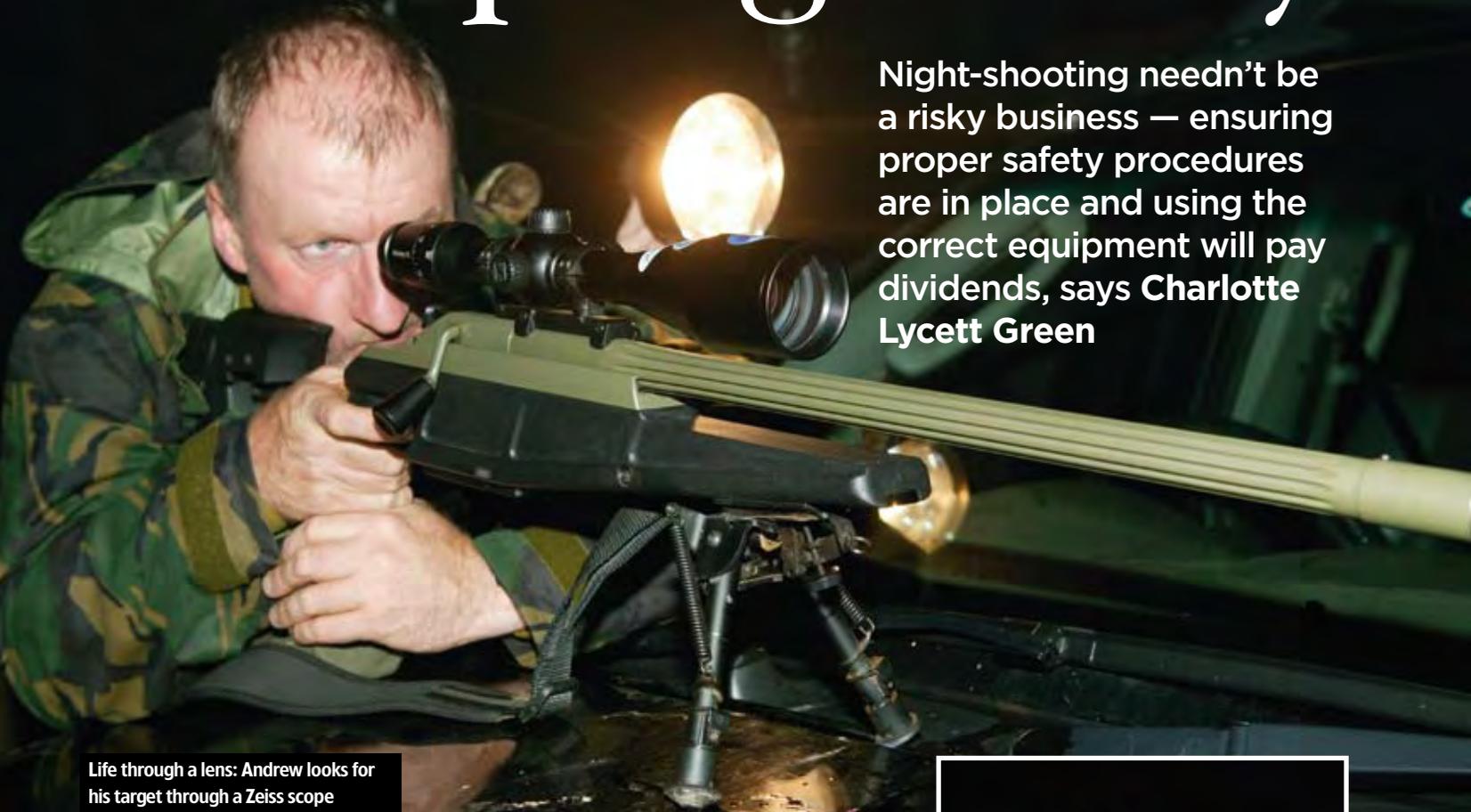


Lamping safety



Life through a lens: Andrew looks for his target through a Zeiss scope

Night-shooting needn't be a risky business — ensuring proper safety procedures are in place and using the correct equipment will pay dividends, says **Charlotte Lycett Green**

