

A man with a grey beard and a green baseball cap is kneeling in a field of tall grass. He is holding a long-barreled airgun with a wooden stock and a black scope. The scope has the word "Marauder" written on it. Next to him on the ground is a dead duck with white and brown feathers. The background shows dry, rocky ground and some sparse vegetation.

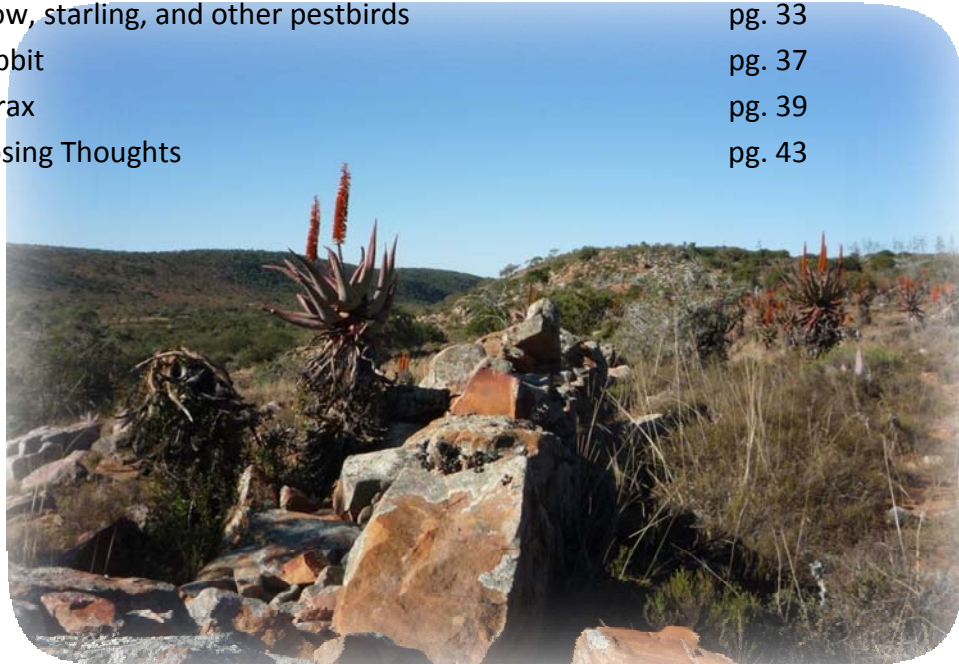
Crosman Precharged Pneumatic Airguns

Jim Chapman

**Airgun Hunts
with the Benjamin
Marauder in South Africa**

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Introduction

As an outdoor writer, and moreover one specializing in hunting airguns, I get to shoot a lot of airguns. There are many good rifles being produced today, as well as a few great ones. But what we have been missing is a great hunting airgun at a price point most hunters can afford. In a marketplace that is populated by guns starting at over a thousand dollars, not to mention the cost of adjunct gear such as filling equipment, it is difficult for new shooters to enter the sport. That is why I got excited when Crosman entered the precharged pneumatic arena, first with the Discovery then following with the Marauder.

The Discovery is a single shot PCP rifle that has everything the airgun hunter needs in an entry level gun; it is accurate, powerful, and reliable, fills to a low charge pressure with a handpump, and can run on CO2 for lower powered indoor shooting. But the truly compelling thing with this rifle is that packaged with a handpump it cost far less than anything else the airgun hunter could buy. I was lucky enough to be sent one of the first pre-production guns to shoot, hunt with, and give some feedback on. But truth is that I think the engineers and market research people got it just about perfect and delivered exactly what the market wanted and needed. However, there was room for a higher tier rifle that bridged the simple no frill design requirement of the Discovery and the more sophisticated (and much more expensive) rifles at the high end of the price/performance spectrum. While I really like the Discovery, I thought it would be perfect if there was an option to get it with a shrouded barrel, and if there was an option for a premium trigger to be installed by their custom shop (even if that cost a few hundred dollars more), and if there was a multi-shot version. That was the point; this gun hit so close to the mark that the only thing needed to make it a better gun were features only found on much more expensive rifles!

Then a couple years later I received word that Crosman had a new PCP rifle in development, and again was offered a pre-production gun for evaluation. The Marauder was unveiled at the 2009 SHOT Show in Orlando; and what was introduced to the airgunning world was a rifle offering features previously found only on much more expensive models. The Marauder has a 10 shot rotary magazine, a sophisticated match grade adjustable trigger that is a dream, and comes standard with a shrouded barrel that is whisper quiet. This in addition to the Marauders intrinsic accuracy and the power to take any small game from squirrels to woodchucks, has resulted in a gun I love to carry in the field. As a matter of fact, I selected the Marauder as my small game rifle for an airgun safari in South Africa's Eastern Cape, which in past years has been a challenging testing ground requiring a gun to shoot with precision, hit hard, and be reliable. When you're thousands of miles from home, it makes sense to only carry gear you believe in. The Marauder has proven itself to me.



Rob lining up a shot on some pest birds before lunch one day. Here is a guy that lives on a huge property filled with big game, and it was hard to get the airgun away from him!

My intention with these hunts was to demonstrate that the Marauder is the real deal for small and medium game hunting, and that they can be used to make one shot kills that cleanly anchor the tenacious small game and pest species in this hunter's paradise. Even though this book was based on hunting in Africa, the experience speaks directly to the guns suitability for hunting anywhere in the world.

Hunts were setup over a five week period in South Africa, and I planned to make the most of the hunts. My friends and professional hunters Rob Dell and Andrew Myers were contacted to organize the trip. From my Indiana based office I was phoning sponsors; Crosman for guns, scopes, and pumps to be drop shipped for pick up on my arrival to the Eastern Cape, Pyramyd Airgun, arguably the biggest and one of best airgun supplier in North America came through with financial support, and Adventures in airguns supplied additional equipment. It all came together and formed one of the most enjoyable hunts of my life.

In this small booklet my objective is to share several facets of hunting with the Marauder, relating our experiences regarding the guns, the gear, the people, and the game. And in the end I believe you'll see that if you own a Crosman Marauder, you have a gun that will take you anywhere you want to go.

Hunting with Airguns

There is a long tradition of hunting with pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) air guns, dating back to the late 1600s when big bore air rifles were used by European nobility to take large game animals. In more recent years, spring piston airguns became available to the masses, and after World War II there was a dramatic increase in the availability of guns. The sport has continued to grow in much of the world, especially in those locales where gun ownership is not an option for the civilian population. In Europe there is a tradition of high quality airgun manufacturing, especially in Germany and the United Kingdom.

As a matter of fact, the UK has arguably been the center of the modern airgunning world. They produce many of the finest spring piston and PCP airguns in the world; and support a vibrant airgun hunting community with a couple popular magazines dedicated to reporting on and promoting the sport. And while the range of available guns offered to the market comprises both spring piston and pcp power plants, there has been an upsurge in the popularity of precharged pneumatic guns in the market over the last decade.

In the United States serious airgun hunting has been relatively unknown, and even less so when it comes to PCPs. However, as Americans are faced with increased urbanization, the attraction of the air powered hunting arm becomes ever more apparent; providing a means of hunting in areas that are more densely populated where firearms are a no-go. While many hunters feel that PCPs are easier to shoot accurately and tend to be more powerful than spring piston guns, the fact that there has been a dearth of appropriately priced pcp guns for the American sportsman has blocked a lot of new hunters from entering the sport. With Crosman's release of the Discovery and the Marauder, this is going to change in my opinion!

In this book I will examine how these new Crosman guns can be used for field work, and relate some firsthand experiences coming out of our five week airgunning trek in South Africa, in which I relied solely on the Marauder and the Discovery for small game hunting.

Why Hunt With Airguns?

