

African Hunting Gazette

ESTABLISHED 1995



US\$12.95 • CAD14.95



Steenbok — a Bowhunt Quest

By Frank Berbuir

I remember quite well my first encounter with a steenbok. It was in northern Namibia in 2004. On the second day of that hunt with my PH Gustav, we suddenly spotted this rather beautiful tiny antelope that is quite common in southern Africa, but somehow not easy to find - small, shy, and almost entirely independent of drinking water, getting any moisture they need from their food. This one looked really cute, with his huge radar-bowl-like ears, graceful, slightly built body, nice brown coat, and big eyes that reminded me of a child begging for sweets. Gustav was so enamored with the beauty of this animal that I finally felt sorry about wanting to shoot it, and let it go. In the following years (2005 and 2006) I never saw another steenbok.



In 2007, again in Namibia in the Khomas Highlands, I was once more specifically looking for steenbok. My black guide was a highly experienced tracker, and from the moment he found the first fresh tracks, he followed them like a predator. After a three-hour stalk in the burning mid-day November sun, he pointed to a beautiful little buck resting in the shade of a small brush. The bokkie was at approximately 30 metres. I remembered my first chance encounter a couple of years ago, and this time I was also a bit reluctant to shoot a lying down animal. But when we moved another step forward, the steenbok jumped up and was gone in a split second. Another chance gone!

In all the following years that I went to bowhunt in southern Africa, I did not see another steenbok till the August of 2014 when I went once again to the Dark Continent.

This time I travelled to bowhunt with my friend and PH Izak Vos from Vos Safaris. On my bucket list I again had a steenbok, this appealing creature, one of the “Tiny Ten”. Izak had told me that he knew an interesting place up north in the Limpopo Province not far from the Botswana border where, hopefully, we could find this long-sought-after antelope.

Izak met me in Joburg, and during the drive to the camp we discussed our hunting plans for the following eight days. With good memories of our extremely successful bowhunt on a huge Cape buffalo and other big game the year before, I decided to bring again my trusty Elite GT 500 bow set at 90 lbs draw weight with the Easton Full Metal Jacket 250 Dangerous Game arrows, and the Muzzy Phantom SS 200-grain Broadhead with a total arrow weight of 800 grains. Rather an overload for a steenbok, but I felt very comfortable with this bow set-up, and my previous month's practice sessions went well. “Never change a winning team”, was my thinking, particularly as I wished to take an eland as well.

The difference between those two animals could not be more extreme: An eland, with a shoulder height of about 1.6 metres (5 feet) and a weight up to a ton (more than 2000 pounds), compared with a steenbok of about 15 kilograms (33 pounds) and just half a metre (1½ feet) in height. However, the pretty little steenbok is not easy to hunt, because at the first sign of trouble they typically lie down low in the vegetation, and then it becomes quite challenging to find them.

The first day at our destination we just scouted for game by driving in the area, and glassing and stalking. The countryside was mainly quite flat bushveld with open savannah, peppered with thorny bushes, some acacias, and a few rocky outcrops. This is really challenging when stalking with bow and arrow,



A female steenbok – one of the prettiest of small antelopes.

especially if you try to get close to the game. Izak had definitely not exaggerated about this area, or the numbers of steenbok. That day, besides numerous impala, warthog, blesbok, kudu and blue wildebeest, we saw about a dozen of these tiny antelopes, and among the males, females and young ones there were some really good trophies. We also spooked a pair of bat-eared foxes just twenty metres in front of us, which was a one-of-a-kind encounter for me because I had never seen them before. They are beautiful animals.

When we arrived at a large grassy area we spotted

a big steenbok male at approximately 130 yards. He was a very impressive specimen, and Izak estimated the horns to be a tremendous trophy at 5½ to 6 inches! The steenbok was facing us for quite a while before he jumped away on a zigzag escape route before he finally disappeared in the high grass.

“This is the one we will go for tomorrow,” Izak decided. “He will stay in the area - they are territorial animals and there is a fair chance

to stalk him and get close tomorrow early morning.”

Back at our hunting camp we relived the wonderful impressions of the day and talked about the plans for the next morning as we enjoyed some excellent, tasty grilled springbok ribs. Our accommodation was a rustic self-catering hunting camp in a roughly 100-year-old former farm house, with its own special non-luxurious charm. It was planned that way from the beginning between Izak and me - just the two of us.

We had no electricity, and used old gas lanterns after dark. Hot water was boiled on a campfire with a water kettle, and all the cooking and the braaivleis was also done on the campfire. We both really enjoyed this simple “like in the old days” arrangement. One day, we even had a very special visit from an adult monitor lizard who was very much interested in what we could offer him when the door was open, and he went straight into the house checking out the kitchen for flavorful goodies.



