

A NIGHT ON THE TUBE

A sudden SOS call gives Mark Ripley an excuse to field test the Tube TL35 thermal scope from InfiRay - not that he needed one!

When the farmer texted to say he had seen a fox late one afternoon near the stream, and another had been caught by the farm lad in a cage trap behind his house, I knew there were fun times ahead. With foxes moving around and pairing up, I wasn't entirely surprised that one or two had moved into the area. But with plenty of the season's pheasants still on the ground and the lambing season just around the corner, the farmer was keen to see any threat to his livelihood removed.

I promised to pop over and take a look, but to be honest I didn't really expect to see much around as this farm generally doesn't hold more than the odd fox. My best bags here have amounted to no more than two or three in a night, and that was when I first started looking after the ground.

The terrain here is quite open, with

very little cover on much of it. That said, there is a bowl at the end of the valley with some wooded areas that is always the most likely place to find a fox. A long steep bank with some smaller patches of light cover further along the valley represents the second best area to try.

However, I did feel that if I did happen to see a fox this evening, I had just the tool for the job - the new Tube TL35 thermal scope from InfiRay, supplied by Scott Country International. I've had this scope on long-term loan now for several months, and I've rather fallen in love with it. Of all the thermal scopes I've tested, this would be the one I would buy, with the Pulsar Thermion a close second. I've currently got the scope mounted on a Weatherby .243 rifle on test from Raytrade. I have to say I rather like this rifle and it's become somewhat of a 'go to' foxing set up for me.

SPRINGING INTO ACTION

Arriving at the farm around 8pm on a still but cold evening I parked the truck in the usual spot next to the barns, and after gathering my gear I set off down into the bowl at the bottom of the valley. I slipped as quietly as I could through the metal gate at the top of the steep bank using the well-practised technique of lifting the gate with a welly-clad foot while holding up the latch to stop it scraping and clanging.

Safely inside, I worked my way carefully along the top of the bank to the edge, peering down the slope as I went to check there was nothing immediately below me. I've fallen foul of this a couple of times in the past and bumped into a fox hunting the rabbit burrows below on the hillside, not seeing it until I was on the ridge. Once on the edge of the first bank, I could see all the bowl below me except for the back of a short stretch of wood

BELOW: Two down, and the night was just getting started





“I WAS ABLE TO PASS ON SOME GOOD NEWS IN THE FORM OF A 75GR ACCUTIP, ADDING A SECOND FOX TO THE BAG”

in the base, in which lies a small pond that can also sometimes be a good area to find a fox.

As I stood scanning the surrounding hillside I spotted one coming up from the back of the wood heading up the hill. It was in no rush, constantly stopping to sniff the grass or cast a casual eye over the fleeing rabbits nearby as if wholly uninterested. I would need to move fast to close some distance on this fox as it was over 300yd and partly obscured by the tops of the trees in the wood below.

As quickly as I dared, I made my way down the bank and around the edge of the wood. From the bottom of the bowl, I'd now lost sight of the fox further up the bank, which is always a risky situation as before you know it you can easily find yourself face to face with it on the hill! The problem is that in this scenario you never know which way the fox is going to travel. Sometimes when halfway up the hill it will cut right or left to an area of cover, and once out of sight it's easy to lose for good.

However, on this occasion my luck was in and I spotted it before it spotted me, close to the boundary bushes at the top of the hill. With only around 50yd before it was too close to the skyline, I had to be quick.

I lay down behind the rifle on its bipod and flicked the Tube scope on from its standby mode. At just shy of 200yd I gave the fox a shout and it duly

ABOVE: The new Tube TL35 thermal scope from InfiRay mounted on my trusty Weatherby .243

stopped and turned broadside. I fired and saw it crumple in a heap even before I heard the sound of the impact.

I began to make my way up the slope to collect it, when a quick glance through the thermal alerted me to a second fox away to the right, making its way directly to the recently deceased one.

I quickly slipped the rifle into the Rekon tripod, as this fox was slightly down the bank and I needed a little more elevation than the bipod could offer. Then I watched it move down the hill towards me, clearly unimpressed with the condition of its mate and

rather on edge. Moving fast, I headed down the hill slightly to cut it off.

Setting the tripod quickly as it approached from the left, I gave it a soft “Oi” as it passed in front of me. At around 130yd it stopped broadside like the first to look up the bank, and I was able to pass on some good news in the form of a 75gr Accutip, adding a second fox to the bag.