As stated previously, in Europe and much of the world airguns are the only option available to people wishing to hunt. They simply are not allowed to possess firearms, or the population densities are so high that there is not enough open land to hunt over. But there are several reasons that shooters everywhere appreciate; airguns are relatively quiet (in the case of the Marauder, less than a whisper) and have a limited carrying range, they can therefore be used to perform pest control duties and hunt in fairly populated areas, and due to the limited range can even be shot safely in the backyard or down in the basement. The cost



We took airguns along on our big game hunt to shoot small game and pest species in our down time. This proved a great way to keep my shooting and hunting technique dialed in, and I have to say I enjoyed the small game hunting with airguns as much as the big game with firearms

of airgun projectiles is much lower than even .22 rimfire ammunition, with pellets costing a penny or two per round. The challenge of the hunt is increased with airguns, because to ethically take game the hunter must close the distance which requires honed hunting skills. In this respect airgun hunting offers many parallels to bow hunting while incorporating traditional marksmanship.

The modern PCP airgun is capable of tack driving accuracy out to sixty or seventy yards, while most springers can be used with confidence out to thirty five or forty yards. Another benefit is that the hunter can get in a great deal of practice. I will often go down to my basement range and put a couple hundred rounds through a gun I'm getting ready to take with me into the field. You're not going to be able to do this with a firearm unless you happen to live on a ranch in Montana.

The last reason on my list is the least tangible Airguns are cool! There is something about the engineering that goes into these guns, along with the diversity in designs available that makes airguns a highly addictive past time. The airgun uses a tiny puff of air to send a fifteen or so grain piece of lead down range to anchor their quarry! This is a fact that always amazes me.

Ethics of Airgun Hunting

One of the most frequently asked questions I get from other hunters that use more conventional weapons is “is it ethical to hunt with an airgun”? This is a fair question, and the short answer is yes. If one knows their gun and what it is capable of, both in terms of power and accuracy, they know what they are capable of with respect marksmanship, and know the animal being hunted, then they can ethically harvest game. This is of course the same set of criteria any hunter using any weapon must exercise. As a matter of fact I can make a strong argument that an airgun hunter able to practice in their basement or backyard and shoot hundreds of pellets per month throughout the year, is going to become a more proficient marksman than a firearm shooter that may put less than a hundred shots per year (often far less) before heading out after game. I hunt with firearms, archery equipment, and airguns; but it is my airgun that makes me a better shot and a better hunter overall.

Ethics are not simply a question of the tools used to harvest game, but how those tools are applied. I will say that after thirty years in the field hunting with firearms and twenty using airguns (concurrently thank you very much), that airguns are a viable option for making humane kills on small game and for pest control. To summarize; pick the proper gun and pellet, keep it to the appropriate range, know your skills, and you can indeed hunt ethically with air power. It is one of my objectives in this book to demonstrate that the Marauder is an air rifle well suited for this application in every respect.



Pest Control

The application for which most airguns are purchased domestically would be for plinking and informal 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 are by their very nature considered pest animals, ones that are vectors for diseases or cause damage to property such as brown rats. There are other animals that are not usually considered 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. 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.



The accuracy, power, shrouded barrel, match grade trigger and excellent fit and feel of the Marauder made it the perfect gun for pest control and small game hunting.

Using airguns to shoot these pests makes a lot of sense, as they are uniquely suited to the task. They are powerful enough to effectively dispatch a pest animal at 70 yards, and the Marauders discussed in this book are capable of tack driving accuracy. If you do happen to miss, the projectiles will not travel a mile or cause excessive damage to surrounding equipment or buildings. And lastly, with a shrouded barrel this rifle is almost silent. This means that you will not become a pest species to your neighbors as you move around a property clearing out the starling population, your pest might be their cute little bunny ... so stealth has its place.

Small Game Hunting

For me, small game hunting with an airgun is a favorite hunting past time, and a couple of my favorite guns are the Marauder and Discovery pre-charged pneumatics. I love being out in the Midwestern woods in fall and winter with an air rifle stalking squirrels, or glassing the landscape in pursuit of rabbit and quail out in the California high desert. I also love taking these guns on my big game and predator hunts; as you'll see in this book additional opportunities will always arise even in game rich areas such as South Africa!

We are blessed with a lot of small game animals in North America, with squirrel and rabbits by far and away the most popular quarry. But in some areas turkey, quail, grouse, and other game birds are on the menu as well. Some animals, such as fox, bobcats, coyote, raccoons, and nutria are sometimes considered game animals, sometimes furbearers, and sometimes pest species, and in many jurisdictions can be taken with air powered guns. On my airgun hunts in South Africa game such as the many types of doves and pigeons, crows and ravens, Guinea fowl, geese, several types of starlings, mongoose, fox, hyrax, wildcats, porcupine, rabbits, springhares, and various rodents large and small gave us great hunting and shooting opportunities when not out after big game.

Why use an air rifle rather than one of my firearms as a method of take? I still like to hit the field with my .17 and .22 rimfire rifles and handguns, but find that airguns make it more about the hunting than about the shooting (not saying the shooting isn't fun or important mind you). That forty to fifty yard airgun range can be a real obstacle to overcome when moving through the forest, knowing that a snap of a twig on the ground will send every squirrel in the area running for cover.

Another major plus for me is that as stated, airguns open up a lot more territory for hunting. At home in Indiana, it seems like there is a lot of open space on one hand, but on the other there seems to be a house on the corner of every forty acre parcel. I am exaggerating, but my point is that there is more limitation on hunting space than out west. I have found that a lot of farmers out where I live will let me take an airgun around their farms, but not a firearm due to the carrying distance and noise generated. A side benefit of the airgun is that the precise placement of the pellet, usually on the head, causes less damage to the meat. These animals are destined for the larder so this is not an insignificant advantage. But one of the most important advantages of airguns in most settings is that they are so quiet. This is very important when hunting around farms and near habitation, but even when using an airgun during down time while on a big game, is a great attribute.

On this trip to South Africa, my primary intent was big game hunting. However, there was a lot of down time in which I could get out with an airgun for both pest control and small game hunting, where the report of even a rimfire would have caused too much disturbance.

The Team

On this trek in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, I was hunting with my two friends and Professional Hunters Andrew Myers and Robert Dell on the Dell property. I've known these guys for several years and we've hunted together for everything from springhares to kudu bulls with airguns. There are a lot of PH's in this country, but these are the only two with the experience, knowledge (and permits) for putting together an airgun safari. Andrew lived in the UK and started shooting airguns there, having developed a strong working knowledge of airguns and airgun ballistics by the time he returned to South Africa. Robert's family has owned their holding for generations and he knows the land and the wildlife like the back of his hand. Besides being a PH, Robert is also an outfitter, and has all the credentials and contacts to put together a wide range of safari options. He hunts a big territory covering many holdings in the district and speaks the local native languages. He has led me on some very intense stalks over the years.

Robert and Andrew are both very experienced firearm hunters that have taken a variety of African game, but what I really appreciate is that they had the foresight to lead the way for airgunners in this country. It was Andrew that came up with the idea of adding an airgun shoot to a traditional safari, and that idea eventually evolved into an airgun only concept. Our first few safaris together, we only used airguns for big and small game. However on this Crosman Safari I decided to use a centerfire for big game then switch to airguns for everything else. When I've used big bore airguns in the past, the demands of perfect range and shot placement has resulted in having to invest a lot of time for each animal (much more than with a centerfire) and on this trip I only wanted to take a black wildebeest and a couple of other big game animals, then have plenty of time for small game and airguns.

On this hunt, Crosman kindly agreed to ship additional rifles so that we were all equipped with Marauders, and unlike the typical safari set up all three of us would be actively hunting. So the feedback and experience you read about in this book will not only be my own, but that of the two most experienced Professional Hunters using airguns in Africa.

My own experience with airguns started when I was a boy growing up in Southern California. I spent endless days and weeks hunting with my Benjamin multi-pump rifle, hiking the hills in search of ground squirrels, rabbits, and other small game. But then I moved on to firearms, wingshooting and big game hunting, following along this path for many years. After college I took a job that moved me to Europe, Asia, and Australia for the next fifteen years, and it was during this time that I became acquainted with "adult airrifles", which grew into a lifelong



Andrew and Rob are both great shots and were absolutely deadly with their Marauders. I watched them dropping starlings at 50-60 yards with head shots Everytime!

fascination. During the last three decades I've hunted small game with airguns throughout the US as well as China, Europe, and South Africa. Another turning point occurred several years ago when I met Dennis Quackenbush, the master airgun artisan building bigbore airguns, and started using them for big game. He introduced me to another fanatical airgun hunter named Eric Henderson, and I think it is safe to say that between the two of us we have taken more big game with large caliber airguns than any other hunters in the world. And while I do enjoy this type of shooting, my preference remains small game hunting with standard caliber airguns.

