

# FIRST STEPS IN FOXING

A beginners' masterclass that will get anyone new to foxing well on their way to emulating Mr Rips!

**F**ox shooting is not only an effective form of fox control but also an increasingly popular sport. Compared to deer stalking, it's also a far cheaper form of shooting and, depending on the area you're shooting in, easier to get into.

Often, deer stalking ground will be closely guarded by anyone with permission to be there, and wherever there are opportunities for stalking, they seem to be quickly spotted and snapped up, leaving few openings for the newbie stalker.

Fox shooting on the other hand can be more readily accessible with far more ground holding resident foxes than deer, again depending on the area in which you live. Most farmers will be well aware of the

problems foxes can cause and be happy to have them controlled.

Often, sports grounds, golf courses, recreational parks and even school playing fields can offer fox control opportunities. For many people wanting to get into fox shooting from a sporting perspective, finding ground on which to shoot will most likely be the biggest stumbling bloke unless you already know someone that will take you out.

If you already have permission somewhere, gaining an FAC to control foxes shouldn't cause too much of a problem, however the police may restrict your choice of calibre for safety reasons, depending on the type of ground you wish to shoot on.

Once you have been able to gain permission on some ground and

obtained your firearms certificate, the next thing will be selecting a suitable rifle for the job.

If you are in an area which is close to houses, roads, railway lines etc, or the ground is small and somewhat flat, you may find you will have certain conditions on your certificate, such as only shooting from an elevated position. Another limitation that may apply could be that you may only use a rimfire to control foxes.

Unless at close range, a rimfire isn't really in my opinion a particularly suitable tool for the job. Let's take the humble .22 LR to begin with. The .22 will kill a fox humanely to around 50 yards with subsonic ammunition and around 100 yards with high velocity, provided the bullet is placed in the right

**BELOW: Being comfortable behind the rifle from a variety of shooting positions is essential for a foxer**



PICTURES: MARK RIPLEY



## “BY FAR, THE MOST PRACTICAL AND HUMANE TOOL FOR FOXING IS THE CENTREFIRE RIFLE”

spot, ideally between the base of the ear and the eye.

The other popular rimfire is the .17 HMR. Again, with good shot placement to the head this can also be used, ideally out to around 100 yards. I've had mixed results when chest shooting foxes with both these calibres at close-range so now stick to head shooting foxes when using rimfires.

By far the most practical and humane is the centrefire rifle for foxing. Any centrefire will serve the purpose, although the police are reluctant to grant anything over a .243 for fox shooting alone. The larger centrefire calibres can get quite expensive to run, which can be a valid concern if you intend to shoot a lot of foxes or do a lot of shooting in general.

By far the most popular fox calibres will be the .223, .222 and .204, all of which are ideal for foxing and not quite as expensive in terms of ammunition. There are many different rifles to choose from, with almost every

**ABOVE: The FoxPro caller is a very effective tool for attracting the attention of Charlie**

manufacturer offering a rifle in one of the above calibres and all at varying prices. Ultimately, you will choose one to suit your budget and taste – pretty much all factory rifles are capable of shooting well enough to hit the kill zone of a fox at normal ranges these days.

Buying a second-hand rifle can also be a good option if it's clearly been looked after, although rifles with heavy use are often better left on the shelf. Brands such as Tikka, Sako, Browning and Howa all make good rifles at reasonable prices with cheaper brands such as Bergara and CZ also offering some excellent budget options.

Once you have a rifle purchased, you will also need to look to buy a scope and moderator. There are many moderators available, but one which I would highly recommend is the MAE range from JMS arms.

Like rifles, there are also a vast array of different optics available and once again to suit every budget and situation. If you intend to use your rifle

a lot during the day or with a traditional lamp, then a standard dayscope will be the best option.

The majority of foxing shots will be first or last light or at night – so mostly in low-light conditions. To help with this, it's worth spending a little more and getting a good brand such as Bushnell, Vortex, Sightron or Leopold for example – or, if your budget allows, top brands such as Swarovski, Schmit & Bender, Nightforce or Ziess.

If your budget is tight, Hawke offer exceptional scopes for the money, often comparable to scopes costing twice their price.

Whatever optic you go for, don't scrimp on scope mounts. You don't need to spend a fortune, but avoid nasty imitation makes! I've always found Sportmatch mounts to be very well made and sensibly priced.

With your new rifle acquired, the next step will be to zero it in and then your set to get out foxing. I would recommend zeroing a rifle an inch high »



at 100 yards for a centrefire which with most calibres should give you a point and shoot range of at least 200 yards.

**ABOVE: Thermal technology has been an absolute game changer when it comes to foxing**

**MODERN TECH**

In this day and age, many foxers are using Nightvision and thermal equipment at night (myself included). It's fair to say this does give some major advantages over the traditional lamp. The introduction of the thermal spotter has been by far the biggest game changer to foxing in years.

Although these units are not cheap (although they are certainly getting cheaper), they really are excellent tools, giving you the ability to quickly spot a fox without it having a clue you are there and they're well worth the outlay to anyone serious about foxing.

Nightvision has also massively changed over the years with many different options available from dedicated scopes to rear and front-mounted add-ons for a dayscope. I'm currently using the Sightmark Wraith night vision scope, which is amazing value at £600, offering not only night vision capabilities but also a colour screen for day use.

For those with deeper pockets, there are also thermal riflescopes, but I'd advise newcomers to night shooting to be cautious as it takes some experience with thermal to identify your quarry using only a heat signature, especially at longer ranges.

Whatever set-up you choose to use, the actual act of shooting a fox is not as easy as it first sounds! It's a long learning curve and you never stop learning no matter who you are!

**INCREASE YOUR CHANCES!**

The ability to shoot off sticks, a tripod, bipod or fencepost – as well as kneeling and sitting – will stand you in good stead in any scenario you are likely to experience in the field

Experience is the teacher here and it will take a while before you learn the body language of a fox and better predict its next move. For a beginner, the easiest way to shoot a fox will be to ambush it on one of its regular routes or better still over a pre-baited site.

Foxes will eat pretty much anything you eat – a roast chicken carcass proving the most irresistible in my experience! It's wise to tie the bait down to keep the fox from carrying it off as this will give you more time to get onto the target and take your shot.

Much like mounting a shotgun, you can practise this by picking a spot in front of you and fixing your eye on it. Then, mounting the rifle in front of your eye, you should then only need to make a slight adjustment to line up the crosshairs on it.

Practising shooting from different positions is also a major asset. The ability to shoot off sticks, a tripod, bipod or fencepost, as well as kneeling and sitting, will stand you in good stead in any scenario you are likely to experience in the field.

Calling can be another great and exciting way to shoot foxes and can be very effective at certain times of the year. There are various mouth calls on the market, which can be very effective – and they only take a little bit of practice to get used to them.

You could also opt for an electronic caller such as a FoxPro. These offer a selection of different calls as well as being remotely controlled, allowing you to stand some distance from the unit itself. This means a fox's attention is not on you as it comes into the area. Although this is a great method to draw them in, you do need to be very quick sometimes as they will often charge in and charge out just as quick if they find the caller!

Whatever methods you use, always remember safety is paramount – so muzzle awareness and safe backstops are a must!

Foxing is like many things in life, it sounds and looks easy and sometimes it is! However, more often than not it can be fruitless and frustrating! Keep at it and learn from your mistakes and success will follow. [RS](#)

**RIGHT: A decent night's work with the Sightmark Wraith and the trusty .223**

