

Bowhunter

Farewell issue



Bowhunting baboon



Die amptelike spreekbuis vir SABA

Bowhunting giraffe

Bowhunting reedbuck

Bowhunting common

Bowhunt adventure on sable



By Frank Berbuir

It is August 2016 and luckily I made it back to beautiful South Africa to bowhunt again with my friend and professional hunter, Izak Vos from Vos Safaris. The overnight flight to Johannesburg went smoothly and the Immigration was also done quickly. With bow and arrow equipment, as a sporting device, you normally do not have any special formalities with Customs so that I was out promptly and happy to see Izak again, who picked me up at the airport.

Since we had not seen each other for two years there was a lot to talk about during the drive up north to the Limpopo Province to the hunting grounds where we wanted to hunt two magnificent and beautiful antelopes. One was the sable, a member of the ring-horned antelopes and the other one was the nyala, a member of the spiral-horned antelopes.

The sable antelope (*Hippotragus niger*) or *swartwitpens* in Afrikaans, is a beautiful majestic antelope. It has a compact and robust body, characterised by a thick neck and tough skin. Often it has a well-developed and upright mane on its neck, as well as a short mane on the throat. Its general colouration is rich chestnut to black. Females and juveniles are chestnut to



The beautiful Limpopo landscape.

dark brown, while males begin darkening and turn black after three years.

The underparts, cheek and chin are all white, creating a great contrast with the dark back and flanks. Because of the white underparts they got the Afrikaans name "swartwitpens", which means "black with a white belly". Long, white hairs are present below the eyes, and a wide, black stripe runs over the nose. The tail is long, with a tuft at the end.

Both sexes have ringed horns which arch backward. In females, these can reach up to one metre in length, while in males they are between 82 and 165 centimetres or 32 to 65 inches long. The males are heavier and about one-fifth taller than the females. The head-and-body length is typically between 1,9 and 2,5 metres or up to 100 inches. Males reach about 1,4 metres at the shoulder, while females are slightly shorter. Males typically weigh up to 250 kilograms and females about 220 kilograms.

It inhabits East Africa, the south of Kenya, and the southern African savanna woodlands and grasslands during the dry season, where they eat mid-length grasses and leaves. They visit salt licks and have been known to chew bones to collect minerals. They are diurnal, but are less active during the heat of the day. They form herds of 10 to 30 females and calves led by a single male, called a bull. Males fight among themselves; they drop to their knees and use their horns. When sable antelopes are threatened by predators, including lions, they confront them, using their scimitar-shaped horns. Many of the big cats have died during such fights.

After we had reached our hunting destination and had had a meet-and-greet with the landowner and farmer we settled in ourselves and enjoyed a nice braai – Afrikaans for barbecue – that evening. The planning for the next day was scouting the area. The landowner told us that there was an old sable bull, a real warrior and fighter, which was roaming around on its own. The next day we started with a game drive and scouting with the binoculars. We ranged the area and could see some nice kudus, blesbuck, warthogs and nyalas as well as a small group of sable antelopes with some young males but not the one we were looking for. In the afternoon we finally saw a lonely roaming bull with tremendous horns proudly strutting through the bush. That must be the one we were looking for. As we were told he was rambling around alone and looked like a warrior. Indeed you could see several scars on his skin. His body size was huge, his mane was thick and the horns looked enormous. It was a bit too far and late to start a stalk and if we drove closer he would spot us and probably run away. So we left him for that day because he might go to a small water source nearby the next morning where a salt lick might also catch his interest.

That evening at the campfire we relived the scenes we had observed that day. My sleep was fitful with the picture of that sable in my mind. Early in the morning at sunrise we were back at the spot where we had seen him the day before. We made our walk-and-stalk to the waterhole and salt lick to ambush ourselves behind some covering bushes from where we could observe the spot up close. The rising sun warmed us up slowly on that South African winter's morning. The guinea fowls with their cackling sounds and francolins were as always the first creatures to show up. We did not realise how much time had elapsed since we came there when all of a sudden we heard something approaching from our right. Luckily the wind was blowing perfectly from the front so we would not spook whatever was coming closer. Slowly but surely we heard it coming closer. We were all on edge when, between the last two bushes, this magnificent ring-horned antelope called sable

stepped out. A beautiful bull was standing there, checking the spot. His curved long and thick horns in a nicely symmetrical shape, his black coat, long mane and face mask made him a stunning sable bull.

These antelopes are not as shy as a kudu or nyala. He was standing there like a rock with his raised head. After a couple of minutes he went straight to the salt lick. Izak showed me with his left hand that I should stay calm and do nothing. I had nocked in an arrow on the string and put on the rest when we arrived at our ambush and also my release was snapped in the loop. There was a small clear shooting window on the salt lick and I was focused like a lion on its prey. Izak whispered, "Wait until he is at the salt lick, relaxed and standing broadside." I don't know how much time had passed when the moment of truth was there. He bent down his head to the salt, his left leg a bit forward, nicely showing me his broadside. He was at 26 metres when I pulled my bow to full draw, quietly and slowly. With the sight pin on his vitals I released the arrow. It hammered into the animal's chest and penetrated fully through his body, sticking out on the opposite side. He jumped up with a slight right turn before he flew away like a racehorse coming out of his starting cage.

I was much excited, my heart was beating wildly and my hands were shaking. Izak smiled at me and said, "Great shot, my friend, let's wait a bit and give him time." About forty minutes later, which felt like an eternity, we followed his flight trail. Roughly ten yards from the shooting spot we found the arrow covered in blood and still in perfect shape. The blood trail was sparse but by his deep tracks we could follow his flight direction. Then we saw him, expired beside a bush about 110 metres from the shooting spot. What a beautiful specimen of the ring-horned antelopes of Africa was lying there. I was overwhelmed and more than happy together with Izak about this awesome animal and trophy. After some nice respectful trophy pictures we loaded him on the pick-up. Back in camp the slaughtering brought 120 kilograms or 265 pounds of first class sable venison and the sirloins tasted excellent a couple of days later.

What an extraordinary performance again of bow and arrow.

Together with my friend and PH, Izak Vos from Vos Safaris, I had a tremendous good hunt again with unforgettable impressions and memories during that week in South Africa. What an exciting safari again. Once more thank you very much to Izak and his outstanding company and organisation.

Shoot straight, always good hunting, Weidmannsheil and *alles van die beste*.

Equipment:

Bow: Mathews Z7x at 70 lbs

Arrow: Carbon Express Maxima Hunter 350

Broadhead: Silverflame XL two-blade, 125 grain

Optics: Zeiss Victory binoculars & Nikon rangefinder

Release: Scott

Camo: Sniper Africa