I've authored three books on airgun hunting (one coauthored with Randy Mitchell) and have for the last several years been a columnist for Predator Xtreme Magazine, which is the only mainstream hunting publication in the USA with a regular airgunning section. I've also written many other feature articles on airguns and airgun hunting for other publications. Because of this I have had the opportunity to shoot many guns from most manufacturers. The reason I've mentioned the writing background is so that the reader understands that I have experience with and access to a wide range of guns, and have a lot of options when heading out for a hunt.

Gun Selection

On my earlier trips to the Eastern Cape, I'd carried some excellent small game rifles that included the DAQ Bandit .25, the Falcon Prairie .22, The BSA Superten .20, and the Evanix AR 6, There were several things learned on these hunts with respect to what I wanted and needed in a small game gun; some expected some not. The fact that accuracy was paramount was to be expected, and the gun had to generate adequate power to take quarry up to the size of a large African Porcupine. For this reason I wanted the rifle to deliver approximately 30 fpe. Some of the shooting is very fast paced with the need to acquire and shoot one target after another, especially when in a target rich environment such as when flocks of pigeons are flying in. For this reason I preferred a multi-shot with a perfectly reliable magazine. I'd experienced a couple of near catastrophic failures on previous trips, so insisted that the gun be reliable and easy to fix if something did go wrong. One of the unexpected findings from these earlier hunts was that a silenced gun offered advantages even when hunting in the bush. I figured a Guinea fowl seeing a flock member drop would run off screaming for the hills, and that the sound was unimportant. But I found that with a suppressed gun, I could often get a second bird before they took flight. And the last key item was that I had to enjoy shooting whatever gun I took, because I'd be shooting my small game rifle more than all the others combined!

Crosman had sent me pre-production examples of the Discovery and Marauder rifles to evaluate before they were released. During these tests I'd had a chance to use them extensively. I'd spent a lot of time doing quantitative testing with many pellets, and carried both of the guns on several hunts before the African trip. Quite honestly there were several guns that I could have opted for, but the simple fact was that the Marauder fulfilled all of my criteria; it is a hard hitting tack driver that has proven reliability (in my experience) over thousands of shots. The gun carries and comes to shoulder very well. But moreover, the fact that this gun has the potential of becoming an instant classic in the American airgunning scene made it an obvious choice for me. I had been speaking highly of this rifle based on my real life experience at home, but I wanted to give it the ultimate field shakedown!

Because this hunt was going to be focused on small game and I was using a barrowed centerfire for my big game, bringing another small game gun was not an issue. I decided to take the Discovery primarily because I'd been a fan of this gun since it emerged on the market; it offered everything an entry level hunting gun needed to deliver at an unbelievably low price. I wanted to see how the reasonably priced and readily available "everyman's" PCP would be bare up under the tough and challenging conditions this hunt would provide. And as with the Marauder, based on my own "hands on" experience I had faith in both the rifles performance and reliability, key issues when traveling halfway around the world to shoot in areas remote from any repair or support infrastructure.

The Marauder PCP Air Rifle

The Marauder is an American made precharged pneumatic rifle featuring a match grade trigger, a ten shot rotary magazine, and a fully shrouded barrel! The gun comes dressed in a very handsome ambidextrous hardwood stock with crisply cut checkering. It has a rear mounted bolt action that cycles and indexes the 10 shot rotary magazine. On the last shot the bolt locks open until a freshly loaded magazine is inserted, The gun can be easily adjusted to operate at a range of fill pressures up to 3000 psi depending on what the shooters requirements are, though on our rifles we set up for the balance between maximum power and accuracy with a willingness to reduce shot count. After shooting the gun for a while from both the bench and in the field it is clear to me that these guys had a pretty good picture of what we airgunners want and need in our hunting, plinking, and target rifles when they designed it.

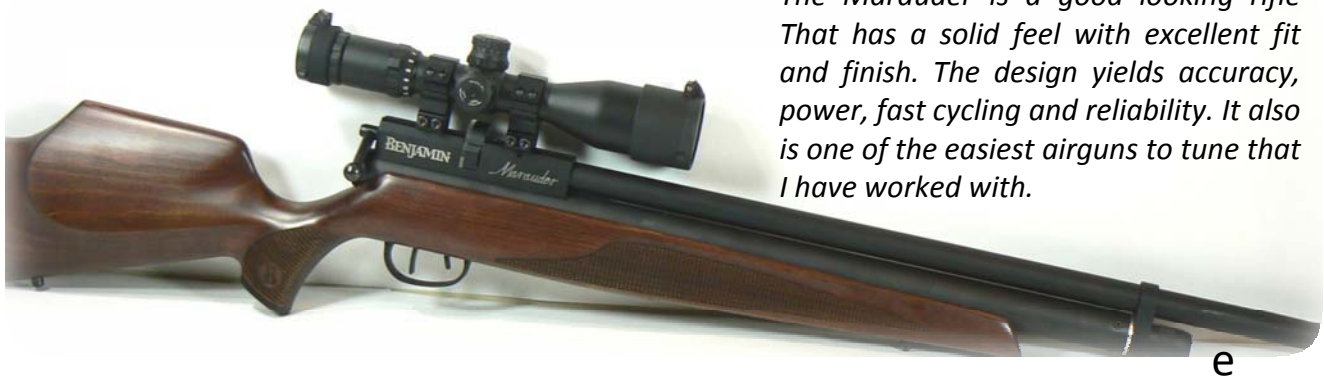
The first gun I was sent to work with was a pre production .22 caliber rifle, but the two additional rifles I had shipped to South Africa were .177 and off the production line.

The stocks are hardwood with laser cut checkering on the pistol grip and forestock, and they are ambidextrous with a raised comb that provides a good sight alignment through the Centerpoint 3-9x40 30 mm scopes with medium profile mounts. The Benjamin name is carved into the bottom of the forestock, and the logo on the pistol grip. The pistol grip has a black cap and the butt is finished with a ventilated butt pad with a white spacer that adds a touch of classy good looks to the package.

The Marauder weighs in at a bit over 7 ½ lb (7lb 8 oz to be exact) with an overall length of 43". It is well balanced and comes quickly and naturally into shooting position. The guns I was sent were set up to my specifications and I told the guys that for the .22 I'd like to get 30-35 shots using Crosman Premier pellets at around 850 fps. The .177 caliber guns were set up to propel the Crosman Premier heavy pellets at 1025 fps, yielding up 40-50 shots per fill. It was also equipped with swivel studs for mounting a sling, as I intended to use both a sling and a bipod when out hunting.

The metal work on the guns was quite nice, well proportioned and well crafted. The aluminum receiver has a high profile, with the bolt mounted to the rear where it is easy to reach and cycle. The receiver is grooved to accept 11 mm scope rings and open sights are not included and in my opinion aren't needed on a gun like this.

The Marauder uses a proprietary ten shot rotary magazine, which is indexed as the bolt is pushed forward after cycling. When the bolt is pulled all the way rearward, the magazine is simply pushed out. After loading the process is reversed, and again the bolt has to be positioned fully to the rear. The magazine is



The Marauder is a good looking rifle That has a solid feel with excellent fit and finish. The design yields accuracy, power, fast cycling and reliability. It also is one of the easiest airguns to tune that I have worked with.

The components of the gun are seen in these photos include a)bolt, b)trigger guard, c)trigger, d)safety, e)fill cap, f) pressure gauge (manometer). The screw between the trigger guard and the pressure gauge is the stock screw (g) which attaches the action to stock.

