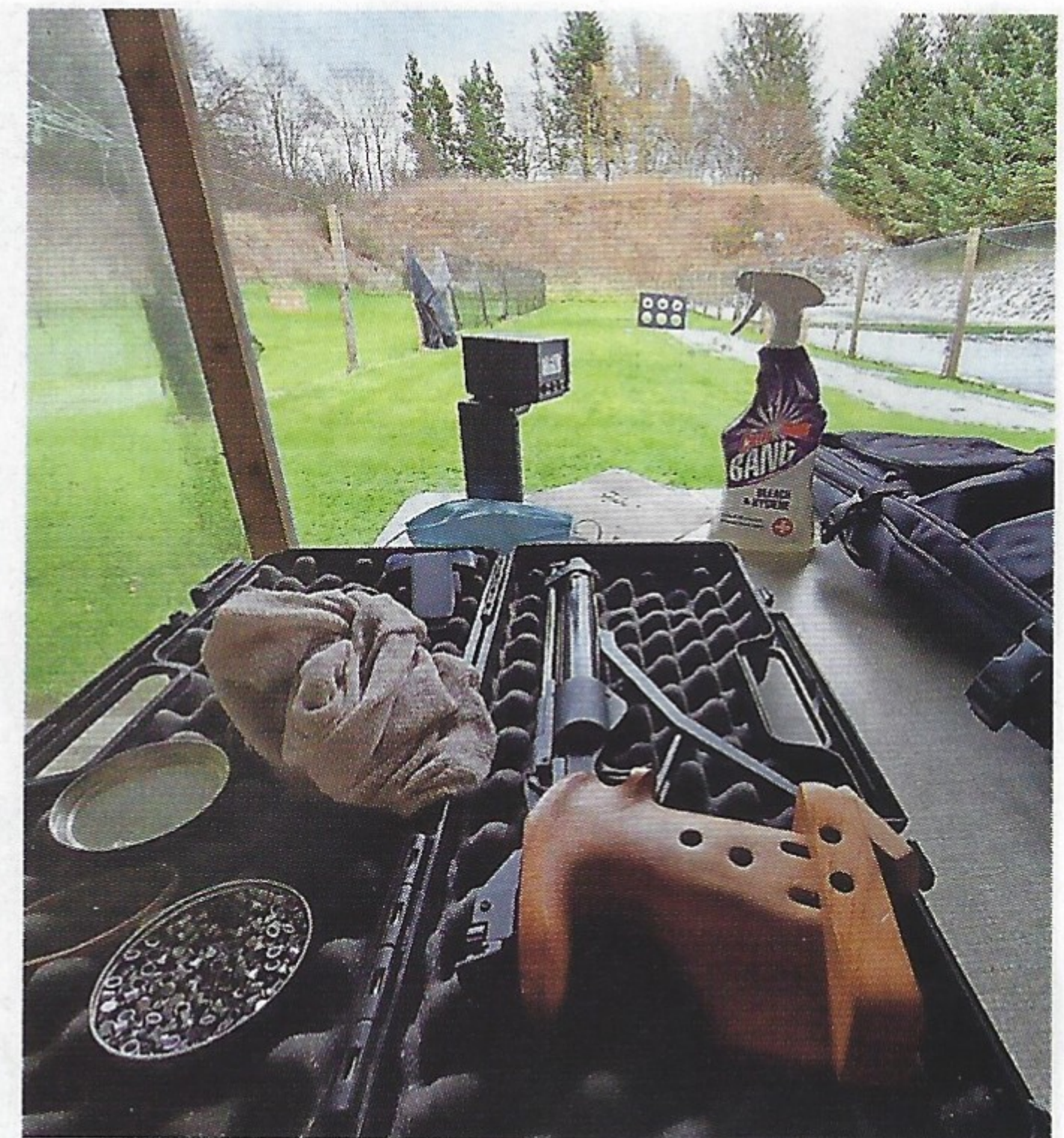
There were other temporary changes, like marking the gun racks off-limits to discourage close mingling. Instead, range-side tables provided temporary gun storage beside each pair of partitioned-off lanes.

### COULD I STILL HIT ANYTHING?

You may remember from the March 2020 issue that I'd fitted a grab handle between lanes 1 and 2, to facilitate standing off-hand shooting in as naturally competitive (but safe) a position as possible. For this reason, I booked lane 2 for my first return session, in early December. It felt great to be back in the club and behind the trigger, although with not having any home space for practice, I had no confidence of still being able to hit the proverbial barn door. As luck would have it, after a few practice cards – but not so many as to risk bringing on the muscle shakes – I scored a high of 44 and a low of 36 (ex-50). These scores quickly became the norm for that evening, and I averaged 39.5 ex 50 from 11 cards, so I was neither improving nor deteriorating – fair dos. Two weeks later, I was back and my highest scoring card was 43, but then my lowest was 35, so my average (again of 11 cards) for the evening was 38.6 ex 50.

