



Vermin controller Andy Lovel teams up with Steve Coultas to test the latest Guide IR thermal imager from Thomas Jacks on a nocturnal foxing foray in East Yorkshire

It was the same old story: a friend rang me to ask if I would deal with a fox problem, as the smallholding next door had lost some chickens. My mate wanted the culprit brought to book post-haste as he feared the vulpine villain would soon turn its attention towards his own geese.

This occasion would prove perfect for testing my new toy: the all-singing, all-dancing Guide IR, which I had recently received to assess its worth in the field. The particular field in question was 22 acres in extent, and the oversized paddock currently contained 14 ewes and my mate's two precious geese. The sheep were safe enough, but the geese had started to lay. If things went like last year, as soon as the goose started to sit, the fox would turn its homicidal attentions towards her. We had gone through this same scenario the year before, and I had been too late to stop the then three geese turning into the present two. It was embarrassing to say the least, and a long-lasting friendship was now at stake, not to mention my reputation.

One of the discarded chicken carcasses was 20 yards into the paddock. I had a good idea the culprit would be back the next night, so another

pal Steve Coultas and I set up in the pick-up 120 yards downwind from the remnants of the fox's most recent crime. I was using my Archer monocular attached to the Kahles scope, effectively turning the day scope into a night vision unit. The Guide IR thermal imager would function as the spotter to locate the offending fox who would then hopefully fall to my single-shot Pfeifer bullpup in .222 Remington.

This was the first time I had used thermal imaging, and I was smitten with it from the outset. Unlike night vision, this sees heat, detecting animals partly hidden by trees, grass and the like. It won't see through walls but it will see through light foliage. It does, therefore, have practical daylight applications for some shooters too.

The Guide unit we were using was the 518b. I found it could detect hares out to 300 yards, foxes at 400 and roe deer as far as 500. Note I said detect – you would probably have to halve those distances to identify them. You would have to initially, at least, because the more you use the unit, the more proficient you become at animal identification.

Weighing in at just 500 grams, it is incredibly light and mobile, and there is a button to double the size of the image, which helps greatly



Thermal imaging: Foxes



with identification. Furthermore, you can switch from white hot to black hot, which helps greatly with clarity in adverse conditions.

I was regularly scanning the hedge sides with the Guide when I saw a white, fox-like shape moving towards us from behind the hedge. Switching to the rifle, I tried to locate the fox in the NV-assisted scope – but the hedge proved to be a barrier. Steve had switched role to spotter on the Guide IR, and he immediately informed me that Charlie had fortunately come under the thorns, now at about 120 yards. I soon picked up the fox, with nose to ground, quartering towards the chicken.

Patiently I watched through the Archer as the fox stopped to stare round, completely unaware of our presence. I squeezed off the shot and it dropped on the spot to the 50-grain Sako soft point. The feisty round did the business. A closer inspection revealed an average-sized vixen; the night was still young, so we waited out for the possibility of the dog fox risking his brush.

The ewes decided to bed down and chew the cud about 20 yards in front of the pick-up. I spent the next couple of hours watching the wildlife. A barn owl floated over the paddock, and even early season bats stood out like mobile white blobs in the Guide IR viewer. Steve was now in charge of the rifle. He had accompanied me on many foxing forays, and he was ready to take his first fox.

Deploying the Mini Colibri fox caller, I let the 'hare in distress' call screech out into the night. Soon after, I saw the ewes turn as one towards the fence on our immediate left through the Guide IR viewer. Turning my attention to this area revealed a fox trotting along the fence line. Steve was already following it with the night vision.

I cranked up the Colibri caller once more, but on a lower volume. Charlie stopped at about 80 yards and stared in our direction, captivated by the call. Steve composed himself and took the shot. The fox collapsed instantly with the rifle report, its rapidly flicking brush soon slowing to a permanent stop. As I suspected, the fallen vulpine proved to be a dog fox. I congratulated Steve and felt the geese were safe for now.

The guide IR is an amazing bit of kit. Actually it's more than that – it's revolutionary. While I know it isn't cheap, for serious fox shooters it has to be a must-have. When the time comes to return this test unit, it will feel like I've gone back to the Dark Ages. Maybe I can sell a kidney (not one of mine of course) and get one of my own – watch this space. ■

Equipment reviewed by: **Andy Lovel**

Product: **PFEIFER HANDY HUNTER**

Distributor: Fox Firearms ■ 0161 430 8278 ■ www.foxfirearmsuk.com

Price: **£POA**

Comments: Superb, quick-handling bull pup

Product: **KAHLES KX 3-9X42**

Distributor: RUAG ■ 01579 362319 ■ www.ruag.co.uk

Price: **£839**

Comments: Superb value optic that more than delivers

Product: **DEERHUNTER MONTANA**

Distributor: Deerhunter ■ 01564 782234 ■ www.deerhunter.eu

Price: **JACKET £245, TROUSERS £125**

Comments: Great lightweight, breathable weather protection

Product: **ARCHER GEN 3 MONOCULAR**

Distributor: Starlight NV ■ 01942 884378 ■ www.starlightnv.co.uk

Price: **FROM £1,660**

Comments: Affordable and practical night vision that really delivers

Product: **GUIDE IR**

Distributor: Thomas Jacks ■ 01789 264100 ■ www.thomasjacks.co.uk

Price: **FROM £3,099.95**

Comments: Revolutionary – it's the dog's!

Product: **BLACK ISLANDER DIOTTO**

Distributor: Black Islander ■ 01349 877770 ■ www.blackislander.co.uk

Price: **£184.99**

Comments: Hard-wearing but comfortable and low maintenance