There are a couple of adjustments that can be made to alter the fill pressure and velocity range of the gun. Adjusting the guns fill pressure can be done with the action in the stock, however to work on the valve metering used to optimize the velocities generated, it is necessary to remove the action from the stock first. Our guns were set up at the factory so we did not alter them (other than adjusting the trigger) for this hunt.



The only tools required to tune the Marauder are Allen Wrench sizes; 1/4", 1/8", 5/64", .50", and 3/16". Using the tools and the tuning instructions in the owners manual, you are able to tune the .177 up to 1100 fps and the .22 up to 1000 fps. The shooter needs to decide what their specific needs are and adjust the gun accordingly. We selected .177 for regulatory reasons discussed elsewhere, but all things considered I'd recommend .22 caliber for hunting as with a peak velocity delta of 100 fps, they shot with almost the same trajectory. However you get substantially more power with the .22 if tuning for maximum velocity.



By removing the action from the stock you have access to the trigger assembly. Instructions are given in the Marauder manual so that advanced shooters can adjust the triggers pull weight, first and second stages and the trigger position. We set our triggers on the three guns between approximately 1-3 lbs depending on individual preference.



The integrated shroud is supported over the air reservoir by a barrel band. Carrying these rifles in the field for several weeks we never experienced any barrel drift or shifting of the POI. This shroud works very well, and this is one of my quietest air rifles.

The filling nipple for the air reservoir is kept clean and protected by a screw on cap. The nipple itself is a male high pressure Foster type fitting, which is an arrangement I find vastly superior to fill probes. They are faster to use, take less additional hardware (to damage or loose). I have been in the process of modifying several of my other guns to this system to ensure compatibility with my filling equipment.



fairly easy to load once you get used to it, though it does take a little practice being neither the easiest or most difficult I've come across. I have shot thousands of pellets using a number of .177 and .22 magazines without a malfunction, though on the .177 magazines every once in a while it was necessary to rotate the magazine cover in the opposite direction to increase spring tension. The magazine loaded and fed almost every pellet I tried, with the exception of extremely long bodied pellets such as Eu Jins and the Predator XPs. I was able to handload individual pellets with some difficulty, though I was told that there will be an insert to convert to singleshot, which is a great backup in a hunting rifle.

The Marauder has an adjustable two stage trigger that was set up at the factory with 0.144" travel to actuate, 0.127" of initial take-up, 0.011" over travel and 2.5 lb pull. The trigger was smooth, tactile, broke crisply, and didn't require any adjustment from me (of course they asked me how I liked my trigger before shipping the gun). I think this is a very good trigger, especially at the mid level price tag the gun carries.

The choked barrel is 20" in length and the shroud extends it to 23 ¾ ". The shroud is one of (if not the) key feature on this gun. It is very effective in reducing the sound signature of the rifle and is integrated into the guns design so that it cannot be opened or removed.

As with the Disco, the Marauder fills using a quick connect Foster type fitting. It does however differ in that on the Marauder the fill probe is covered by a screw-on cap. The set up on my .22 was for the highest velocity and after some testing I found that the sweetspot for this gun was about 2900 psi, about 2800 psi for the .177 guns. On a few occasions I used the Crosman hand pump to top off the reservoirs after 25-30 shots, and found it easy to charge the gun up from 2100 psi back up to 2900 psi in a couple minutes of pumping. The gun features an on-board manometer to monitor pressure that is calibrated to 3000 psi.

The trigger really was a pleasure and being light and responsive enough out of the box to facilitate accurate shooting. The checkered pistol grip provided a stable and consistent hold for my shooting hand. The long straight trigger blade is wide enough to offer comfortable contact with the pad of my trigger finger and has an excellent tactile feel overall.

The other thing I noticed right away was that the gun is very quiet with the integrated shroud doing its job. I think that this is a key element in a hunting airgun, because one of the practical reasons for buying a hunting airgun is to expand your hunting opportunities by allowing you to shoot in noise sensitive areas. The shroud increases the length of the rifle by a few inches, but is well proportioned and looks like a typical bull barrel. It is affixed to the receiver by a barrel band at the muzzle end of the gun, and is quite stable even though I detected a slight rattle if the gun was shaken.

Before leaving the States I took the .22 caliber gun to the bench down in my basement range to shoot several brands and styles of pellets across the chronograph. These included the Crosman Premiers I'd asked the gun to be optimized for, in addition to JSB Exacts, Beeman FTs, Beeman Kodiaks, RWS Superdomes, Crow Magnums, and Eu Jins. The highest average velocity, calculated from a 20 shot string after a fresh 3000 psi charge, came from the CPs, though the Superdomes, FTs, and Exacts were all very close. I opted for 20 shot groups after a fill as this closely approximates my usage when hunting. All of these pellets, which are similar in weight, had average velocities in the 870s or thereabout. The crow magnum and Kodiaks came next at 825 fps and 790 fps respectively, with the heavy Eu Jins not surprisingly coming in last in the low 700s. It is important to note that I had asked Crosman to set up the gun to generate velocities around 850 fps with Crosman Premiers, and they delivered exactly what I'd requested. The most accurate pellets shot in this evaluation were Premiers and the least accurate were the Crow Mags, but any of the pellets tested would have been more than adequate for a day of small game hunting. The Premiers were the most accurate and went into a ragged one hole group, which I was happy to see as I find this a very effective small game pellet.

For the .177 guns I did not extensively test a lot of pellets before shipping the rifles to South Africa, as timing issues did not permit this. I had asked the guys over at Crosman to set the guns up for Crosman Premier Heavy 10.5 grain pellets to deliver maximum power while retaining accuracy. I stated that I'd like to get around 30-40 shots per fill, but this is the parameter I was most willing to trade off as they rifles were tweaked for us to take into the field. As the guns were shipped, they were doing about 950 fps and at 50 yards off shooting sticks I could keep the groups tight enough to be covered by a quarter, which was what I wanted for hunting. I made it a point to refill after the forth magazine, but on a couple occasions when shooting pigeons I ran the gun out at almost 60 shots (though towards the end the POI shifted a bit).

One of the great aspects of the Marauder is that it has the flexibility to be set up just about any way the shooters wants it; balancing power, shot capacity, and fill pressure to optimize the performance for a given hunting application. The velocity is adjusted by a screw that intrudes into the air transfer port. The more it intrudes the less airflow there can be and the slower the rifle will shoot. To adjust the screw the action is removed from the stock, and then the locking screw is removed from the adjustment hole. This adjustment isn't a rough approximation that spits out an approximate velocity but moreover a precise way of achieving the velocity that works best with the pellet you have selected for the field.



Setting up the Marauder

The guns we had included two Marauders in .177 and one in .22 that had been setup to deliver approximately 30 fpe. We all adjusted the triggers to meet our own preferences, but they ranged from around 1 to 3 lb. This is one of the attributes of the Marauder I fully appreciate, the match grade trigger is one of the most easily adjustable I've found on any rifle. The trigger weight, first and second stage, and trigger position can be tweaked (if you know what you're doing), to make the trigger action exactly what you want it to be. We also had a Discovery in .177 that was in stock form. The reason the guns were selected in .177 was in response to South African law which states a gun .22 caliber or over is treated as a firearm, and I wanted to leave the Marauders with Rob and Andrew after I left to keep on hunting, testing, and working with me on optimizing for our style of hunting. If the guns sent to them were .22 they'd have to be registered (which could take over a year) and they would have to have added them on their firearm licenses, or they would have had to enter and exited the country with me. So we decided to make do with .177 on the guns I'd be leaving behind and I quite frankly had little to no concern in doing so.

The guns were set up for Crosman Premiers, heavies for the .177 though they also liked the JSB Exacts, which pleased me as I have a long history hunting with those projectiles. We had two 1200 count boxes of the CPs and two 500 count tins of the JSBs, which I felt should get us through the weeks of hunting, though over the last years I'd left several tins of .22 and .177 pellets behind at the farm when I returned home as well.