### WEIRD FEELING

This week, after nearly four months of lockdown I was keen to dust-off my 10m pistol practice and I'd hoped that the forecast light wind wouldn't be a hindrance, but as luck would have it things were dead calm – result! It felt weird lining up on standard 10m paper



Everything needed for practice. It's great to be back!

targets outdoors, but as you can see from the photos (thanks again, Bri), I had a batten to brace my off-hand stance, almost like on the indoor range. Club regular and keen 10m shooter, Les, had made-up a six-card target holder, complete with removeable legs, so I was grateful to use that and avoid repeated 'cease fires' to replace individual cards downrange. One quirk of the unseasonal cold spell was that the right-hand side of the range was still white with snow – yep, on 7th April – but this then offered an unexpected advantage in that I only had to lean my head to the left, to get snow behind, and through, the target cards, which offered a perfect white contrast to my holes in the black centre bulls. Did I say black? Almost all my shots so far were in the black, which raised my hopes of a decent score, then for my last pistol shot of the

**Determined to be back with a bang. That was the plan,**

as safe and accessible as possible. As it happened, the forecast didn't do the evening justice because for one night – book-ended by two stormy nights – the air was perfectly calm, allowing a few of us to make the most of it. Snow still covered half the range, so it wasn't exactly perfect, although as you'll see, even that proved useful at times.

### NOT THE ONLY OPPORTUNITY

Back in early December, our club's activities briefly resumed on the indoor 25m range, before being sadly curtailed by yet another necessarily restrictive lockdown. Upon arrival, we discovered new bespoke timber frames holding Perspex screens to keep everyone separate, with floor labels clearly indicating the 'new normal' one-way system. The downside is our range's usual eight lanes had been reduced to four, but via an online session pre-booking system, a decent number of shooters still got to take their turn. 'Those of us who got to test out this first indoor session were very impressed, so hat's off to the Aberdeen &



Covid-aware indoor GARC precautions.





**Farmyard hazards 1. Walking into this in the dark could definitely ruin your night.**

session, I only went and rushed it, leaving a wild flyer at 6 o'clock low in the no.4 ring. D'oh – more practice clearly required!

## BLAME THE COLD

On this cold night, I'd started with ten sighting-in shots on one target, before getting straight onto some scoring cards. Funnily enough, that sighter card scored 85/100, then my next two cards totalled 72 ex 90 (no, I evidently couldn't count my shots) and 76 ex100. I'll blame the cold for that because there I was, trying not to hold my arm on aim for too long, to avoid muscle tremors – when the icy night air was encouraging them. Anyway, it was great to be on the range again alongside my friends, albeit socially distanced, and my 10m pistol scores clearly leave large room for improvement; bring-on more practice sessions.

## NEW PERMISSION

Shooting buddy and long-time AGW reader, Davie (hiya bud!) is a star, regularly offering to help me overcome my physical issues, to get back out behind the trigger, whether on the pests or the practice range. He's friends with several estate managers and gamekeepers, both from his part-time/post-retirement work as a water bailiff, and his regular fox control rounds. As I recovered from my latest bout of backache and with today's magazine deadline looming, I was keen to get back out on the pests last week. I tried to plan ahead, but was all too aware that forecast high winds would prevent any bunny-bagging in my usual

permission's open paddocks. Davie stepped in and offered to introduce me to a gamekeeper friend, who had recently taken over some of his fox control duties.

The gamekeeper's rounds include several farms with numerous sheds and barns, where feral pigeons and occasionally rats were a

regular menace to the farmers and livestock alike. Their defecated mess spoils the animal feed and generally increases disease risks. Indoor pest control would be just the ticket to avoid the current high winds and horizontal snow we were experiencing.

## CURIOUS CATTLE

I followed the sat-nav trail and found the gamekeeper's cottage okay, then after introductions and shooting insurance and permission-signing was sorted, he showed me round the first of the sheds. A dozen pairs of widely spaced red eyes greeted me from the darkness as I approached the sheds, wearing my headtorch – a curious row of cattle watched our every move. Scanning the first shed opposite them surprisingly revealed nothing, but the second contained a few tell-tale, two-tone thermal signatures of feral pigeons among the overhead roof trusses. Just like rabbits, pigeon heads always glow brighter than their bodies in the thermal spotter, so if the pests ever look 'all white' – or all black, when using 'black-hot' mode – you just turn down the brightness to get better thermal contrast and improved definition.

