

Lamping feature

Green eyes at night; lampers' delight

With summer upon us, you may be checking your lamping equipment with a view to be up and running when the crops come off and you want to get into the foxes. Sophia Gallia brings you some gamekeepers' lamping tips...

WHERE TO GO

THE KEEPERS AMONG YOU WILL PROBABLY already have ground on which you need to control foxes. Supporter members, however, may wish to find some.

- Get the permission of the landowner if you haven't already got it.
- Become familiar with the ground.
- Know the safe spots for shooting.
- Know the routes that foxes use (they are fairly habitual creatures, although they are easily disturbed).
- Ensure you have the right Condition on your Firearm Certificate.
- Establish where you can go and where you should not.
- Does your insurance cover you?

WHEN TO GO AND WHEN TO SHOOT

Foxes can be culled at any time of the year. However, a popular time is shortly after harvest when the crops are cut but cultivations have yet to happen. The cubs are fairly well grown by then, so are out and about. Bales on fields can be useful for creeping up behind and as a rifle rest.

- A dark night will ensure you are seen less by your quarry; a bright moon will show you up.
- A bit of wind will muffle faint noises and can carry away your scent.
- Use the wind to get closer to your quarry.
- Foxes are most hungry when they have just moved out for the night, and as such are most likely to come to a squeak in the first hour or two after dusk.
- The end of the night also often reaps rewards until shortly after the new dawn.
- Learn to judge ranges in different light conditions.
- Do not shoot until you have seen and identified the whole body. Use binoculars



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to help. There are horrific but thankfully rare stories of people shooting at eyes alone only to discover it's not a fox but something quite else, a horse or a person for example. Or even, in one case, a shiny bit – probably the only shiny bit – on the “marksman’s” Land Rover.

- Do not shoot without a safe backstop.

GETTING AROUND

Some keepers would rather go by foot, very slowly, using natural features of the land to hide behind. However, many use a vehicle.

THE GUN AND BULLETS

- Reliability is key.
- Many keepers choose a centre fire of calibre .243, although the calibre comes down to personal choice and the circumstances in which you are using it.
- Bullet weights of anything from 35 grains upwards will kill a fox. Your preference may depend on whether you use your rifle for other quarry.
- Get plenty of practice with your rifle, ammunition and lamping equipment to ensure you are familiar and competent with your chosen kit.

THE SIGHT

A lengthy article appeared in *KtB* (summer 2009) about what to look for in a sight.

- The main purpose is to ensure accurate bullet placement.
- Clarity in the optics is vital; being sharp right across the field of view.
- It pays to have a robust scope that is also lightweight.
- Go for the

Browning's A Bolt .223 is a perfect foxing rifle on a sensible budget. The rifle features a spare magazine, threaded barrel and set of bases included, all for around £550. The ammunition to go with it would be Winchester Super X .223 55 grain pointed soft point.



A Zeiss sight mounted on a rifle.

highest quality you can afford and get a good mount.

- Night vision equipment can be handy.

THE LAMP

- The lamp needs to be powerful enough to see the animal clearly at the shooting distance (eg. 800,000-candle power). The more power, the more detail.
- A set of coloured lenses and a lamp whose power can be turned down can help where you have ‘lamp-shy’ foxes.
- If using a filter, be able to identify your quarry in all light conditions (and filter colours, when they can look very different).
- Will you have someone to hold the lamp or will you be alone (see below)?
- Keepers suggest using a lamp that works from a battery or a car cigarette lighter.
- Go for the best you can afford.
- Try not to shine the light directly at the fox but just above its head.
- Be aware of houses and roads and do not shine the lamp at them.

GO IT ALONE OR WITH A MATE?

There is less temptation to talk if you're on your own! And there's plenty of equipment out there to help (eg. rifle-mounted lamps, see *KtB* spring 2011) and car door-mounted gun clamps. If you go with a mate, establish in advance who will do what so that you don't need to discuss it while out.

OTHER TECHNIQUES AND EQUIPMENT

- Squeaking a fox closer to you is a popular method of bringing it in range. Manufactured ‘squeakers’ are available to buy. However, many keepers find that sucking the back of your hand or a bit of polystyrene squeaked against a car window

work just as well. Do not be tempted to squeak too much.

- Some keepers swear by baiting a fox in, using a rabbit on a string or road kill.

KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Tell the landowner before you go. Some police forces are trying to persuade us to inform them every time we go shooting. There are possible advantages and very definite disadvantages to this, so you must decide for yourself whether it is a good idea.
- Carry your paperwork.
- Remove shot quarry (the next day if necessary).
- Have a safe backstop.
- Always recognise the whole body of the fox (not just the eyes).
- Do not shoot if in any doubt.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- BASC's *Lamping Code of Practice* is worth reading and being familiar with.
- There is a useful article on lamping by Steve Woodhall on BASC's website.
- There are various web forums about lamping, which may provide additional tips. Search for ‘lamping at night’.
- Coch-y-Bonddu Books (01654 702837) has copies of the comprehensive and classic guide on the activity, *Foxing with lamp and rifle* by Robert Bucknell, for £30.

The hunting set up for the NexTorch from Koolbox, designed to fit onto a rifle.