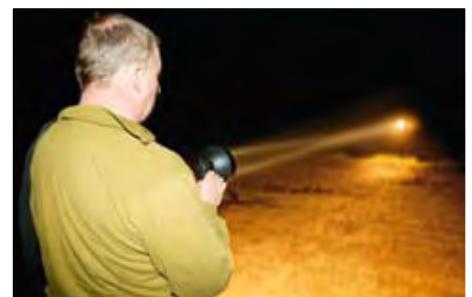
We've all heard horror stories of accidents occurring when shooters are out lamping. Some of these tragic incidents have made the national press while others feed the rumour mill. The purpose of this article is two-fold: to highlight the important safety aspects that all shooters should be aware of when shooting at night, and to look at the kit that is suitable for the task. This is not intended to be an equipment test, but more of a general overview of how safety and efficiency can be improved when out night-shooting. The lack of light provides an obvious handicap but, after spending all night out lamping, tiredness becomes a major factor and even the most safety conscious Shot can make a silly mistake when they are deprived of sleep. Also, with familiarity and frequency of outings comes the increased chance of something going wrong.

I recently visited Andrew Venables' WMS Steel Challenge shooting facility in mid-Wales to test some theories about target identification, range and equipment. Unfortunately, we were

► **Top to bottom: the fox-shaped target with reflective eye material was set up at three different ranges; the fox target looks realistic through an illuminated scope; it can be difficult to judge range at night, as Andrew demonstrates**

handed a good dose of Welsh weather on the evening that we were shooting — the rain came in sideways as we sheltered for several hours in a huge sheep shed in the middle of the night as we tried to conduct our experiment. This made visibility in the lamplight particularly difficult. However, one of the great advantages that the WMS Steel Challenge has over other shooting facilities and ranges is that it uses laser-cut steel targetry in the shapes of most of our British quarry and pest species — as well as some foreign ones, too.

For the first part of the experiment we set up a fox-shaped target at three different ranges to see how far away we could identify the fox. To make it more realistic, we stuck some reflective tape on to each target to give it "eyes" that would reflect in the lamp — and crossed our fingers that they would stay on in the rain. ►



Choosing and using your scope

The experiment

We used four popular scopes, which represent a good cross-section of what is available on the market, from a basic Meopta scope that costs around £400 to an all-singing-and-dancing Zeiss Diavari that costs more than £1,000.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Fixed power Meopta scope in 6x42 | 3. Swarovski 1.5-6x42 with illuminated reticle |
| 2. Schmidt & Bender 3-12x50 PM1, the Precision Hunter | 4. Zeiss Diavari 6-24x42/56(?) T*FL |

Targets were set up at 50, 150 and 200 yards and three tests were carried out



TEST 1: Establish what the naked eye can see

The first test was to shine the lamp at each of the targets in order to work out what we could see with the naked eye. Luckily, the reflective tape worked quite well and we could see a "pair of eyes" shining brightly at all three ranges.

TEST 2: Check if the fox can be seen at different ranges

The second test was to look through each scope on 6x in quick succession to work out whether the target could be identified as being in the shape of a fox at the three different ranges. The results were interesting. At 50 yards, it was possible to identify the target as being a fox with all four scopes. At 150 yards, the fox-shaped target was discernible with only the Zeiss and Swarovski scopes. At 200 yards, in the weather conditions at the time, we could not identify the shape of the target with any of the scopes. It was merely a "set of eyes" that we could see.

TEST 3: Experiment with the magnification

Knowing how limited we were in our ability to identify correctly the target at different ranges with a selection of scopes, the next stage was to experiment with increasing the magnification to find the trade-off between light gathering and clarification of the target in the scope, and the effect this had on the field of view.

As might be expected, the Swarovski and Zeiss scopes performed the best. On 6-8x the Zeiss was the brightest, but at 24x it became rather dim. In each instance, however, increasing the magnification in order to achieve clarity of the target at the different ranges compromised both the light gathering ability of the scopes and the field of view.

There is an obvious safety concern that arises at this point. By zooming up the magnification to high power, the field of view is reduced to little more than a few feet either side of the target and the light is poor. It provides something to think about next time you read or hear of somebody taking a shot at a fox at a range of 200 yards and beyond.

