

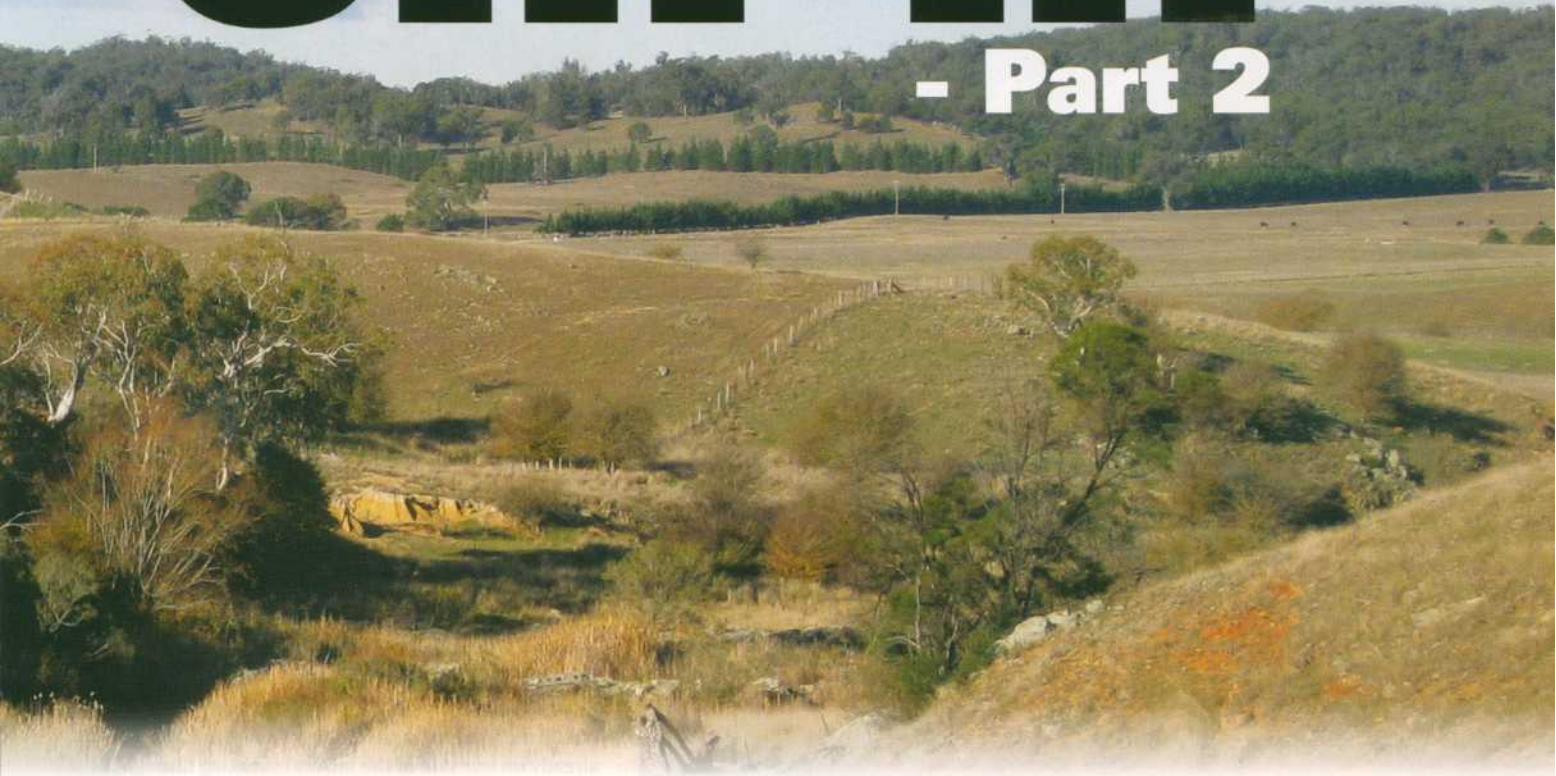
Calling

A man in camouflage gear, including a jacket, pants, and a cap, stands in a field of tall grass and shrubs. He is holding a rifle over his shoulder and a fox by its neck. The background shows rolling hills under a blue sky with some clouds.

Last issue, Tony Pizzata gave us some pointers on fox whistling. Now he recounts a very productive hunt using those methods.

'em in

- Part 2



IT WAS MID May when Marcus and I had decided to visit a new property we had lined up for some fox whistling a few months prior. Marcus was chasing a few skins to tan and now they were starting to look reasonable. The NSW Southern Highlands and further South is where I call em' in and after deadlines were met with work, we headed South for a few days hunting. On arrival we were greeted by the property owner Guy and his son Grant who informed us that they'd seen plenty of foxes about. Eager to get started, Marcus and I thanked them for having us and headed off to plan our attack. Being our first hunting trip to this property, the plan was to scout that afternoon to familiarise ourselves with the lay of the land and start hunting the following morning. The property consisted of about two thousand acres of rolling hills and a creek that weaved its way through the centre of it. Not much timber in most paddock, scrubby guts, dry grassy hill faces and dusty tracks. Yep, fine merino wool country!. Lots of lambs at lambing time and a feast for foxes, eagles and swarms of crows that frequented the property around then. A drive around in the vehicle and a glass from up high revealed the creek bed ran for miles and featured a maze of bull rushes, laden with blackberry bushes and further up, some rocky gorges and fern choked gullies leading up to the open tops. Further back towards the boundary, there were a few stands of timber and more blackberry bushes, but we'd leave that for another day.

