

# Cape fox



iStockphoto.com/Nico Smit

**Above:** Compact canid: The African cape fox is smaller than the British red fox

**Below:** In an evening's lamping, Adrian encountered foxes, antelope and spring hare. You won't get that when lamping in the UK!



The South African cape fox, or grey fox, is smaller than our native red fox. It is very rarely seen during the day, so the means of attack is lamping at night.

Lamping foxes in Africa, as I found out, is very different from lamping them in the UK. The first difference I noted as we set off from camp in the Nissan Patrol was that it is a group outing. There were two of us in the front, two trackers with the lamp, and Neil and myself sitting on the rear shooting seat.

As soon as we left the camp, the lamp went on, and we scanned the bush veldt and dirt roads as we trundled along. There were eyes everywhere: springbok, impala, duiker, steenbok, eland and the very strange spring hare, which is like a cross between a rabbit and a kangaroo. Suddenly the tracker tapped the roof of the bakkie and we stopped. The light was fixed on the side of a small kopje at a pair of blinking eyes. The PH got his Leica binos out; the eyes disappeared.

A few seconds later we were moving again, down a rutted track. We could see a mass of game animals everywhere; there was nothing boring about this lamping session.

Then we heard a rustle in the acacia bushes. Neil fixed his rifle on the target, and in seconds a porcupine was in the bag.

Over the next 30 minutes we shot a few spring hares, but none of our intended quarry. Then, running along the dirt track in front, there appeared a fox. I tried to get the Swarovski scope onboard the .222 fixed on the animal, but it was moving too quickly. The truck stopped sharply, knocking me from my seat, just as the fox turned and looked back. I recomposed myself but the

## Cape fox fact file

### Recognition

The cape fox (*Vulpes chama*) is the smallest of the African canids, typically between 45 and 61 centimetres long, with a tail of between 30 and 40 centimetres. Its fur is black or silvery grey above, with the flanks and underside a lighter, yellowy colour. It is easily recognisable by the tip of its tail, which is always black.

### Feeding

Like most foxes, the cape fox is an omnivore. It prefers to eat small mammals and carrion, but will also eat insects and fruit.

### Reproduction

Although not much is understood about the cape fox's social practices, it appears to be monogamous like most other canids. Unlike many other foxes, however, it mates all year round –

although a larger proportion of cubs is born in early summer. After a gestation period of 51-53 days, the female gives birth to a litter of between three and six cubs, weighing 50-100g each. Cubs are weaned after six to eight weeks and reach sexual maturity after around nine months. The cape fox has a life expectancy of around 10 years.

### Vocalisation

The cape fox is very vocal; its most common sound is a howl followed by a bark. A breeding pair will alternate this vocalisation: one howls, then the other barks. When threatened, the cape fox growls and hisses.

fox vanished into the veldt. We quickly drove to the spot where he turned, and got the lamp on him again. This time, we switched the truck off to allow the tracker to whistle. The fox stopped and turned sideways onto us; I dropped him on the spot with a heart shot.

It amazes me how hunting the same beast can differ so starkly depending on where you are. My lamping expedition in South Africa was a far cry from a cold night in the fields in Britain. For me, the main difference lamping in Africa is that the animals do not at all appear to be lamp shy – as they usually are for hunters shooting after dark in the UK. **AS**