



Fox shooting and hunting

Introduction:

In Australia, landowners are permitted to hunt and shoot foxes on their own land provided they are appropriately licenced. Recreational hunters and shooters need to gain permission from private landowners to hunt or shoot on their land. Hunting and shooting on most public lands is prohibited, although in New South Wales regulated hunting is allowed on some designated public lands.

Hunters and shooters must be aware of, and strictly observe all relevant legal requirements and safety guidelines for the use of their weapons. The general use of firearms is covered under individual state or territory legislation. The act of killing a fox is governed by the state or territory's animal welfare legislation and penalties apply if it is not done in a way that causes the animal as little pain as possible. A code of practice and a standard operating procedure for the shooting of foxes is available^{1,2}.

“ The fox is responsible for the decline of a number of species of native animals and they also prey on newborn lambs ”

Shooting as a method of fox control:

Shooting is considered an ineffective way of significantly reducing fox numbers, so is often used in combination with other methods. It is labour intensive and not as cost efficient as poison (1080) baiting on a broad scale^{3,4}.

Shooting is a very selective method of fox control. It can provide a viable alternative in areas where foxes are bait shy, where 1080 baiting is not feasible, or where baiting is not a preferred option. If done properly, shooting is one of the most humane ways of destroying foxes. The humaneness of shooting depends on the:

- skill, experience and judgement of the shooter
- animal being clearly visible and within range
- use of the correct firearm and ammunition
- shot placement.

Diagram 1

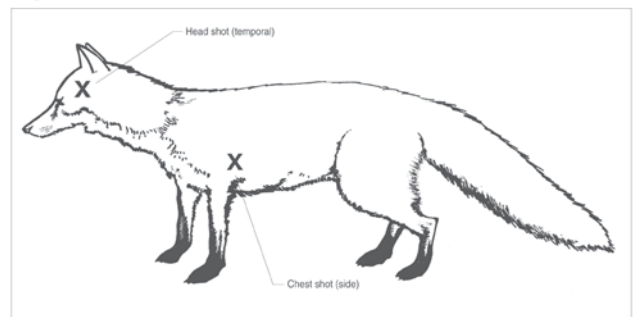


Diagram 2 - Side view (skeleton)

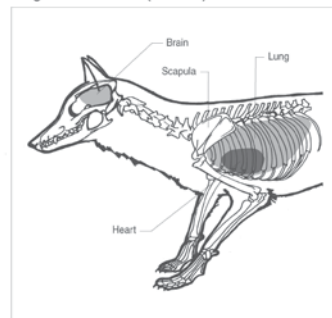


Diagram 3 - Head shot (frontal)



Recommended shot placement - Fox. Image: adapted from Sharp T and Saunders G (2005).²

Head shots are preferred over chest shots as they are more likely to cause instant loss of consciousness to the target species. There is a higher risk of only wounding the animal if it is shot in the chest. Shooting at other parts of the body is considered unacceptable. Shooters must be certain that an animal is dead before they target

another one. If an animal is wounded, it must be located and dispatched as quickly as possible.

Care must be taken when handling fox carcasses, as they can carry diseases such as hydatidosis and sarcoptic mange that can affect humans and other animals. The use of gloves is recommended and hands should be washed after handling fox carcasses.

Equipment:

Recommended firearms and ammunition for shooting foxes are:

- small bore, high velocity, centre-fire rifles fitted with telescopic sight, used with hollow-point or soft-nosed ammunition
- 12-gauge shotguns with heavy shot sizes of No. 2, SSG, BB or AAA (within a 20- metre distance only).

The accuracy and precision of firearms should be tested regularly.



Image: Mark Sobjerajski

Spotlighting:

Foxes are mostly active from dusk to dawn, so shooting at night with the aid of a spotlight (at least 100W) is more common than shooting during the day. This is typically done using a 4WD vehicle travelling slowly across the terrain. When foxes are illuminated by a spotlight, they have a bright eye shine ranging from pale yellow in juveniles to golden yellow in adults. Infrared night-vision equipment is sometimes used when spotlighting. Many hunters use lures and whistles that produce an artificial animal distress call, rabbit for example, to entice foxes to within shooting range.

Fox drives:

Fox drives or 'battues' are conducted during the day and involve unarmed beaters, often with dogs (see below), driving foxes into a line of waiting shooters. Many foxes – including wary adults – can be taken this way. However, this method needs many people participating and only a relatively small area can be covered.

Hunting with dogs:

Dogs may be used in hunting to flush out a fox from cover so it can be shot. Dogs should never be used to capture or directly attack foxes. The use of dogs is governed by a state or territory's animal welfare legislation.

In Victoria and New South Wales, fox hunters who use hounds and horses must be members of approved hunting organisations. The only hounds permitted for this purpose are 'foxhounds' identified with a legible ear tattoo and registered with an approved hunting group. There are strict rules governing how hunted foxes should be treated and the animal must be killed humanely.

More information:

1. Sharp T and Saunders G (2005). *Model Code of Practice for the Humane Control of Foxes*. NSW Department of Primary Industries, Orange.
2. Sharp T and Saunders G (2005). *Standard Operating Procedure - Ground Shooting of Foxes (FOX 003)*. NSW Department of Primary Industries, Orange.
3. McLeod L, Saunders G, McLeod S and Walter M (2007). *Effective Implementation of Regional Fox Control Programs*. Final Report to the Bureau of Rural Sciences, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra.
4. Saunders G and McLeod L (2007). *Improving Fox Management Strategies in Australia*. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, Australia.