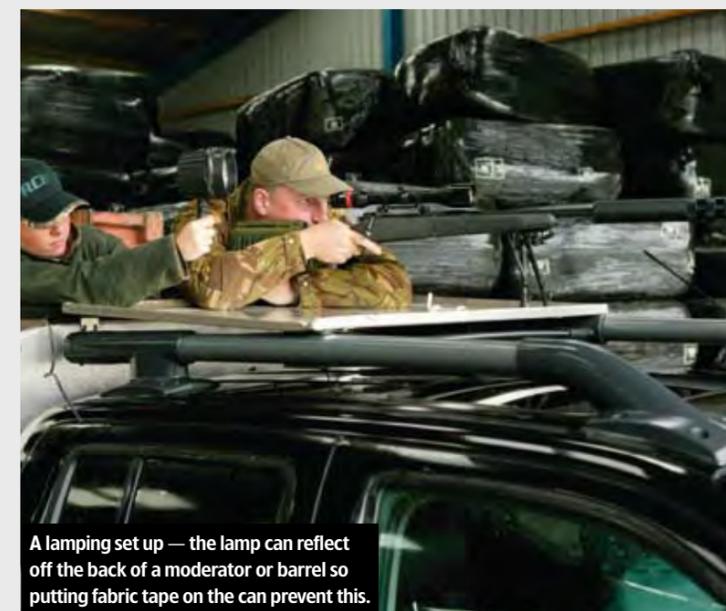
The conclusion

Since, in theory, when shooting at night the range of shots taken is typically around the 50 yards to 150-yard mark, scopes with more than 12x are not really necessary as the extra magnification compromises light gathering and safety issues arise because of the reduced field of view. There is also the fact that, when set on high magnification, it is difficult to find a target at close range.

"Some people think that they can't go out and shoot foxes unless they have a heavy barrelled varmint rifle," said Andrew Venables, "when actually an ordinary lightweight rifle with a 3-12x scope set on 6x is more than adequate for most shots within a 50 yard to 150 yard range." ■

Considering safety issues

The ideal lamping set-up



A lamping set up — the lamp can reflect off the back of a moderator or barrel so putting fabric tape on the can prevent this.

Travelling on the back of a vehicle with firearms carries an obvious risk, so here are some tips on how to make it safer:

1. Consider investing in a secure seating system. This can be as simple or complicated as you wish. Make sure it does not slide back when the vehicle is driven uphill.
2. If shooting from a truck with a container on the back, a purpose-built trapdoor in the roof of the container is useful.
3. The lid of the trapdoor should rest on the roof of the cab to provide a stable platform to shoot from. Ideally, the lid should have a lip to prevent anything that is dropped accidentally, such as live rounds, from rolling off the roof of the cab.
4. Wrap pipe-lagging around the edges of the opening of the trapdoor to make it more comfortable to lean against.
5. There should be enough room for two people — one to lamp, one to shoot.

Follow the proper procedures



The rubber pad gives a more yielding surface on which to position the bipod

1. All firearms should be assumed to be loaded at all times and handled accordingly.
2. Never allow a loaded rifle barrel inside the vehicle — only load when it is pointing out of the vehicle.
3. Don't point the rifle at anything you don't intend to shoot.
4. Make sure you know the ground well and

have carried out an extensive recce during the day.

5. Keep your finger out of the trigger-guard until you're lined up for a shot.

6. Before making a shot, know what is in the foreground, make sure you can identify the target correctly, know what is behind the target and judge the angle of the ground in case of ricochet (if the angle is less than 35 degrees, there is a chance of ricochet).

7. Consider whether you're firing into soft ground or frozen turf, off which the round is likely to ricochet.

8. When shooting from the back of the vehicle, there should be something on the roof or rest that prevents the barrel pointing down on to the roof, so that if the vehicle goes over the bump and the Rifle has an ND, it's not going to fire into the cab.

9. If you are shooting a large calibre without a moderator or bipod and so shooting from the Hawkins position off the bonnet of the vehicle, be careful that you don't flame-etch the bonnet.

10. Unload before dismounting from the vehicle or passing the rifle to another person.

Impact of bullets

Being in a vehicle won't necessarily protect you from bullets. The picture below demonstrates bullets can penetrating a steel girder. The girder pictured below is ¼ (6mm) thick and is cleanly penetrated by all rounds at 100m.



223 55gn soft point

245 1009 soft point

To contact Andrew Venables, tel 01686 413030/440782 or 07767365804, or visit www.wms-firearmstraining.org.