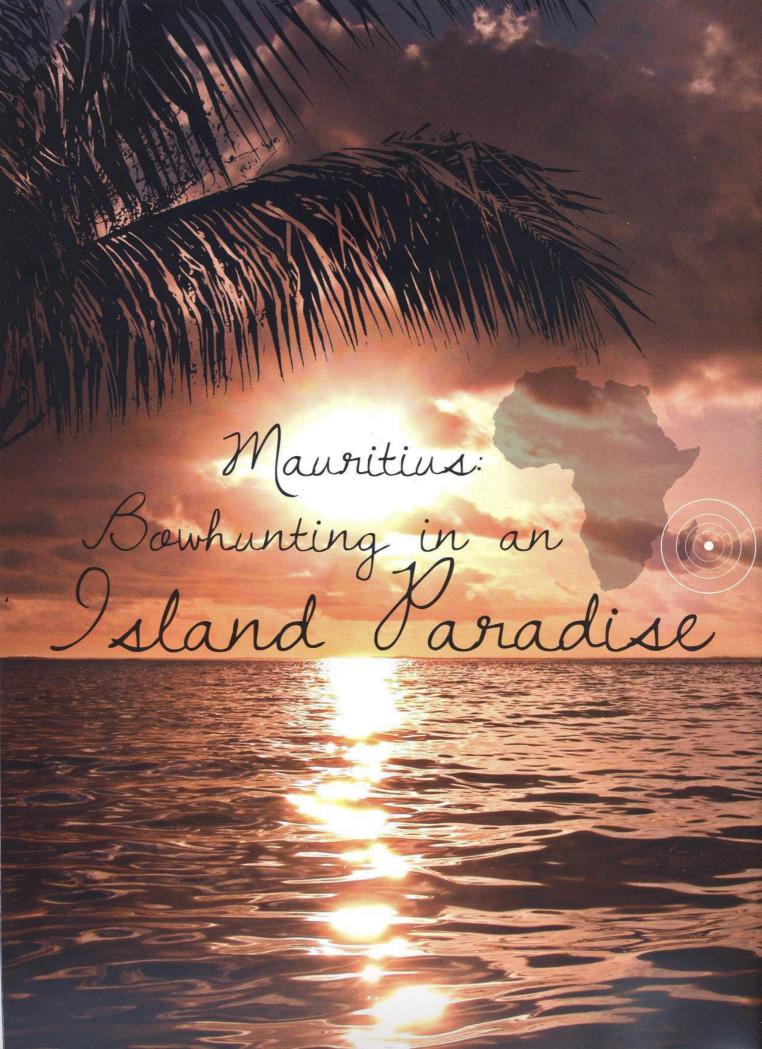
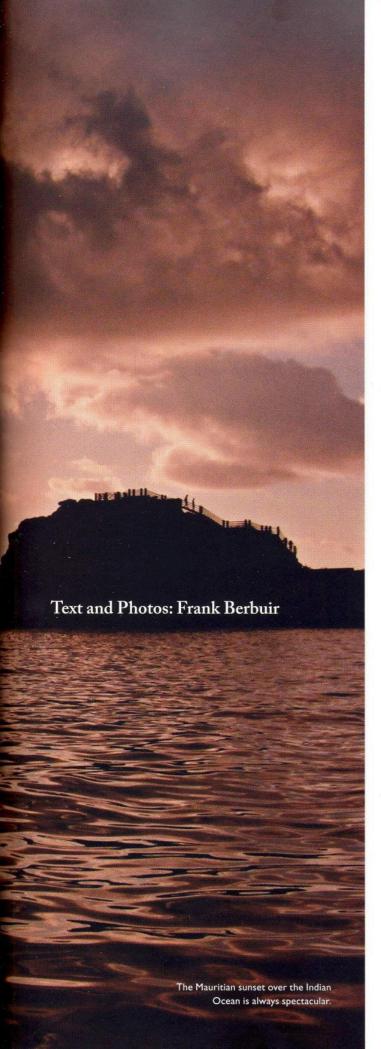
Hunter's Path