On the road to the Eastern Cape

The flights from the States to Capetown took 26 hours, and went smoothly. Between New York and Capetown we stopped in Dakar for refueling, and then proceeded on to our South African port of entry. One reason this trip was fairly stress free was that I'd shipped much of my gear over ahead of time, and everything had arrived, cleared customs, and been tested out before I ever climbed onboard the plane.

My family and I spent a few days in Capetown visiting relatives and friends in the area (and I got in a little fishing), before loading up the car and driving north on the Garden Route to Knysna. My wife and daughter would spend a few days with me on the coast, and then I'd catch a bus north to meet up with Andrew for the drive inland to Rob's property.

The five hour bus ride carried me through new territories and provided me with an opportunity to chat with a number of locals. I sat wedged between two ladies that on hearing my American accent launched into a recitation of everyone they knew that had visited the states, each American actor they knew of, asking my/interpretation of political events in the news.

But eventually my stop came and jumping off met up with Andrew and got ready for next morning's departure. We drove a bit further up the coast to Port Arthur so we could pick up air tanks from a dive shop that had been pre arranged. We planned to do a lot of shooting and had four 80 cf tanks lined up which in the end we needed.

Arriving at Hounslow later that morning, we found Rob waiting for us and ready to go, We would hunt big game later that day, but needed to first sort out gear and guns, so decided to take the airguns out for a bit of introductory hunt on the pigeon population in the meanwhile. Moving between big game with firearms and small game with airguns became the rhythm of the trip.



Gear for the trip

Besides the guns and ammo chosen for the hunt there were several items selected that I knew would either directly improve our success in taking the game we were after, or make us more efficient and comfortable while in the field., In all my years of hunting, I have lived through many unpleasant situations, I've been caught out in the desert without enough water, stuck overnight without a tent or sleeping bag, run out of food, been too hot or too cold, etc. However I don't think there is a good reason to be uncomfortable or ill equipped just to prove a point. This is a sign of poor planning or poor judgment in my books. So I picked my gear for this trip in the spirit of being properly equipped and prepared.

Shooting sticks and bipods were packed along, but I most frequently shot from a modified field target position on my knee, off my backpack when shooting prone, or offhand braced on whatever was available when standing.

Two indispensable bits of kit on these hunts are a good set of 10x binoculars worn on a shoulder strap for locating quarry, and a range finder. I'd wanted to pack a spotting scope, but ran out of space in my baggage. My range finder is a Bushnell Yardage Pro that has been a constant in my daypack for a couple of years now. While I am pretty good at range estimation in general, when hunting unfamiliar game in unfamiliar territory it really helps to rapidly dial in targets.

Another cool bit of kit is my handheld Magellan Explorist GPS. I'd been hunting this property for several years, but there are thousands of acres to get lost in so this was my insurance policy to get me back for dinner at the end of the day. When out for predators at night it is easy to get turned around, but a GPS will get you back on track. However one should keep in mind that any electronic device can fail, so I really try to depend on my sense of direction and dead reckoning and use the GPS as a backup.

I carried my gear in a messenger style day pack that had plenty of pockets to keep things organized. My binoculars were worn on a side strap which gave me access but stayed out of the way when not in use. This with a bottle of water, some biltong, and a candy bar and I was ready to go.



I generally carry a sheath knife on my belt and a folder stowed away in my pack. I think it is pretty obvious that an outdoorsman should not be out in the field without a knife, so enough said.

One of my basic selection criteria for the rifle I carried was reliability, but just in case of failure a basic repair kit with extra wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers, O rings, Teflon tape, and other bits and pieces was thrown into my day pack. And speaking of the day pack, I used a camouflaged messenger style pack that had a single bandoleer style carry strap. It had a number of external pockets that allowed fast access for gear as needed.



The stock yards we hunted

Our Quarry and Hunting Grounds

I had booked a safari with Hounslow Safaris and planned to stay at their headquarters at the Delll Farm hunting both there and another local property that held excellent populations of kudu, bushbuck, impala, springbuck, duiker, steenbuck, blesbuck, wildebeest, warthogs, and a variety of other species. We decided to bring airguns along on this journey to do some pest control duties around the farm and to bag some small game for camp meat along the way.

South Africa is a hunter's paradise anyway you look at it, but it is perfectly suited for the airgun hunter. It has a diverse and challenging group of birds and mammals that are available to hunt, as a matter of fact I have my idea on what constitutes the south African big five for airgunners;; The Guinea fowl, big, smart, fast and jittery, Getting into shooting range on these wary flock birds and past the many eyes takes some doing, The springhare looks like a gerbil on steroids hopping along in a sinewy gate that is like no other animal, putting this pest down takes some skill, The rock hyrax(or Dassie) is agile , fast, wary. The Egyptian goose is one of the most skittish big birds I've ever seen when on the ground, and always a challenge to get into range on. And the exceedingly wary carrion crow. These were my targeted species for airgunning.

The terrains we hunted on were varied; with wide open plains dotted with anthills to rugged hills studded with volcanic rock. But the areas where we focused on airguns were primarily around the stock yards; feeders, water troughs and outbuildings given over to livestock production. This environment was a magnet for all manner of feathered and furred pest as well as small game species.

Rock Pigeons

One of my favorite small game hunts on the farm is pigeons; the volume of shooting is unbelievable. Literally wave after wave of pigeons fly in to raid the animal feeders in the stock yards. The Marauder was one of the best suited airguns I've used in this pursuit for two reasons; first is that the shooting gets fast and furious with birds coming in left and right high and low, making the highly reliable 10 shot magazine a very desirable attribute. The second major advantage of this gun being the low sound signature produced by the integrated barrel shroud. A small puff and the sound of the target being hit hardly alarmed incoming birds. The accuracy and power were all that could be asked for, and the gun coupled with the Crosman Premier Pellets produced devastating terminal performance,

Additionally, the birds are being harvested for two very good reasons, it is primarily a case of pest control as the birds eat a great deal of feed, but more to the point foul what is left behind. The second favorable aspect of the story is that these grain feed pigeons are a pest that can be eaten, a haute cuisine treat for the palette..... But first we needed to figure out how to make a traditional pigeon pie, and Rob took the job on himself good man that he is, I'll tell more of this shortly.

Rob and I selected a spot and built a blind from hay bales which would` hide us from view as the incoming birds were picked off. The bales were stacked behind a wire fence with 2x4 beams across the top with additional bales stacked on top to provide support and tie the blind together. There was a shooting window facing the field which contained the animal feed bins. Some old grain bags were hung from the door to prevent incoming light from giving the hunters away. There were a couple spaces left around the enclosure that allowed a 360 degree view of surrounding areas.





The author with the output from a one hour hunt, the Marauder .177 and Crosman Premier pellets were an effective combo

The important first step is to shoot 3-4 birds and position them around the yard as decoys. This would invariably bring in more birds enlarging our decoy population. One trick I employed was to take a 14" length of wire and bend it into a cradle which would hold the dead decoys in lifelike positions. These were stuck into the ground at strategic positions and worked brilliantly. As soon as the decoys were out and I was in the blind, the birds started flying in, sometimes a small group of five or six birds some times as many as thirty would land. I would shoot a magazine then reload with a fresh one and continue. Being selective and taking my time, I could average fifty or sixty birds an hour!

Both the .177 and .22 Marauders were equally devastating, with the majority of birds dropping immediately on impact. The accuracy was such that head shots at 40 yards were very doable, and body shots also anchored birds with both calibers. At one point I started shooting the birds out of the air as they hovered in place looking for a landing site.

At the conclusion of one afternoons hunt I brought a bag containing sixty pounds of pigeons to the farm help for processing, keeping some of the meat for ourselves and distributing the rest amongst the workers. The next evening we returned to the farmhouse from a big game hunt to find an appetizer of pigeon hearts and onions, along with a main course of pigeon pie awaiting us. This was a first for me, and it was very tasty.

While the primary goal of our pigeon shoots was to reduce the numbers of birds around the stock yards, being able to convert the kill into an excellent source of protein was a big plus in my view. In terms of the shooting, the Marauder was one of the fastest action guns I've shot, and with three preloaded magazines in my pocket I was able to shoot without interruption when the birds were winging in.



