

'Secret weapon' in the hands of thousands

Dave Rose



Back in February 2016 we published the intriguing tale of the Foxbusters, a band of hardy hunters in Western Australia who launched a campaign against the pest in the west. At the helm of the crusade to tackle the introduced marauders remains Graham Lawrence, who organises regular spot-lighting outings aboard his modified 1985 Range Rover. Graham's initiative continues to cater for guest hunters from around WA and interstate who want to assist in trying to curb the damage inflicted by foxes on native species and livestock.

Back then Graham also started using a 'secret weapon' to lure foxes after dark on the various farmland properties where they operated - a taped recording of a distressed animal. The sound of a parrot, to be exact.

Initially there was a smattering of interest as Graham, a SSAA member since 1996, made the fox caller available to fellow hunters. It was after the *Australian Shooter* link-up that demand took off. Fast forward to December 2018 and the amount of fox callers sent out hit the landmark 1000.

"The response has been staggering," said Graham. "I don't know where all these shooters came from but things really took off. We had about 70 requests before the article but then it became a flood. It calmed down after a while but maybe we should expect another saturation after this story appears.

"A lot of the information is spread by word of mouth among mates so who knows how many have just forwarded on tapes of the callers. For all I know there could be

2000 people out there using the caller from such recordings."

Graham described the earliest callers as a work in progress but explained how things evolved. "The sound on the caller is that of a wounded parrot," he said. "It's a parrot found locally in WA but the sound seems to work all around Australia. We recorded a few different parrots but found this is the one that works best. The caller is very much like a fishing lure. Whereas it's the sight and shine that attracts the fish, it's the sound that appeals to the predator and the prospect of an easy meal."

To obtain a secret weapon you simply fill in a request form on the Foxbusters' website (foxbusters.com.au) and an MP3 copy attached to a reply email will be sent by Graham. All you need then is a portable

'Secret weapon' in the hands of thousands

MP3 speaker that's rechargeable and takes a TF (TransFlash) or micro SD (Secure Digital) flash card.

When the sound is played it routinely attracts foxes which have previously attacked stricken birds. Even when spotlighting with its eyes fixed in the beam, foxes have been known to rush towards the sound, throwing their normal inbred caution and wariness aside and the caller has also been successful in enticing feral cats.

The website carries multiple testimonials to the pulling power of the secret weapon, one remarking: "It's unbelievable really and quite humorous at times. Has to be seen to be believed." Many describe themselves as experienced fox hunters always willing to try something different and only too happy to add Graham's secret weapon to their armoury.

One tip is directed at hunters operating on foot or using a hide. In such situations Graham recommends the hunter places the speaker 15-20m from the hide so the fox's focus is on the source of the sound and not the shooter's position.

And he's never too busy to speak to new customers. "I've made a lot of good friends through the secret weapon," said Graham. "Most of the requests are from within WA and the next biggest would be Victoria."

Graham's vehicle, aptly dubbed 'Rover', features all mod cons including three MP3 speakers for calling in foxes, seven firearm racks, a retractable rest for the driver as well as liquid soap and hand-washing water. It also has a fox autopsy table with knife, scissors, gloves and sample jars and there's a retractable backrest for shooters in the rear. The kit is rounded off with scales for weighing and a 'mood adjuster' for wounded foxes.

Graham has become something of an expert on fox behaviour, compiling a database which he shares with others via the Foxbusters' website. "I respect foxes, they're very intelligent and crafty so when things work out well it feels like an achievement to have outfoxed the fox," he said.

"Their athleticism and the way they've been created is amazing but they don't belong in the Australian environment. It's hard to blame the English for introducing them for whatever reason - we've all made environmental mistakes. They simply didn't know what they were doing."

Graham's research into foxes' habits and feeding patterns has made him a doyen of the subject and he regularly delivers speaking presentations, one of his latest outings to address Year 11 students at WA

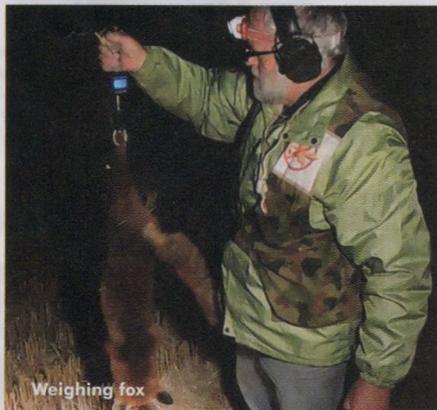
Even Mel Gibson was there!

WHEN PEOPLE COME across Graham Lawrence's souped-up buggy 'Rover' for the first time, many reckon it looks like a crazy cart from the *Mad Max* movie. Graham's stock reply is: "I'm not mad and I'm not Max but I have had Mel Gibson shoot foxes from this vehicle."

The explanation behind Graham's quip involves Melinda Gibson, the young lady in the photo. Mel was recently among a party of hunters aboard the rig and shot her first fox. In fact Mel, who hails from just north of Albany, finished up with three foxes to round off an eventful night-time outing.



Checking a fox's teeth can determine the animal's age.



Weighing fox

College of Agriculture in Narrogin.

He has compiled records of what he has found in the stomachs of dead foxes on which he has carried out dissections, an almost endless list including beetles, mice, fruit, grain and lots of rotting fodder. "I reckon I'd have cut open more than 600 foxes and surprisingly we only found rabbits which many would consider their main meal in about 10 of them. Then again, rabbits are harder to catch than beetles."

The chance to hunt with Graham using his customised 'Rover' is still attracting customers. During the past decade Graham has logged 290 excursions on the buggy, those outings equating to 1610 foxes killed which averages out at 5.5 'redcoats' per assignment.

"There are lots of local guys who come for the fox hunts as well as several women from throughout the state," said Graham. "One lady catches foxes in a trap and also snares a lot of feral cats. Foxes may look cuddly creatures like dogs but it's out in the bush at night you see the damage they cause and what's really going on."

With Graham's secret weapon in the hands of at least 1000 users, hopefully more hunters will give it a go in the never-ending quest to curtail the unwelcome effect of foxes. ●