Although we'd planned to hunt the following day and now knew a plan of attack, we still had a couple of hours of light and decided to make a start at the head of the property down on the creek. As I would be whistling and filming, I handed my Miroku shotgun and cartridge belt to Marcus and asked if he'd mind shooting. "More work," he sniggered with a mischievous grin. As the breeze was blowing across the creek, Marcus and I thought it best to hunt from the other side, so after crossing the dry, rocky creek bed, we both found a spot under cover and settled in for our first encounter. The area before us was a lone blackberry that ran for about 25 metres and was surrounded by low fern. Then there was about a 100 metre break of open terrain before the next patch of cover. At the first short bust on the whistle we both spotted the orange flash not forty meters ahead. As the fox came into view I pressed record on the camera and watched the fox come to within ten meters distant. Then he turned to look back and that's when Marcus raised the shotgun. Click went the safety and at that short distance the fox swung back at Marcus having pin pointed the sound. Releasing a single shot of number two's, Marcus put the fox to sleep and all went still.

I suspected another may have been coming in as the fox seemed distracted, but in the heat of the moment, we both made the mistake of getting up and exposing our presence. When whistling, particularly if you've only fired the one

MAIN PIC: Author and last fox for the day.

BACKGROUND: An exciting view to any fox whistler.



“...there he was, not thirty metres away and closing fast.”

ABOVE: Typical fox habitat, note the well drained blackberries on the side of the hill.

INSIDE: Marcus and his first fox for the day.

shot, it pays to keep whistling in these circumstances as another may be just around the corner. Nonetheless we'd bagged one and were happy to take a look at him.

A few photos, a quick skin up and we were off to the next stand. Depending on the type of terrain, I usually like to move about four or five hundred metres before attempting to call in another fox. In flat open expanses, where the sound of the whistle travels a little further, particularly if there is no wind or breeze, you can afford to move a little further away. Looking ahead, the terrain opened up to a dry, rocky creek bed and seemed to branch off into one of the paddocks to a dead end. It was up that side street we could see an inviting blackberry bush and some low-lying bulrushes. With very little cover to hide in, Marcus and I had to risk calling from an open hill face in knee high grass. As the hill was quite steep, providing we got in amongst the long grass and didn't make any sudden movement, we shouldn't be detected.

Setting ourselves up, I gave a light toot on the whistle and, on queue, the fox appeared from out of the bushes opposite. However, as quickly as he had appeared, he about-faced and disappeared back into the bush. Another soft call on the whistle and we waited. The fox was gone, had he smelt us, had he see us. No to both questions was

my silent assumption. Giving it a few more minutes I thought. Patiently we waited until finally I caught movement on the other side of the bush. He's back I thought silently to myself. Within moments, there he was not 30 meters away and closing the distance fast. He was already on our side of the hill and sneaking through the long grass in our direction towards us. Slowly, Marcus raised the gun and dropped the fox at little more than ten meters away. Keep whistling was my immediate thought and while doing so, Marcus reloaded. Another soft shrill and hot on the trail of our last fox was yet another. The fox pulled up not five meters from where the first one lay as Marcus slowly raised the Miroku while simultaneously releasing the safety. Again the fox swung his head in our direction having heard the safety click. Sorry old mate, BANG! And it was all over.

With little more than half an hour of light left we decided to carry the two foxes to our final stand for the day and do the skinning later. One more whistling session and yes, another fox. Again, the customary photo thing and some commentary on video with not one, not two but three foxes to skin before dark. What an afternoon we'd had. In the space of little more than two hours we'd called in four foxes. A mad dash across country put us back to the vehicle in little more than ten minutes and right on dark. Daypacks, shotgun, video equipment and three unskinned foxes had both of us gasping for air in an effort to get back to the vehicle before dark. After a welcome cold drink, I flicked the light on the back of the 4WD and Marcus and I had the skins off in no time.

Checking in with the owners before we left, they invited us in for a quick brew and a chat. As Grant had a few hours free the following morning, we invited him along for a hunt with us. Accepting our offer, we said we'd be back around



ABOVE: The property owners son Grant and a fine fox.

eight am. Fox whistling can be productive at any time of day, however, I don't like to make a start too early in the morning as they tend to be still wandering back to their hiding places till then, which makes predicting where they will appear from a little more difficult. As my place was no more than ten minutes away by vehicle, we decided to camp there for the night and, after such an eventful afternoon, neither Marcus or I got much sleep, hoping tomorrow would bring similar success. A combination of very little hunting pressure and typical fox territory with lots of rabbits made this property a fox hunter's paradise.

The following morning we picked Grant up and headed for another part of the property. This time we'd be hunting some steep gully country, laden with bracken fern and blackberry bushes. As we approached the area my eyes lit up and Marcus could see it. I felt like a kid in a lolly shop, knowing this was going to be fox heaven. So remote, so much typical cover and miles of it to whistle. I was almost trembling at the knees to get started.

This time I handed Grant the shotgun and again I'd do the filming and whistling and Marcus the photographing. As we'd hoped, the hunting got better and better and I

don't think there was one stand where a fox didn't show. Stand after stand we kept calling em' in and by midday, we'd called in some seven or eight foxes. By lunch time Grant had work to do and decided to call it a day. I think we'd even surprised him on how many foxes we'd seen. Marcus and I continued on for the afternoon and managed several more foxes and one wild cat.

Eventually Marcus gave me a break from the camera and handed me the shotgun. I wasn't too worried about shooting but took up his offer. On the last stand for the day we managed to call out a vixen in extremely good condition. On queue, out she came, trotting in towards the call of the button whistle. At a mere ten metres she was despatched. What a way to end the day!

Over the course of a day and a twilight, Marcus and I managed to call in some fifteen foxes and one cat, in fact we'd almost lost count. Although the odd one or two managed to get away, we'd had a very memorable trip. As it will probably take several months for numbers to rebuild again and other foxes to establish in the area we'd hunted, we decided it best to rest the area and return next season. Will it be as productive as this trip? I'll let you know next year. ■