*We had no electricity,
and used old gas lanterns
after dark.*

At sunrise the next morning, after a quick coffee and biscuit, we walked to the area where we had spotted the outstanding steenbok the day before. We glassed the area carefully, going at a slow pace for some hours along the edge of grassy opening, using the bushline as cover.

"There he is," Izak suddenly murmured. "He's resting on the ground. Do you see the bare patch with no grass? He is lying in front of the grass and the bare patch is in front of him." I moved my binos a bit to the right and could also then see him. Yes, it was the one we had seen the day before. Now we had to plan to get closer because the distance was about 70 metres. There were only some small bushes in the open grass field that we could use as cover, and we needed to keep our silhouette as low as possible.

Izak crept slowly but surely forward like a leopard, and I followed in his tracks directly



PH Izak, me, and our fine "Tiny Ten" antelope trophy buck.



The fireplace and cooking facility in our rustic hunting camp.

behind him.

At the last bush between us and the animal, he stopped and took my rangefinder, checked the distance, and whispered, "He is lying at 40 metres, nicely broadside looking to the front. It's now or never, Frank. It's Showtime!"

Now it was up to me. I moved up slowly on my knees, nocked in the arrow quietly. Calm, I pulled my bow smoothly to full draw. I had to slide my upper body a bit to the right for a clear shooting window, and aimed with the 40 metres pin of my sight to where Izak told me before, on a spot low on his vitals because he was lying on the ground. This time I was not

reluctant to shoot, but I could feel my heart beat in my chest while aiming. I took a deep breath and finally tapped the trigger of my release. The arrow was on its deadly mission and within a split second was into the tiny antelope's body. "Yes," Izak whispered. "The arrow went through." He had followed the action with his binoculars. He shook my hand, hugged me, and said: "Congrats, well done my friend. You got your steenbok!"

I was overwhelmed and very emotionally touched when we walked to him and I saw this beautiful animal. Finally, after all these years, a wonderful trophy steenbok was lying



Equipment:**Bow:** Elite GT 500 @ 90 lbs**Arrow:** Easton Full Metal Jacket 250 Dangerous Game with heavier inserts**Broadhead:** Muzzy Phantom SS 2-Blade @ 200 grain**Optics:** Zeiss Victory Binocular & Nikon Rangefinder**Release:** Scott**Camo:** Sniper Africa

Steenbok (*Raphicerus campestris*) are one of the smallest antelopes, standing 45 – 60cm or 16" - 24" inches at the shoulder and a weight of about 15 kilogram or 33 pounds. Their coat is any shade from fawn to rufous, typically rather orange, and blends in appropriately in their habitat. The underside, including chin and throat, is white, as is the ring around the eye. Ears are large with "finger-marks" on the inside. Males have straight, smooth, parallel horns 7–19 cm respectively 2.8" – 7.5" inches long. There is a black crescent-shape between the ears, a long black bridge to the glossy black nose, and a black circular scent-gland in front of the eye. The tail is rather small and not usually visible.

in front of me. After a few minutes of silence of respect, we arranged the buck for some trophy pictures. Back at our camp, even though it was just 10 o'clock in the morning, a Castle Lager tasted excellent. The bokkie was stored for a full mount trophy in a cooler box before sending it to Izak's uncle Jan Viljoen, my taxidermist of note, who did a fantastic job on my previous trophies, but that is another story. On the remaining days of this safari we had even more exciting encounters, hunting success, and moments of lifetime memories. One more time, thank you very much to Izak for the great organization, experience and company, and all the nice people I had the opportunity to meet during this fantastic time.

Always good hunting – "Waidmannsheil" and alles van die beste.

German hunter Frank Berbuir is passionate about the outdoors and hunting – especially bowhunting, which he has practised for more than 18 years. Although he's bowhunted in several countries, he's become addicted to hunting in Africa since his first safari in 2004. Frank is a mechanical engineer and risk manager in the automotive industry.



The grasslands were peppered with thorny bushes and some acacias.

12 monthly issues, plus weekly bulletins and 24/7 access to 10,000+ hunt reports and articles covering the entire world

There's Only One Hunting Report!

YOUR SOLE CREDIBLE SOURCE FOR:

- Warnings on developing problems
- Advice on avoiding trouble and finding the right hunt
- Hype-free reporting on destinations and operators



DON'T LET WORLD DEVELOPMENTS CATCH YOU BY SURPRISE. SUBSCRIBE NOW.
1-800-272-5656 | www.huntingreport.com