The straw bale shooting blind was quickly put up in twenty or thirty minutes. It was positioned just outside of a stock pen where the pigeons flew in large numbers.

It was set up outside the fence to keep the goats from eating the building from under us.

Shots were from 30 to 80 yards typical, and the gun gave anything we wanted.

This photo shows the field with decoys, live pigeons, and dead ones scattered about. It was amazing how many times I shot the thin wire fence when aiming at a bird. It was important to pick shots carefully to avoid equipment and livestock.



I used a 14" length of wire to form a cradle which the birds body was laid in and the wings draped over. This technique can be used for just about any flocking birds, and works very well.



The rock pigeon is more abundant on the farm I was visiting than I've seen before. It is an attractive bird with gray plumage with a rose color on the back, chest, and neck. The eyes are a bright red and very striking.

They would fly in singly at first, then larger flocks would follow. Once on the grounds they fed and moved around continuously. Once they'd landed, the birds would stay on the ground for quite a while.

A couple of the dishes made from the pigeons we bagged; an appetizer of onions and pigeon hearts and an English style pigeon pie. Both were delicious and with a hundred pounds of birds dressed, a lot of meat to use.





We took a Discovery along to compare it with its new big brother. The gun was a .177 caliber that we shot with open sights and scoped. This gun got a lot of use during our breaks and did a fine job of anchoring a couple dozen rock pigeons to add to the larder. This gun was shooting 7.9 grain light pellets and was doing quite a job on the pigeon population. The accuracy is good, and there is plenty of power. The sound is a bit high and tended to scare birds away, but they would start returning after a while.

Guinea Fowl

Guinea fowl are the bird that is in my mind's eye as the symbol of South Africa, big flocks are seen just about everywhere as you travel through the cape. They are a large and striking bird, which are grayish blue with white polka dots covering their plumage. They have a tear drop shaped body that is the size of a goose, yet all in all looks like giant mutant quail as they move along in large flocks of 20 – 100 birds scratching for food. The male has a helmet of cartilage on its bright blue head with a red mustache like appendage on either side of the beak.

Guinea fowl are a game bird, and we hunted them for the table. There are essentially two ways to do this; you can spot and stalk them or set up an ambush. Neither way is easy, these birds are wary, and with so many in the flock there are always eyes on the lookout for danger.

One morning before sunrise I collected the Marauder and my daypack and headed off to collect a couple birds for an upcoming game dinner at the farm. There was a pasture that the birds often came to feed in, and my plan was to get there first, sit in a clump of bush, then take my shot when they were in range. But as I was making my way to the pasture, enough daylight had arrived that I could see the fowl (and hear them) already in the field. So I slipped back into the bush and started stalking around behind their position. The only problem was that the flock was strung out with some in the bush and some in the field; I needed to be quiet because if I stumbled on one bird the entire covey would flush.

Dodging the huge thorns of the omnipresent thorn bushes I moved as slowly and quietly as possible. The sound of birds clicking and clucking was moving towards me from a direction I'd not anticipated, so I dropped to my knee in a dense (non-thorny) bush and waited. After about ten minutes the first birds became visible under and behind the low branches of the brush. Finally one stepped out looking straight towards me and I squeezed the trigger watching the bird crumple in front of me. The shot had taken the bird right at the base of the neck. The sound of the shot was quiet enough (thanks to the shrouded barrel) that the birds only hesitated for a moment and I thought I'd get another chance. But then one stumbled onto me and let out the alarm, and I had probably forty or fifty birds exploding from every direction. One bird ran in front of me in high gear, but with enough time to snap the gun up and get off a broadside shot. The bird ran about ten yards further before dropping. With two birds in the bag and the rest of the flock headed for parts unknown I headed back to prepare for a day of thinning out the warthog population, but with the idea of returning in the late afternoon to set up an ambush when the fowl came in for their evening feed before roosting.



The Guinea fowl is an exceedingly abundant game bird in South Africa, and large flocks can be found just about anywhere. This large male exhibits the large helmet and red moustache that is the sign of a mature male.

That afternoon found me sitting in a blind Rob and I had built out of bales of hay, looking out over one of the pastures. Andrew and I had been there a while when we saw two big flocks at either opposite side of the field running and sparring for positions in their society. Then as if on cue a group broke off and ran at a brisk trot in single line formation directly towards us. To our right was a feeder the sheep were eating out of and we held fire allowing the birds to start feeding on the spilled grain. As we waited more birds came in, and we each picked a fully mature male to shoot. I took the first shot and hit my bird broad side, at which he ran twenty yards and toppled over. The other birds trotted off, but the one Andrew had picked was running at an angle that he could shoot on. At the muffled crack of his rifle the running bird went down, got up and ran a few yards before dropping for good. We could have stayed and shot a couple more, but these two with the ones from the morning suited our needs so we sat and glassed the animal life until dark and headed back.

The guinea fowl is a big and tenacious bird that we've shot with shotguns and rimfires as well as airguns in the past; but the Marauders we were both using provided the power to effectively and efficiently produce clean kills. In the weeks I was in South Africa I harvested a lot of Guinea fowl and this rifle worked like a charm. Between the accuracy, power, low report, reliability and 10 shot fire power Andrew stated it was his favorite gun we'd ever used on our hunts.



I shot this nice Guinea fowl in the last light of the day. A flock of these birds are very jumpy, and their sense of sight very sharp. Stalking into airgun range with thirty or forty sets of eyes watching is a challenge indeed. I feel that if you can stalk in on these birds, you can stalk in on large game as well. It's a great tune up.

The birds were hung in the cold room to age, just as any other game we shot. One of the things I really enjoy when hunting out here is that everything is used. These birds are excellent in stews, and the younger birds can be roasted.



It was nice having the fast follow up shots provided by 10 shot magazine. Very often when ambushing a Guinea fowl, the birds would stay around long enough to anchor a second or a third. This was also due to the shrouded barrel, as an experiment I took out an unshrouded gun on a few hunts and the flocks scattered with the shot every time.



I laid prone behind a tree watching a flock of about forty birds gather up a few hundred yards away one morning. They chased each other around and sparred for social status, then as if on a signal started running towards me in a single file. They closed the distance in a surprisingly short time, and I waited until the lead bird got inside of forty yards and filled my scope, then squeezed the shot taking him at the base of the neck. He crumbled and the rest of the birds scattered.

If I had to pick a favorite small game species in South Africa, it would have to be the Guinea fowl.

A closer look at the head of a large male bird. Putting it into a North American context, the birds are a bit smaller than turkey but have the same wariness and eyesight. They flock, run and flush like giant quail. In States (such as California) where turkey, quail, and chucker can be hunted, the Marauder is a great choice in the authors opinion!





I found these birds near their roosting site in the middle of the afternoon. As I was hiking out looking hyrax I heard the clucking and regrouping calls of a large flock. I stood quietly leaning against a tree and picked off the first bird as it passed by. The flock took off in all directions, but I stayed put until I heard the regrouping calls starting again. I followed the calls until I spotted a group of five or six birds and popped another one before they left the area

Egyptian Geese

In the USA we have Canadian geese that besides being a great game species can also be a true pest. But because of their status as a migratory game bird they are off limits to airgun hunters. In South Africa they have the Egyptian goose, which is a fairly large (smaller than Canadians) and attractive waterfowl. They are a vocal resident of many of the stock tanks and waterholes around the farm. I always found it odd seeing these birds sitting on the branches high up in the trees, honking away. These geese are very wary and quite intelligent, and a trophy for the airgunner able to work into shooting range without giving themselves away.

The first Egyptian goose that I shot was taken by dressing in full camouflage and leopard crawling into range at a waterhole and waiting for the bird to swim into range. The bird was taken with a shot to the neck as it swam into range. But this was not an effective means to pursue them; it took too much time and had a high failure rate. Not to mention that retrieving the downed bird from the middle of a murky pond was no fun.

