

BowHunter

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TSESSEBE BOWHUNT



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? Tsessebe (*Damaliscus lunatus lunatus*), also known as the sassaby, is a close relative of the bontebok and belong to the same family as the wildebeest and the hartebeest - all of which are characterized by their comical appearance as a result of their shoulders being higher than the withers. In fact, its entire body looks more clumsy than agile. However, when threatened, this has proven to be one of the fastest antelope in the bushveld of Africa. They can reach a running speed of up to 90 kilometers per hour respectively 56 miles per hour.

It was end of August and I was lucky to be back again in South Africa to hunt with bow and arrow with my PH Izak Vos from Vos Safaris. We were in our cosy hunting camp for a week now on a great farm on the border of the North West close to the Limpopo Province. The property and scenery along the Crocodile River was stunning and the hunting grounds were captivating with some challenging and stony mountains as well as dense bush and open plains.

From time to time during the week we saw a small herd of tsessebe with a major bull, some females, but just a little number of juveniles. Far from the herd we also saw two very young males with clear visible signs of injuries. When

we asked the farmer about it, he said that the herd bull is fighting the male calves to death or exiling them from the herd. He said they will most likely die in the bush due to their injuries or may fall prey to hyenas and other predators. Therefore, the herd did not grow much the last five years and we would do him a favour if we hunted this bull.

No sooner said than done. Our day started with a refreshing morning walk to the area where the "beesters" usually roam and we had seen them before. It was August in South Africa, which means wintertime, and the early morning was quite chilly, but with the splendid sunrise and the warming sun in our faces it was a delightful pleasure. When we

reached the area we calmly made a plan how we wanted to approach and stalk the animals. Even though the herd was small there were plenty of eyes, ears and noses that were much more sensitive and sharp than ours – getting your scent and silhouette in a split second. With the wind in our favour we sneaked closely to a bush where we could hide and see them. We were about 150 meters from them.

We slowly moved forward to the next covering bush always keeping an eye on the antelopes. So far they were all calm and easy. Within roughly an hour we shortened the distance to 100 meters. suddenly they all looked in our direction! We froze in our position behind our sparse cover. After a few minutes it started to hurt from sitting on our haunches. We could not figure out what disturbed them. They started to slowly move away from us. Ok, that's the way the cookie crumbles, we thought. We restarted from the beginning and tried to follow and get closer. Once they were behind some bushes and we were not in their sight, we silently sneaked out behind our cover and stalked closer at a snail's pace in a bent over position to the next available cover.

To make a long story short, the situation as before happens again and again. Meanwhile four hours were gone and

with the high standing sun as well rising temperatures, the challenge got more and more demanding.

All of a sudden, we heard some cracking noises from behind and saw that three giraffes were approaching at about 50 meters from us and most like would smell or see us. Now it was getting difficult! If we got up or moved, we would probably spook them all. Therefore we hid ourselves in a thorny bush and kept dead quite. Luckily the Sniper Africa camouflage hunting clothes were quite thorn-resistant and the hunting gods were also in our favour. The giraffes fortunately turned to the left and wandered off slowly without noticing us. Wow, that was an exciting encounter!

To our surprise and pleasure the tsessebe were still there and did not move away due to the giraffes. However, we still were 100 meters away from them. At a crawling speed we moved forward – slowly but surely.

Time was running out and by now. It was high noon and very warm. 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. Izak whispered, "The bull is standing to the left at 38 meters. You will not get closer and you have to wait until he turns quarter-



Captivating hunting grounds

ing away or broadside. But you better get ready. It's now or never, Frank. It is Showtime!"

Now it was my turn. I moved up slowly on my knees, knocked in the arrow quietly and set the sight on the correct distance. Calmly, 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 pin of my sight on his vitals. I felt my heart beat in my chest and it felt like eternity until the bull stepped to the right and were standing quartering away. 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 penetrated the antelope's body. "Yes," Izak whispered. "The arrow is completely in and you can only see fletches sticking out."

The bull jumped up, kicked, and along with the others of the herd, was all running straight away from us. We tried to follow the run of the bull before he disappeared between some bushes and we did not hear anything anymore. What an excitement!

After a 20-minute rest we followed the tracks and blood trail from the spot where the arrow hit the tsessebe. At first the blood trail was clear and visible and easy to follow but after 50 meters we did not find any blood anymore. Happily I had an excellent and experienced professional hunter at my side that is also a sophisticated tracker. He found the tracks of the bull and slowly but surely we were going forward when Izak suddenly stopped at the corner of a bush and shook my hand, hugged me, and said: "Congrats, well done my friend.

You got a tsessebe!"

I looked quite surprised and bewildered when I asked him: "Why are you congratulating me?" With a broad smile he said: "Look around the bush!" I walked around him and there he was lying behind the bush – my fine tsessebe bull. Steamrolled I knelt down, looked and evaluated this magnificent animal.

It was an awesome and challenging experience to harvest this awesome tsessebe bull with a bow and arrow. After some nice pictures, we radioed the farmer to pick us up. When he arrived and saw the bull the joy was complete – with a happy farmer, happy professional hunter and happy bowhunter.

It was another a tremendously good hunt with my friend and PH, Izak Vos from Vos Safaris in South Africa – with unforgettable impressions and memories.

***Shoot straight, take care, always good hunting,
"Waidmannsheil" and "Alles van die beste".*** ●

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



Happy hunter (right) and PH (left).