

It's always sad to see something good leave. The guys at Scott Country International sent me the Pulsar XM22 Axion Key. I had it for around two weeks and used it just about every time I went out, with great success for both airgun and centrefire rifles, but all good things come to an end and I had to return it.

The XM22 is another tiny, hand-held thermal spotter at an amazing price of £870 ... yes, £870! It's budget priced, but certainly not a 'budget built' thermal spotter. It really is palm-sized and slots into your pocket easily with room to spare. The magnification is 2x to 8x and it has fixed focus, like many scopes available out there. Standard issue, eight colour palettes are all accessible by a long touch of the rear button, and a short press of the same button switches between the three different viewing modes. The 950m man-sized detection range is more than adequate for my use with airguns and rimfire, which I think is the market best suited for the XM22. I was spotting foxes easily at 600m when out with the centrefire and had absolutely no doubt about what I was looking at.

### TECHY STUFF

The techies among you will appreciate the 320x240 12um core and 960x720 LCOS display and obviously a 22mm focal length objective lens. The eyepiece is same as the XM20 Key that I tried out, and feels hard against your eye, but after the constant use I have become used to it.

Now for the really interesting stuff; battery life is easily five hours, and I know this for sure because I've run it from full to flat a couple of times, and it was five hours. It uses the B pack APS3 battery, and a spare one will set you back £40, which is not too bad at all and will give you around 10 hours of run time. This is mainly due to the XM22 not having any video/image record facility, wi-fi or stream vision, all of which will eat the battery life. Start-up is incredibly quick; press the button whilst it's in your pocket and by the time you have it to your eye, it's on. The screen is smaller than



It really is hand-sized.

# ANOTHER KEY TO SUCCESS

Mick Garvey reports on the effectiveness of a 'budget' thermal spotter

other spotters, but I didn't find it a hindrance. This is no Accolade or Helion, but at a fraction of the price it is a cracking little unit and perfect for those rabbiting and ratting nights, or as I found out, indoor ferals.

**THE HEAT IS ON**

I have a regular pest-control job at a steel-works where they forge various steel items with huge forge hammers. The feral pigeons love this place when the weather turns cold, and due to the overhead crane running from inside to outside they have unlimited access to the upper steel rafters. The Pulsar came into its own here because the temperature of the steelwork and trusses was much higher than the body heat from the ferals. I watched a couple fly in, but lost them visually, so popped on the XM and was expecting to see the heat source straight away, but it wasn't to be. They were cooler than the steels, but once I'd figured it out, I was on them, and the sub 12 FX Wildcat and Photon RT NV unit made short work of the job in hand. I took six in around 30-40 minutes; one dropped between the outer wall cladding and the RSJs, and the other fell over the fence into a deep pit, so these were left, leaving me four to photograph. Once again, I was thanked and told that I had a job for as long as I wanted it ... nice to be appreciated!

**EASILY IDENTIFIED**

The recent floods have held me back, mainly out of respect for the land and the farmer. I didn't want to chew up the fields by taking the truck on them, and I knew the rain would eventually subside and the fields would drain. In the meantime, we decided to take a walk round our local golf course, which now



**Getting wet? No problem.**

resembled a boating lake. The fairways had flooded terribly – we even had swans on it, and at one stage a Pulsar XM22 Key in it because whilst I was crossing a footpath/

**Evidence of the ferals was everywhere.**



stream, the XM fell from my hand into a few inches of water. Shock and panic were not needed because the Axion is IPX7-rated and will stand 1m of water for up to 30 minutes. Needless to say, I didn't give it a full test!

The day was crisp and cold, with little or no moisture in the air, perfect for thermal spotting, and first on the birdwatcher's hit list was a magpie at 140 paces. I actually spotted it with the thermal before making proper eye contact. There's no mistaking the shape of the magpie at that distance, easily identified by the tail feathers and its characteristic movements, so I was happy with that.

Next were a couple of jackdaws at around 80m, in the treetops, a mistle thrush at around 60m, and a whole flock of gulls that had taken residence on the 'new lake'. These were at well over 200 yards, but I couldn't tell which seabird they were through the thermal.

**ACCOUNT OPENED**

After all that recon', I felt it was time for a visit to my favourite wood. Two days before my planned shooting session, I took care of filling the squirrel feeders and giving the wood a once over, and what I saw was good – very good. There were three or four skinnies running around, and quite a few woodpigeons



# MICK GARVEY

coming in from the fields. I topped up the feeders with my mix, and with a good feeling for the next outing, I left for home, mentally making plans for the 'air attack'.

An early start for me and the FX FAC Wildcat was called for because I had to zero check the Hawke Airmax; I'd been using the 'cat for various scope and NV testing. The Picatinny rail ensured that a minimum adjustment of one click to the elevation was all that was needed for my 40-yard zero, and with that I was set. It was going to be a cold day, but layering up with the Jack Pyke Evolution gear would keep me more than comfortable.

As I stepped into the wood, I scanned the area but nothing was showing, so I took 10 paces, stopped and rescanned, then moved another 10 until I got to my first position. Plenty of wood pigeons were taking off as I moved along, and I had my first shot from a spot overlooking a known favourite sitty tree, a huge beech with very few leaves left. A straightforward, between the shoulders shot at 30 yards brought the woodie down to earth with a thud, and my account had been opened.

## UNREAL AWARENESS

Once in the hide, it was only a matter of minutes before the first of the skinnies showed

### Jack Pyke layers keeping the cold at bay.



**This used to be a golf course.**

itself, taking the purposely placed fallen log to the feeder and then sitting facing me with a peanut in its claws. The Air Arms Diablo made short work of feeding time and within minutes another was heading my way, picked up by the XM22 at around 55-60 yards and coming in fast. It sniffed the dead squirrel and started

to take the loose offerings. Another headshot dropped it next to the first one, and things were looking good.

I had another feeder to the rear of me, some 80 yards away, and I could hear the unmistakable chattering of an upset skinnny. As I made my way over, I saw the problem – a



**Not bad for a few hours – the prepping paid off!**

brace of magpies on the feeder. Yes! – that will do nicely, I thought, but it wasn't to be. The unreal awareness of the magpie alerted them to my presence and they were off, not to be seen again, but the squirrel was still there and so was its playmate, both clear as day in the viewfinder. I took the furthest one, hoping the nearest would stay put and it did just that, so with a slow sliding of the cocking arm I chambered another Diablo and sent it on its journey to squirrel central; four down and things were looking better.

**WAITING GAME**

By now, the pigeons were coming in to the treetops in numbers, but although the trees are predominantly beech, they were all in quite different states of leaf. Some completely bare, and some had hardly lost a leaf and the latter was making spotting the birds a task. It's a waiting game in this scenario, but before long they will give their position away.

Once seen, the task is to thread the pellet through the leaves to give that instant kill, combine this with a steep upward shot and you have to be on top of your game. Placing the crosshairs on the leaf below their heads was the way I took the next handful of pigeons. It can be daunting, but so rewarding when you hear the thud of the woodie hitting the ground.

I had taken five of each in two hours, and that rose to seven skinnies and six woodies at the end of the session.

The Pulsar Axion XM22 Key worked brilliantly over the two weeks and I am very impressed with it. Christmas is coming up, so why not treat yourself to this great budget

priced thermal spotter? I hope you all have a fantastic Christmas and a prosperous New Year – and don't forget to check out my YouTube channel: Mick Garvey Air Attack MIA for more info on the XM22 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdinLr2FKN0MyEM1uhICMJA> ■

**Another well-suited combination.**