I was quite surprised to have shot two foxes so quickly on an area of ground where numbers are generally quite low, and reasoned that this was a dog fox following a vixen in the build up to mating.

BELOW: Where there is a vixen, you can often find dog foxes lurking nearby



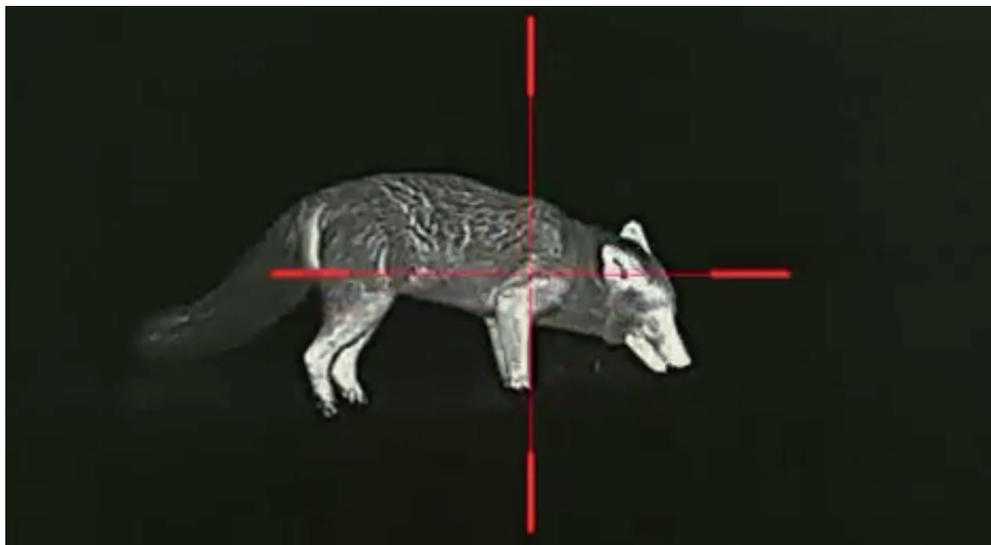
« **THREE'S A CROWD**

Gathering up the pair of foxes, I began to work my way back down the bank when I spotted a third further along the bank making its way up towards a patch of cover where I have a steel target set up. Leaving the dead foxes where they were, I began to close the distance on this one before it disappeared out of sight.

I worked my way up in the shadow of the hedge line towards the bushes where it was headed. Then, picking a spot that gave me a clear view of the area, I dropped the legs of the bipod in preparation for a shot. As I watched, the new arrival made its way to the bottom edge of the cover closest to me almost directly behind my steel target. I waited patiently for my opportunity, and when the fox paused momentarily to sniff something I took the shot, rolling it down the slope at about 140yd.

From what I could remember, this was the most I'd shot on this ground in one evening. Clearly these foxes were moving around from their usual territories due to the start of the mating season.

When it became apparent that the first fox I'd shot was a vixen, I decided to stay put for a while wondering if any other dog foxes may follow her scent into the area, giving me the chance of yet another shot. I waited around an hour before the cold set in and I was just about to move on when I took a better look at a heat source at the bottom of the hill, which I'd first thought was a hare. When I looked a



ABOVE: *The Tube TL35 thermal scope offers excellent definition*

little closer I realised it was, in fact, another fox, just sitting there watching a couple of rabbits near the footpath.

The moon had come out from behind the clouds now, and as I stood up to move a little closer for a shot the fox must have spotted me, suddenly jumping up and dashing up the hill. Although it was on the move, I reckoned it wasn't spooked enough to go too far too quickly. With the fox now over the skyline I quickly made my way up along the footpath to the track above in an attempt to beat it to the top and get a shot.

Once reaching the top, the fox was nowhere to be seen, meaning it had clearly turned and continued along the valley. I made my way along the track and soon spotted it standing

close to the fence back at the bottom of the hill. This one was clearly giving me the runaround, and proving quite the elusive quarry. I decided to go for broke and cut straight down the bank towards it.

Surprisingly the fox simply stayed standing broadside to me as I approached across the open ground. Whether it knew I was there or not I have no idea, but when I closed the distance to 190yd or so I finally got the chance of a clear shot and took the opportunity. By now the fox had sat down and I had plenty of time to prepare, dropping it where it sat.

This last one turned out to be another vixen, making for two dogs and two vixens for the evening, as well as one very happy farmer! **RS**

BELOW: *Four dead foxes equals one very happy farmer!*

Dec & Jan are the peak of the mating season and a prime time to get out on the land in search of Charlie, with both males and females out and about looking for love

