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Bowhunting a Tsessebe Bull

By Frank Berbuir

What is a tsessebe, some guys in my home country asked when I told them about my bowhunting adventure on this African antelope...





It is the end of August and I am lucky to be back again in South Africa to bowhunt with my PH Izak Vos from Vos Safaris. For a week we have been in our cosy hunting camp on a nice farm on the border of the North West Province, close to the Limpopo Province.

The scenery along the Crocodile River is stunning, with some challenging hunting grounds - stony mountains, dense bush, and open plains. In our last week we saw from time to time a small herd of tsessebe with a very old bull, some females, and only a few juveniles. We also saw, quite far from the herd, two very young males with some clearly visible signs of injuries. The farmer explained that the bull was either fighting to the death with the male calves, or exiling them from the herd where they would most likely die in the bush from their injuries or fall prey to hyenas and other predators. So the herd did not grow much the last five years, and we would be doing him a favor if we hunted this bull.

Still calm, I pulled my bow smoothly to full draw.

Our first day started with a refreshing morning walk to the area where the “beestes” usually roam, and where we had seen them before. South African winter early mornings are quite chilly, but the splendid sunrise and the warming sun in our faces was a delight. When we reached the area we planned how we wanted to approach and stalk the animals. Even though the herd was small there were plenty of eyes, ears and noses that are much more sensitive and sharper than ours, and they get your scent and silhouette in a split second. With the wind in our favor we sneaked closely to a bush where we could hide and see them. We were about 150 meters from them when it became more challenging. We slowly moved forward, almost waddling like ducks to the next covering bush, always keeping an eye on the antelopes. So far they were all calm and easy.

It took an hour to shorten the distance to 100 meters when suddenly they all looked up in our direction. We froze behind our sparse cover, and when you are sitting on your haunches, this starts to hurt after a couple of minutes! We could not figure



The magnificent tsessebe.



Rough and challenging terrain

out what disturbed them, but they started slowly moving away from us. That’s the way the cookie crumbles.

So, it’s a case of begin again to follow and try to get closer. Once they were behind some bushes and we were not in their sight, we cautiously sneaked out behind our cover and stalked bent over, at a snail’s pace to the next available cover. To make a long story short the situation repeated several times. Four hours went by, and with the sun high above and rising temperatures, the challenge became more and more demanding. Suddenly there were crackling noises from behind us, and we saw three giraffes approaching at about 50 meters from us, and they would likely

smell or see us.

Now it was getting even more difficult. If we got up or moved we would probably spook them all. So we hid ourselves in a thorny bush, as low as possible and keeping dead quiet. Thankfully the Sniper Africa camouflage hunting clothes are quite thorn-resistant and the hunting gods were also in our favour, as the giraffes fortunately turned to the left and wandered off unconcerned, not even seeing us. But it was exciting for us.

Luckily the tsessebe were still there, unperturbed by the giraffes, but we still 100 meters distance from them. We gradually crawled closer.

Time was running out. By now it was

high noon and hot. However, we made progress without spooking any tsessebe. At the last bush between us and the animals we stopped and checked the distance with the rangefinder.

“The bull is standing to the left at 38 meters,” Izak whispered. “You will not get closer and you have to wait until he turns quartering away or broadside but you better get ready. It’s now or never, Frank. It’s Showtime!”

It was up to me. I knelt, nocked in the arrow quietly, and set the sight on the correct distance. Still calm, I pulled my bow smoothly to full draw. I angled my upper body a bit to the right for a clear shooting window, and aimed with my sight pin on his vitals.

I could feel my heart beating fast, and it seemed like eternity until the bull stepped to the right and stood quartering away. *I take a deep breath and finally tap the trigger of my release.*

The arrow was on its deadly mission and within a split second penetrated the antelope’s body.

“Yes,” Izak whispered. “The arrow is completely in and you can only see fletches sticking out.” The bull jumped, and together with rest of the herd was running away. We tried to follow his direction before he disappeared between some bushes, then heard nothing more. We were in suspense. After a 20-minute rest we followed the tracks and blood trail from the spot where the arrow had penetrated. At first the trail was clear and easy to follow, but after 50 meters there was no more sign of blood. Happily I had an excellent and experienced professional hunter at my side who is also an expert tracker. He found the tracks of the bull and carefully went forward with me following, when he suddenly stopped at the edge of a bush, shook my hand, and hugged me.

“Congrats, well done my friend. You got a tsessebe!” he said. I was surprised and bewildered.

“Why are you congratulating me?”

“Look around the bush!” he smiled. I did, and there was my fine tsessebe bull. Overcome, I knelt down, and evaluated the magnificent animal. It had again been an incredible and challenging experience with bow and arrow, and finally I was able to take this magnificent animal. After some great pictures we radioed the farmer to pick us up, and when he arrived and saw the bull, the joy was complete - a happy



Happy hunter and a happy PH

farmer, happy professional hunter and happy bowhunter.

Once more a tremendously good hunt with unforgettable impressions and memories together with my friend and PH Izak Vos from Vos Safaris in South Africa. Shoot straight, take care, 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 19 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. ♥

There were plenty of eyes, ears and noses

Equipment:

Bow: Mathews Z7x @ 70 lbs

Arrow: Carbon Express Maxima Hunter 350

Broadhead: Silverflame XL 2-Blade @ 125 grain

Optics: Zeiss Victory Binocular & Nikon Rangefinder

Release: Scott

Camo: Sniper Africa

The rather comical common tsessebe or sassaby (*Damaliscus lunatus lunatus*) is one of five subspecies of African antelope *Damaliscus lunatus* of the genus *Damaliscus* and is most closely related to the topi, korrigum (Senegal hartebeest) and bontebok in the same genus. The name tsessebe is derived from the Bantu Tswana language, “tshesebe”. Able to run at speeds up to 90 km/h, they are found primarily in Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, and South Africa. Males weigh 137 kg and females weigh 120 kg, on average. Their bodies are chestnut brown. The fronts of their faces and their tail tufts are black; the forelimbs and thigh are greyish or bluish-black. Their hind limbs are brownish-yellow to yellow and their bellies are white. Both sexes grow horns - those of the male are generally between 37 and 40 cm, females’ horns

being slightly shorter. For males, horn size plays an important role in territory defense and mate attraction, although horn size is not positively correlated with territorial factors of mate selection. Tsessebe are social animals but declare their territory through a variety of behaviors. Territorial behavior includes moving in erect posture, high-stepping, defecating in a crouch stance, mud packing, shoulder-wiping, and grunting. The most important aggressive display of territorial dominance is in the horning of the ground. Another far more curious form of territory marking is through the anointing of their foreheads and horns with secretions from glands near their eyes. They are grazers that utilize a wide range of grass species, but select the leaf over the stems. They prefer fresh growth, and are attracted to burnt areas.