

# The view

by Steve Hurt



Steve Hurt and Bonnie survey the property.

**A**s I sat on the front verandah, taking in the view so often ignored and taken for granted, the afternoon sun laid a golden blanket over the rolling hills. Cattle were moving out from the tree-lined crests to feed out on the flats beside the dry creek bed. It was something of a hunter's sixth sense that caught my attention, but I couldn't say what, that sent me inside to grab the binoculars.

Resuming my position on the verandah bench and casting the optics up to the south-east face a

good 350m distant according to the rangefinder, I instantly picked up a fox rising from his sunny bed. Front legs fully forward with his rump to the rear and in the air in a typical dog-like stretch, he was limbering up for his afternoon exploits.

In a casual but focused manner, he started down the hill towards the road when he started feigning little pounces into the long grass. His approach was more inquisitive than determined as he seemed to give up rather easily, but his pace quickened slightly, halted and then resumed as he made his way along the contour.

Whether it was the cattle feeding towards him, a change in wind direction, or simply of mind, the fox did an about-face and started to backtrack. For the next half hour or so, the antics continued without any real sense of urgency or purpose. When the pace picked up, he headed west, through the fence and towards a small patch of eucalypt forest on the south-west face.

The three magpies on insect patrol in the grass beside the forest spotted the fox at the same time and gave their warning cries. Two of the birds rose immediately and

lifted into the trees. The remaining bird stood its ground, not wanting to respond just yet when the fox picked up his pace and started to close in. The magpie, at an otherwise less than appropriate pace, decided to leave his feeding ground for the trees, protesting all the way.

If the fox had been a little less casual about the final approach, the outcome for the complacent magpie might have been less fortunate, but the hunt appeared to be undertaken more out of nature than necessity, with barely a step missed after the half-hearted rush. And with that, the fox slipped over the spur and was out of sight.

It was now my turn to be snapped out of my complacency and inspect the security of the chicken coop...

Mother Nature is intolerant of fools. The previous night, our cocky would-be chookyard raider made a serious miscalculation - the big male fox decided on a direct, frontyard approach on his way to the hen-house. It's impossible to say what was going on between his ears as he was coming up the driveway, but about halfway between the first and

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second gate, he obviously underestimated the resolve of my 14-year-old German shorthaired pointer, Bonnie, and her 'tough as butter' partner in crime.

The ruckus lasted but a moment or two. Because it was late in the evening and I was rather cold, I assumed that one of the dogs was barking at the cattle across the road as they came to settle under the big eucalypt for the evening, their normal routine, and thought nothing

more of it.

Peering through the kitchen window this morning, while putting the kettle on, the story of the previous night's drama was made clearer. Bonnie was standing over the dishevelled carcass, with the hair on her back and neck still standing erect. Partially blind and mostly deaf these days, Bonnie was still up for the job, but for the life of me, I'm stunned at the outcome. How did she know the fox was there from her bed in the garage, when she can't hear the food bowl rattled at tea time? And this from a retired pointer retriever that lets the cat sleep on her!

After 14 years by my side, and many, many unbelievable acts of sagacity, I had assumed that Bonnie's advanced years, declining senses and last stages of cancer would mellow her and that she would simply slowly ebb away.

Mother Nature's laws will inevitably be played out no doubt, but there's just no way of knowing what's in store, or how the game will be played today. Especially with Bonnie still in it. ●