Another approach which worked much better was to set up a blind and ambush them when they flew in to feed early in the morning. I would locate a spot near a pasture and set up a blind using bales of hay, camo netting, or natural materials. The trick was to get to the blind and set up before daybreak as these were usually the first birds taking to wing in the morning.

On one such hunt I crawled into the blind at about 6:00 am with dawn arriving about 7:00. Before I could see through the dark I heard the geese honking and could hear them flying overhead. What I didn't see was that they landed about 150 yards away in a field, but as the first dim light broke I could see vague shapes through my scope, limbering towards me. I watched as five geese moved towards me, then heard another flight overhead as a few more geese tried to land, only to be chased off by the dominant gander on the ground. I had my pick of birds, but figured I'd only get one chance. So lining up a shot at the base of the neck, I waited until a passing Guinea fowl that had moved in, got out of the way. I took the shot and the Goose folded, while a flurry of geese and Guinea fowl nervously skittered about. I lined up on a second goose, and as I looked through the scope shouted bang! I'd taken my trophy for the morning and had really enjoyed being out to watch the day break; I figured I'd shoot other birds on other mornings.

It was interesting to note that while the Guinea fowl, and certainly not the pigeons, ever got the drift that the blind was bad news, the geese figured it out and after a couple of shots would not come within a hundred yards of a hide. This put them right up there with crows when it came to difficulty in outsmarting them.

The Egyptian Goose is another extremely wary bird we hunted with the Marauder. These birds are very smart with excellent eyesight. To hunt these geese I went out very early in the morning before sunup in fields I had seen them landing in, and waited for them to come in. Birds this size are tenacious and tough, and either a head shot or a pellet delivered to the base of the spin is the best way to go. I let several birds walk by me before I took this one, the dominant male. I watched him chase off several intruders from my hiding position, and think it is one of the most attractive geese I've ever seen.



These are the only geese I've ever seen that roost in trees, and seem equally at home up in the branches as down on the fields or in the water.

On a couple of occasions I found them in the same trees that the Guinea fowl were roosting in, and while they didn't seem to mind them let any other Geese come near the tree and they went nonlinear! They are both very aggressive and very loud.

Crows, Starlings, and Other Pest Birds

There are two types of crows common to the area, carrion crows and black crows. For the most part we left these large predator/scavengers alone, however those that came in close to the animal pens and lambing yards were considered potential problem animals and removed. I remember several years ago watching a crow come down in the same area and pecking out the eyes of a new born lamb, however one or two birds down and these clever creatures seemed to get the message to stay away, at least for a time.

On this particular day I was out before daybreak to set up an ambush to get a couple Guinea fowl for the table. I sat behind a bale of hay in a shaded corner of a storage shed waiting for the line of Guinea fowl I knew would make their way to the boundary of the pasture where they frequently fed. At about 60 yards I lined up the crosshair holding about an inch high, watching through the scope as the bird crumpled. The birds ran around for a moment then stood still. Just as I was ready to squeeze off the next shot, an incoming crow swept in cawing and spooked everything out of the area. I watched as he landed on a post eyeing my fowl then swept down to claim my kill. I swept the gun a few inches and lined up the shot, with my Centerpoint 3-9x40 scope at 9x and the parallax set for 60 yards, a crisp clear view of the head was lined up. The illuminated reticle glowed green in the low light against the black head, offering up an excellent sight alignment. I squeezed the trigger and the crow folded. A second and third I hadn't seen flew up and away, and I didn't see them return to this spot for the rest of my trip.

I did shoot a few more crows in different areas of a couple farms, and the Marauder was up to the job in every case, yielding up one shot kills with both the .177 and .22. caliber guns. The accuracy let me selectively take head shots, and shooting between 40 to 80 yards impressed us all with its tack driving performance.

Around the outbuildings and in the open storage sheds in which equipment and feed were stored, there were several small birds considered pest by the farmers. These included several varieties of starlings (including the omnipresent European Starling), weaver birds, mouse birds, and English sparrows. When these birds were present, they could sometimes be seen in uncountable numbers. We started by knocking down nest, then shooting birds as they came flying in to repopulate. It was impressive to see that we could consistently make head and body shots out to a hundred yards. The flat shooting .177 caliber was especially effective for this application. After a few days of this the number of birds coming in had been significantly reduced they learned quickly that this was not a good place to hang out. The guys reckon they can use their Marauders every couple of days to deliver a reminder, and finally feel like they have come up with an effective way to move these birds away from their feed and equipment and back in bush where they belong.



I hid in a shed behind bales of hay waiting for crows to come in. Crows were another animal that we let be for the most part, only taking the ones around the lambing yards.

You must stay covered and not let the bird see you setting up, or they won't come in.

I did not get a chance to shoot a carrion crow this year. I've been busted every time I've tried, regardless of how well I camouflaged myself! Will keep trying.

When shooting the .177 caliber gun I stuck with head shots, and with the .22 caliber I'd also take body shots.

The ranch we were hunting on was about 10,000 acres and only a small part was used exclusively for farming, with a variety of large game species to be found. The photo below shows the type of stock yards where most of our crow hunting occurred. Outside of these areas the landowners take a "live and let live" attitude towards all the indigenous animals.





Amongst the pest species we shot with airguns were starlings; European, glossy, redwing, and pied varieties are found in profusion around the stockyards, barns, feedlots and other areas where they are a general pest.

As with most of the pest species we shot, if they were in an area where they created a problem it was open season, but if not we left them alone. The only starling that had a shoot on sight policy were the European starlings, for all the same reasons we shoot them in the States and Australia, they are non-indigenous and are a Threat to native species.

The .177 caliber was perfect for these smaller birds offering more than enough power along with flat shooting accuracy. We were consistently reaching out to 80 yards, and again the multi-shot capability of our rifles was a big advantage for the fast action encountered when a big flock of birds came in.



Another pest species was the red faced mousebirds which descend on the farms fruit trees in numbers and can have a major impact in a short time. These are pretty birds, but have a shoot on sight policy around the fruit trees.

We kept the guns charged with air using scuba tanks, we'd rented five high volume 300 bar tanks to use during the hunt. But the nearest place to fill was a three hour drive, so when the tanks ran low we switched over to the hand pump.

We found that the effort to charge the gun back up after 30-40 shots was not too great and took only a few minutes. For most traveling hunts I don't bother with tanks and am happy with the pump.



Rabbits

No matter where the airgunner travels in the world, there will be rabbits waiting for them. In the Eastern Cape if you go out at dusk or lamping at night, you will find them everywhere. The rabbits we hunted on this trip were the large scrub hares that looked and acted like our North American jackrabbits.

At dusk you can walk along the roads and shoot the rabbits as they start moving out of the brush to feed. Rabbits are one of the animals that are fairly easy to kill, and if I couldn't get a good head shot I'd go for the broadside heart/lung. Both .177 and .22 work well on the scrub hare, though the .22 is marginally better for body shots. The Marauder .22 at 30 fpe is good out to about 70 yards with good shot placement. Walking the roadside is the best method for sport hunting this quarry.



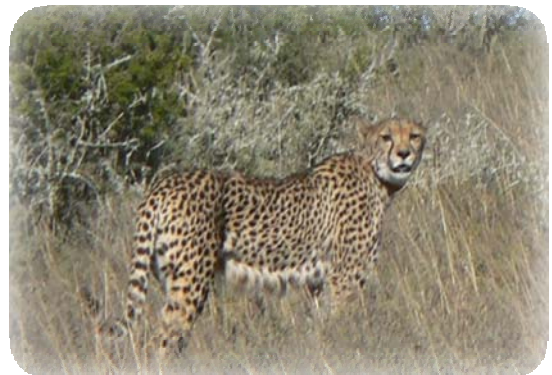
If not for the kudu horns in the background , you'd think this was a West Texas jackrabbit!

However, if the objective is pest control, lamping on foot or from the back of a truck is the most efficient approach. Large amounts of land can be covered quickly, and areas surrounding pastures and grassy hillsides can produce a large number of opportunities. When lamping we used a high powered spot light that was wired to the trucks battery. When one of us was shooting the other manned the light until a rabbit was spotted, then we'd pound on the roof to stop, shooting as soon as the truck halted. Shots were typically between 40 to 80 yards, and this was a situation where the illuminated reticle on the Centertpoint scopes was quite handy.

