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Hunting wild boar at night – the modern way

State-of-the-art technology makes hunting boars at night much easier. Three avid hunters report what has changed for them.

Everything is characterized by constant change – even hunting. Habitats change, hunting areas grow smaller, invasive species impact on existing ecosystems, wolves are becoming more widespread, there are winners and losers. At the same time, technological progress continues unabated, improving the methods and technology used in hunting and offering new opportunities and chances. Hunting equipment today is very different to what used to be available. One of the most prominent developments is the use of thermal imaging and night vision systems for culling wild boars – legally permissible thanks to Germany's Third Arms Amendment Act (Drittes Waffenänderungsgesetz). We do not have to approve of this development or like it, but we must respect it.

In many regions of Germany, wild boar numbers have absolutely exploded in recent years. An important factor in this regard is climate change, and the fact that fewer animals are now dying during winter. In addition, the wide range of food available is having a positive effect on wild boar reproduction. The consequences mainly take the form of increased damage to agricultural land and the growing risk of African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreaks, which are already a reality in a number of German states. For most of the owners of these hunting areas it is very difficult to keep pace with these fast developments.

An aggravating factor is that outdoor areas are increasingly frequented by people seeking outdoor recreation, which means game animals have less opportunity to rest during the day, and have moved most of their activity into the night hours as a result. Although powerful binoculars and telescopic sights make it possible to hunt well into the hours of dusk, even under poor

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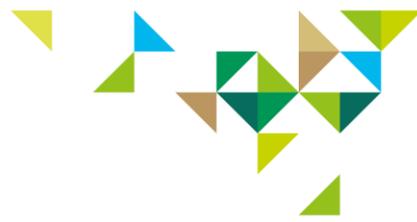
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light conditions, after a certain point even the best optical systems reach their limits. And if it is still possible in these circumstances to confirm the animals in question are boars, achieving a perfect aim is usually impossible. Shooting at an “unknown target” is not only prohibited under hunting legislation, but also goes against common sense. In addition, wild boars are adaptable and intelligent enough to have learned in many cases to avoid open spaces during light nights, i.e. during full moons and when skies are clear.

One solution for this problem is offered by thermal imaging and night vision systems, which make it possible to take aim at and cull wild boars safely and with certainty even in very poor light conditions. The pros and cons have already been discussed extensively in a range of media. Ultimately it is up to each individual to apply this technology responsibly in practice. We spoke with three hunters about their experiences in this regard:

Björn Gürgens, 31, with 15 years’ hunting experience, is a professional hunter who looks after state forest areas in Brandenburg (core area 2,200 hectares), and is strongly involved with the use of this technology in hunting boars to prevent ASF.

Alena Steinbach, 31, 12 years’ hunting experience, editor of “WIR JAGEN”, hunts 750 hectares in the Palatinate Forest with an abundant wild boar population. She normally kills animals weighing 15 to 20 kilograms for consumption. Damage caused by wildlife and ASF are not currently an issue.

Christoph Benett, 48, 21 years’ hunting experience, a city hunter in Lübeck, Schleswig-Holstein, is responsible for an area of almost 200 hectares, and has to deal with massive damage in the urban area caused by wild boars.

What kind of technology do you use, and how long have you been using it?

Gürgens: “For the past three years I’ve been using a thermal imaging device for spotting, and a night vision clip-on system. The reason for this combination is that I hunt exclusively in the forest. We have a strongly rejuvenated undergrowth here, and the night-vision device can be used to identify obstacles in front of the boars, such as branches and twigs.



Steinbach: “I’ve been using a hand-held thermal imaging device for five years, and a clip-on night vision device for the past two years. I’m impressed by the way you can use the (night vision) technology to see the animal in true colour and identify fine details. It’s also important for me to have a clear field of vision and line of fire.”

Benett: “For nearly two years I’ve been using a hand-held thermal imaging device and a clip-on unit. The difficulty of getting a reliable shot off in poor visibility or at night was what immediately encouraged me to invest in this technology. Now we can hunt in our area in any light conditions.”

How much has hunting changed for you through the use of this technology?

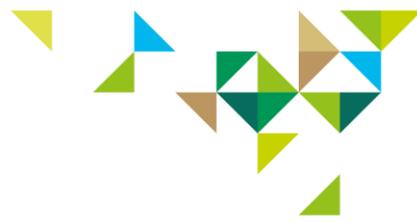
Gürgens: “You can better understand what’s going on in your hunting area. In most cases the animal populations are completely underestimated. And hunting using technology is much more efficient. I can determine the habitat utilization patterns of the animals faster, and actively seek out the boars. It’s also possible for me to hunt more cleanly and ethically at night.”

Steinbach: “I’m much more successful at night now. If you only hunt by the moon, you have to rely only on natural light. The technology gives me the certainty that I’m taking out the right target – I can select better this way.”

Benett: “With both the silencer and night-vision devices, it isn’t unusual for me to be able to cull four or five boars out of a sounder in a single night. That means we can keep our hunting times relatively short, and also minimize the disturbance in the hunting area.”

How do you find hunting with these technological aids?

Gürgens: “I find hunting at night has become more convenient and more relaxed. Because I can do a good job of appraising the situation (how many animals, and their social structure), I’m very much in control of the situation now. There is no more guesswork. The technology gives me a greater level of certainty.”



Steinbach: “It makes hunting much more relaxing, enjoyable, and instructive. You can see what’s happening in your hunting area. Of course, that’s a curse and a blessing rolled into one. If you hunt every animal, you do more harm than good. Responsibility lies with the person who pulls the trigger. For example, we still hunt almost entirely in the feeding areas. In other areas the animals are left undisturbed.”

Benett: “You can only hunt a healthy sounder structure relatively quickly and efficiently if the technology gives you an accurate insight into the animal populations in the wild boar hunting areas. But every shot still has to be carefully considered. You mustn’t take your attention away from that fact, and you have to keep your eye on the entire wild boar population at all times!”

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