## SAFETY FIRST AND ALWAYS

I've included a few photos of hazards I've encountered first-hand in the dark whilst roaming various permissions. It certainly pays to carry-out a thorough daylight recce whenever possible, prior to an evening session, so you know where the obvious hazards are. In one near-immaculate dark

**Farmyard hazards 2. You're looking at a potential leg-breaker, here. Hazard awareness is absolutely vital.**





barn, the floor might have been clear concrete, swept clean of even spilled grain, but as I rounded some bales, pausing to scan ahead with the thermal spotter, I saw something curious, dead ahead at eye level. Popping my headtorch on, it turned out to be a dangerously spiked appendage jutting from a combine harvester's detached cutter assembly; cue giving that a wide berth. If in doubt, it's safer to scan ahead with your headtorch sparingly and risk alerting your prey to your presence, than find a hazard like this the painful way. We really mustn't take risks when stalking around farm machinery.

### PLENTY OF PROPS

On this new, unfamiliar permission, the gamekeeper guided me from shed to shed, waiting to one side as I first scanned ahead with my thermal spotter, then took up position for each shot. I'd stupidly left my trigger sticks in my car, but fortunately, there were plentiful columns and bales, providing stable shooting positions. As always, I checked for safe back-stops for example, avoiding background cables and conduits, or soft asbestos-style corrugated roof panels. If there's any doubt, I take upper body heart/lung shots. Here the body absorbs the .177 non-FAC pellet, whereas a small bobbing pigeon head not only presents little to absorb the pellet's energy, but also increases the chance of an outright miss. Surprisingly, I only glimpsed a single rat, on an overhead truss beam, but that sadly vanished by the time I'd shuffled sideways to where I could take aim braced against a supporting column.

### REDUCED TALLY

As always I'd hoped for the perfect evening; an indoor permission out of the wind and driving snow, with abundant pests queuing up to be shot and recorded in the glorious black & white HD detail of my scope. As it was, the wintry conditions were almost certainly to blame for the reduced pest numbers because I only encountered and shot seven dhoos (feral pigeons) and one particularly mangey-looking corvid. There were a couple more about, but even in total darkness, when they're huddled close together trying to evade the icy wind, as you shoot one the others scatter, which simply can't be helped unless they perch again within the same barn.

At least my kit functioned pretty much as intended, the only ongoing hiccup being with my thermal spotter. The 10,000mah USB powerbank might power it for several sessions between charges, but I keep snagging the connecting cable on my neck-slung rifle. Granted, it doesn't help that the Wildcat is bristling with accessories, but the Pard008LRF is my perfect targeting tool for 24/7 pest control, and the separately mounted 940nm IR torch illuminates everything perfectly without alerting any pests to the threat my presence presents, with no tell-tale red lens glow.



The first feral was ranged, and seconds later, successfully shot.



Those tricky overhead shots can be made easier, thanks to modern technology.

### SEEING IS BELIEVING

I'm preparing a video to accompany the second half of this article, including a couple of outings-worth of pest control. Please excuse one or two early clips where I've clearly knocked the external torch slightly off-centre. I've already arranged to head back out to this new permission in two days, hoping to explore and clear more of the sheds, and get more footage. Now that the underfoot ice is gone, and the winds are gentler allowing longer pellet trajectories, it should be a more productive session. The gamekeeper had expected to see 60 to 70 ferals in some of the sheds as usual, but was dismayed when we found only a couple per shed. In the open doorway of one shed, the cattle were so undaunted by my



The fourth feral pigeon of the night was dispatched clinically.



The laser was used to target this one.

super-quiet Wildcat despatching the ferals, that one tried putting me off my aim by licking my shoulder. Certainly, the most amusing interlude during a cold, wet winter night's pest control.

I'll prepare QR codes directing you to my accompanying Flickr photo album and the YouTube video (CAUTION: contains pest control footage).

### THANKS, ALL

I hope this has been interesting, and that you enjoy your shooting. Thanks again to everyone both visible and behind the scenes at GARC, working to maintain our access to our favourite sport. Thanks to Les for the ingenious target holder, and to Bri for the outdoor range photos, plus to both Davie and the gamekeeper for introducing me to another permission, which will be more productive, I hope, this next visit 'oop north'. ■

### VIDEO REVIEWS

Scan the two enclosed QR codes for video reviews.



(June 2021 1-of-2)  
**Gamekeeper  
Permission**  
Flickr album...  
with all the extra  
photos. ☺



(June 2021 2-of-2)  
**Gamekeeper  
Permission**  
YouTube video  
CAUTION: Contains  
Pest control from 04:12

### INFO

UK Night Vision forum <https://www.nightvisionforumuk.com/index.php>

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