I know that some American hunters don't like the idea of spotlighting,(or lamping as the British airgunners call it), but it is a highly effective method where legal and when the objective is to impact the population of a primarily nocturnal species. As with almost all the different types of animals we took with our airguns on this trip, there was no waste even when shooting pest species, these animals were consumed.



I can't think of many places I've hunted with firearms or airguns where you can see the wildlife available in South Africa. I enjoy both, but sometimes it's good just to be out with your camera! You don't know what's going to be around the next bend. Whether you're an airgunner that might want to shoot an antelope , or a big game hunter that wants to keep busy during downtime- airguns are a great bit of gear to have along on safari!



Hyrax

Hyraxes, also called dassie, are a medium sized animal that resembles a rockchuck with sharp teeth. They are however more closely related to the elephants, and will probably be as close as I ever get to hunting a pachyderm. They live in the rocks amongst the cliffs, in the dam walls, and in grassy areas with low trees in which they like to sun.

In most areas these animals are innocuous and an interesting part of the local ecology. In certain settings they are a nuisance animal, and it was in such an area we used our Marauders to thin out the population. In a rock face in the cliffs overlooking the farmhouse and lodge there was a large population of dassie. My plan was to hike up into the rocks wearing full camo (facemask, gloves, the whole bit) and nestle down into the rocks to wait for the spooked hyrax to reappear.

I'd walked along a trail at the ridge of the cliffs until I saw three dassies on the rocks a couple hundred yards away. When I'd move towards them the whole group had dropped down their holes. I set myself down behind a large flat rock with just my rifle poking over the top and pulled my camo netting over my face and the rear of the scope. With this set up I had a clear and unobstructed view through the scope, yet my face was well hidden. As with any small animal that is heavily preyed on, these critters were very wary. If they see any trace of danger, a reflection of the hunters face or the movement of a hand, they were gone.

After about twenty minutes of waiting, the first one reappeared and peeked out from between a crack in the rocks. Seeing no danger he moved up on top of the highest rock on the ledge and laid flat on it. Not long after two more animals crept into view. I had ranged the high rock ledge the first dassie was laying on at 70 yards, and with no wind and a very steady rest felt comfortable with the shot. The scope was set at 9x magnification and I put the first mildot on the top of his head. As I squeezed the trigger I followed the pellet in the scope as it dropped right between the eyes, anchoring my quarry on the spot. At the sound of the hit the others went on guard, one dropping down its hole but the other stopped to look around. Quickly cycling a round, I sent the second pellet down range taking the hyrax in the side of the head and dumping him.

Over the course of a few days I took a few more of these tough and tenacious rock dwellers. On another day I was after the Guinea fowl that roosted up in the trees growing along the base of the cliffs when I spotted a dassie catching the early morning sun. It had not noticed me moving in behind the cover of a tree, and I was able to brace myself on the trunk and line up a fifty yard shot. I don't think he saw me, but sensed something was not right, and dropped behind the rock. I waited to see what would happen, and when I looked back through my scope saw him at the base of the rock watching me. A second later the Crosman Premier.22 pellet was hurtling downrange, where it took him with a well placed head shot.



Rock Hyrax, which are called dassies by the locals, live in rocks and grasslands. They are, like most animals that get eaten by everything else, alert and hard to sneak up on.

These animals are surprisingly tough and can carry a lot of lead. It has been my experience that if you don't take them with a headshot, there is a good chance you'll lose them down a hole before the shot takes effect. It is for this reason that I opt for headshots, and if I can't get one I wait. The Marauder delivered both the accuracy I need to make these headshots, and the power to deliver excellent terminal performance when they get there. While the hyrax resembles a rockchuck with fangs (they have a sharp set of teeth) they have the constitution of much larger animals. I was very impressed with the performance of the rifles and pellets on these hunts.

As I said, dassie are usually not pest and I don't like to take large numbers of them. But I do consider it a trophy species for the airgunner as they are such a challenge to hunt. If you get to South Africa with an air rifle, this is a quarry you should put on your list. A couple animals here and there will not hurt as this a heavily predated animal, so you won't impact populations. And for the ones I shot, the locals working on the farm considered them a delicacy so they didn't go to waste.



Though they are named rock hyrax, you can find them in grassy areas, in stands of aloes, in the branches of dense trees, and on the banks of dams. They are about the size of a wood chuck, but are much faster and have pointed sharp little teeth, as I found when going to pick one up that had not quite expired.

I think that an animal this size is better suited to the .22caliber guns. They're very tenacious and if shot close to their burrows, may very well be lost.

The hyrax are generally not shot on the farm, unless they are colonizing in the wrong areas such as pastures or dams where they cause some financial damage. I did not try them, but some of the farm workers told me they were quite good to eat and were always ready to take delivery of those shot.



Although these animals are called rock hyrax, the same animals can be found in pastures, along dam walls, and near cultivated areas.

When in these areas they can become a pest species, the photo above was taken in a pasture where the grasses have all been grazed down to the dirt. This is an active dassie colony where several animals lived. Besides the hyrax, there was a group of meercats cohabitating, but these little carnivores didn't really cause any damage so were left alone.

An advantage of using airguns to control pest is that they are very selective, especially when compared to other options such as traps or poison.



Closing Thoughts

So, I put a lot of faith in the Marauders; we had one chance to get this hunt right! I travel to South Africa only once a year and the cost of putting together a hunt like this is not inconsequential. I had shot the Marauder a lot by the time I left for the Eastern Cape, but my gun had been a pre-production model, and in addition I'd not shot the .177 caliber guns. However, I'd been well impressed by the initial gun and had very positive experience with Crosman in the past. The engineers had set up the gun to my spec (which is quite simple for the new owner to do themselves) and tested the guns for me before they shipped them.

In both .177 and .22 these guns functioned flawlessly; the accuracy and power (circa 30 fpe), high shot capacity, and almost silent operation made them truly outstanding field guns. Both Andrew and Rob stated they thought they were the best performing airguns they'd used for small game and pest control. I didn't see much difference between the .177 and .22 calibers terminal performance, probably due to the fact that with the accuracy we were achieving we pretty much (not always) stuck to head shots. The few times body shots were taken, on Guinea fowl, rabbits, etc, the results were equally impressive. These guns hit hard! We had several magazines we kept loaded and cycled through hundreds of pellets, and shot after shot they fed without problems.

We were using the Centerpoint 3-9x40 Adventure series airgun scopes, and found them to deliver sharp and crisp optical quality, excellent low light transmission, and the illuminated reticle with mildots optimized our rigs for long range shooting. These scopes (as well as the rifles) stood up to very hard use, and never lost zero once they'd been locked in.

But the bottom line is clear to the three of us shooting these guns; they are exactly what you need in a hunting airgun. How would I transfer my experiences in Africa to hunting in North America? I suppose that the import is not the differences, but rather the similarities between our quarry on this trip. Based on the performance hunting Guinea fowl, I'd have no concern going after turkey in California. Turkeys are a bit larger, but in my experience Guinea fowl are more tenacious. And what we saw on hyrax and porcupine can be directly related to woodchuck/raccoon sized game. The Marauder will silently and forcefully anchor them! Probably the biggest difference was the sheer number of shot opportunities we experienced here. With the large volume of animals taken, we really had the opportunity to see how the guns, gear, and projectiles worked on average. Shoot a few pigeons in a day and you'll get an idea of how the guns performs on an anecdotal basis, shoot hundreds and you start to understand exactly what the gun should be expected to do.



While sitting around the fire one night discussing the Marauder, we all agreed it would be hard to ask anything more of a hunting gun. I honestly believe that with this gun, there is not an (airgun) appropriate quarry that cannot be taken cleanly and ethically. Two of the guns used are being kept on the farm and will be utilized on a day by day basis, and from what I've experienced over the last several months I have every expectation the Marauders will live out long and useful lives!

