

PEST/ GAME ANIMAL OF THE MONTH FEATURE

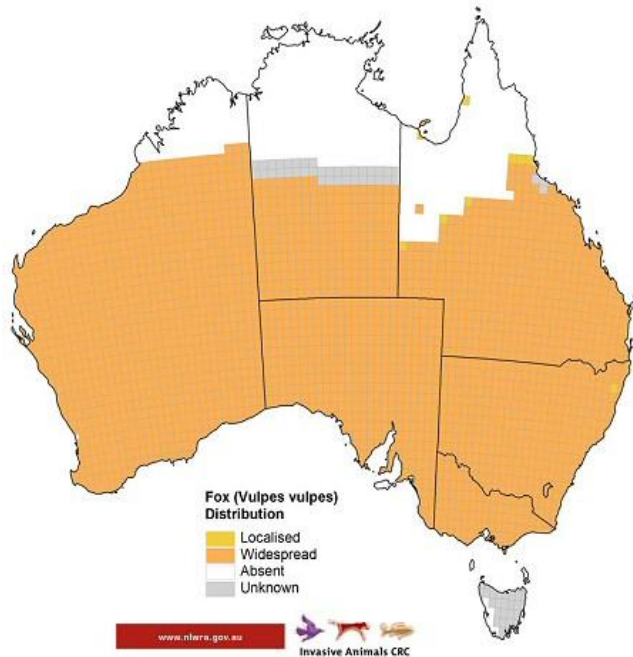
Red Fox - *Vulpes vulpes*

By Steve Hall

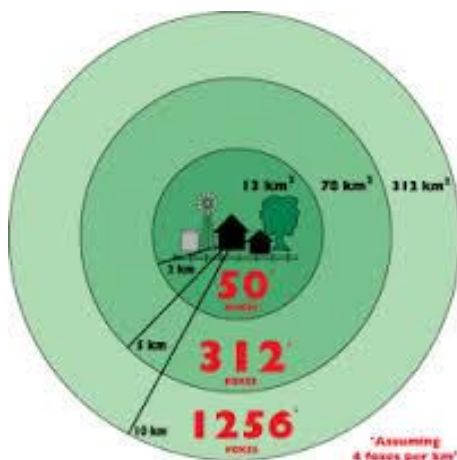
One of the most environmentally damaging animals in the Australian bush, the Red Fox was introduced in the 1850's and 1870's by early settlers for sporting purposes; mainly pursuing with hounds on horseback. From those original release sites 170 years ago, foxes now inhabit 76% of mainland Australia (Tasmania has remained fox free). They inhabit every habitat niche from the tropics to the alpine peaks to suburban gardens in our towns and cities.

While foxes are mainly carnivorous, they are in fact opportunistic omnivores. They will eat anything from meat to insects to plants and grains, they will also scavenge carrion and from suburban garbage.

While the feral cat and cats generally receive most of the bad press for preying on and wiping out our small native wildlife, birds and reptiles, Foxes are often equally to blame. In areas of native bush where foxes tend to prey on animals weighing between 35g and 5.5kg, this can include reptiles, ground frequenting birds, echidnas, bandicoots and the like. They are also a major economic pest to graziers, preying on lambs, kids and poultry. The economic damage to the environment and agriculture from foxes is has been estimated at \$228million



There are now over 10 million foxes chewing through our native birds and animals every night of the year. They generally will eat about 500g of food per day, but they also cache or stash food for a 'rainy day'. It is this practice of killing beyond their needs that make them super destructive on wildlife. In some favourable habitats with plenty of easily accessible food, foxes can achieve densities of 4 foxes to every 1 square km (see diagram below)

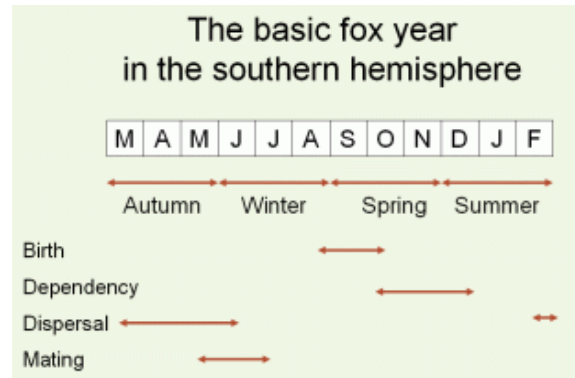


Foxes can live for 5 to 6 years but generally 60% die within the first 2 years. Vixens will breed within their first year and litters are generally 3 to 5 kits/ cubs.

Foxes can be called up with a whistle during the day and will often be seen out and about during daylight but most of their activity is nocturnal.

Targeting foxes at night with a spotlight can produce very good results and high tallies if done correctly.

To be most effective in reducing fox numbers it is important hunters understand the breeding cycle of foxes. At certain times of the year foxes can be very difficult to call in or even stop momentarily from their foraging. At other times they seem to be incredibly stupid and come flying in or just sit and look at you. This is usually during dispersal when last season's kits/ cubs are leaving home and finding their own bit of territory. As hunter we can be quite devastating on these young foxes at this time (see diagram to right).



The minimum calibre for shooting foxes is the .22 Long Rifle Rimfire. With the skins now virtually worthless, shooting them with whatever firearm or arrow that is on hand at the time is appropriate.

As a club, the GHAA have Foxes are present on all properties. They should be dispatched at every opportunity. Our flagship property currently has a competition for the largest fox taken during the year.

Are they fox eyes in my spotlight?

The colour of fox eyes can vary depending on many things.

- A. The colour of the spotlight being used; HID, halogen or coloured filters will influence the retinal reflection colour you see.
- B. The age of the fox may have an effect.
- C. How directly the fox looks at the light.
- D. The distance between your eyes and the light source (reflective angle) can affect the colour.

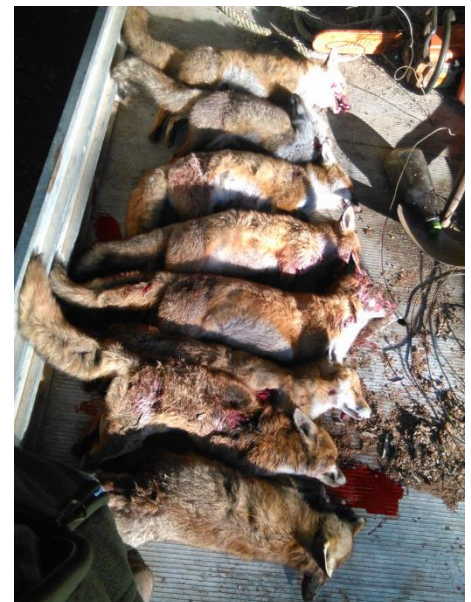
What colour am I looking for?

Usually greenish yellow. However white, orange and even red eyes can be a fox.

Cats, **sheep, cattle, horses and dogs** can share the **same colour as foxes**. The space between the eyes can **sometimes** determine whether it's a fox or not.

The movement of the eyes is the next thing to look for. You may see a fox or a cat blink. A fox's eye may move quickly whereas most other animals don't move so quickly. A fox may only give a quick glance compared to a sheep for example.

A fox may be seen apart from a mob of sheep, but sometimes within the mob but moving differently to the sheep's eyes.



Because other creature's eye reflections are similar to fox, **you must identify the animal before shooting**. Cats, **sheep, cattle, horses, wolf spider and fox eyes can look similar in colour**. Deer have particularly bright eyes; they group together quickly and move quickly when startled. Animals with a more red appearance are kangaroo, possum and rabbit.