

REVOLUTIONARY VIEWING



Andy Lovel tests the latest Guide IR thermal imager from Thomas Jacks on a problem fox control mission, and finds it could change the future of foxing

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.

More and more these days it seems that I am the one to call regarding errant foxes, crop

culprit would be back the next night, so another pal Steve Coultas and I set up in the pickup some 120 yards downwind from the leftovers of the fox's most recent crime. I was using my archer monocular attached to the khales scope, effectively turning the day scope into a night vision unit. The thermal imager Guide IR would be used as the spotter to locate the offending fox, who would then hopefully fall to my single shot Phifer bull pup 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.

After pulling into position, I scanned into the new night and could clearly see roosting pheasants in the hawthorns, mice in the hedge bottoms, and I could even see the geese 300 yards away. I couldn't clearly identify them at that distance but I could certainly detect

them. Incidentally, geese and ducks are hard to see thermally, as they are so well insulated by their down. Most animals like rabbit, fox, and deer stand out like a beacon. 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. Notice I said detect – you would probably have to halve those distances to identify them, at least initially, because the more you use the unit, the more proficient you become at animal identification. Incidentally, there is a model with a 50mm lens which doubles these distances, but the downside is it halves the field of view. In my opinion, the model I used is more than adequate for the detection and shooting of foxes. It also has a photo and video option too.

Weighing in at just 500 grams it is incredibly light and mobile; plus there is a button to double the size of image, which helps greatly with identification. Furthermore, you can switch from white hot to black hot views, which helps a good deal with clarity in adverse conditions. This model takes 4 AA batteries; I use rechargeable ones as they keep the cost down. Each set easily out lasts the manufacturer's claim of two hours' normal use. Changing batteries was easy in the dark, and I was soon doing it like Private Pyle in a scene from Full Metal Jacket.

I was regularly scanning the hedge sides with the guide from the strategically placed pickup, 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 out from under the thorns, and was now at about 120 yards. I soon picked the fox up with nose to ground, quartering toward 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 50gn Sako soft point, the feisty round doing 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 pickup. 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 call I let the hare in distress call screech out into the night. Soon after, I saw the ewes look as one towards the fence on our immediate left through the Guide 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 turned to 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 followed its mate to Valhalla or wherever it is rogue foxes depart to, collapsing instantaneously with the rifle report, its rapidly flicking brush soon slowing to a permanent full 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 is more than that – it is revolutionary. Whilst I know this technology doesn't come 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 my own of course) – watch this space. ■

GUIDE IR THERMAL IMAGER

Thomas Jacks

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munching rabbits and hares, not to mention multiplying rodents and moles. I just hope I continue to deliver!

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 and 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. Embarrassing to say the least, as a long lasting friendship was now at stake, let alone reputations.

One of the left chicken carcasses was some 20 yards into the paddock. I had a good idea the



1: Although not a scope unit, the Guide makes an excellent spotter

2: Andy found the Guide IR simple and easy to operate

3: Foxes could be detected out to 400 yards, giving you plenty of time to plan your shot

4: Thanks to the visibility advantage, the geese are safe

5: A major plus of thermal imagers like the Guide is it can see foxes hiding in light foliage