Whenever someone mentioned Mauritius I immediately thought of a tropical paradise and vacation destination with white sand beaches and palm trees. It never crossed my mind that there might be a hunting opportunity on such an isolated island in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar, some 1,200 miles from the African continent. That is, until I met Lionel Bethault at a hunting exposition in Germany.

ionel is the founder and owner of Le Chasseur Mauricien, an outfitter, professional hunter, guide, agent, organizer, and passionate hunter with both bow and arrow and rifle. He is an amazing one man show. Originally born in France, he has lived in Mauritius since 2003. He is married to a wonderful Mauritian, and has one son, Lionel, Jr. We had a great conversation at the show, and after getting to know him the idea of making a trip to his five-star resort for a hunt in this Indian Ocean tropical paradise became very interesting. In fact, his descriptions, photographs, and references convinced me, and my non-hunting Missus, to book the Gold Medal Package.

You might wonder what species are available to hunt on Mauritius? The primary species is Rusa deer (cervus timorensis rusa rusa). They were first brought to the island from Java in 1640. Hunting Rusa deer has since developed into a significant island tradition. A male Rusa is a gracious stag with heavy, six-point antlers. The best time to hunt is during the rut, which starts in mid-July and lasts for about two months. It is interesting to note that an aspect of Rusa stags' behavior is to adorn their antlers with tufts of grass, branches, and leaves to make themselves look more impressive. Hunting is mostly done by spot and stalk. The Rusa deer taken on Mauritius are eligible for entry in the SCI and Rowland Ward record books. The island is also home to wild boar, Japanese hare, pheasant, partridge and guinea fowl.

After an eleven hour flight from Frankfurt we landed at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, where Lionel was waiting for us. The sun was shining and it was a comfortable 75° Fahrenheit. The hour drive to the resort led us through several small villages and huge sugarcane fields. The Indian Ocean was to our left and the interesting island mountain scenery was to our right. Enthralled by the beauty we soon arrived at the five-star Heritage Awali Spa & Resort in Bel Ombre, a beautiful property right on the Indian Ocean with a private beach. The resort offers spacious rooms and suites, several swimming pools, bars, restaurants, jewelry and gift stores, a spa, fitness center, tennis and volleyball courts. For those who like to golf there is a perfectly manicured eighteen-hole golf course across the street from the hotel. Our suite was more like a gorgeous and luxurious colonial style home, with our own beach surrounded by pine and palm trees, and it sat just forty yards from the crystal-clear waters of the Indian Ocean. Everyone at the resort is very friendly and speaks English and French.





Top: The best time to hunt is during the rut, when you can observe an abundance of Rusa deer roaming through the woods and meadows.

> Left: The Heritage Le Telfair Resort offers luxury flair in a top-notch location.

Bottom right: Spot and stalk, or walk and stalk, is an ambitious and challenging endeavor on Mauritius.

ollowing the perfect welcome by Lionel and the hotel staff I took the opportunity to accompany him on a drive to the approximately 4,000-hectare Bel Ombre hunting grounds, which are roughly ten minutes by car from the hotel. The comfortable hunting lodge is situated on top of a mountain. Inside a couple of Rusa deer shoulder mounts, some pheasant mounts, and many photographs decorate the walls of the grand lounge and the terrace, where hunters gather for the driven hunts. The terrace provides an awesome view of the hunting area. It is mostly mountainous with steep slopes, meadows, pine trees, palms and subtropical forest with tall and thick bamboo, small creeks, and a 100-foot-high waterfall.

Though I wasn't expecting to hunt I had my Sniper Africa camouflage clothes, boots, bow and arrows with me. My intention was to take some practice shots and to check my equipment before we began hunting the following day. However, after a couple of practice shots that proved my bow made the journey intact, we spotted a small herd of Java deer roughly 800 yards away in the valley. Lionel asked me if I wanted to walk down for a closer look. How could I refuse such an offer? Soon we crossed a small creek and were working our way, uphill and downhill, through dense bamboo forests. Immediately it was apparent that being in good physical shape would be a definite advantage on this hunt.

As we stalked downhill Lionel suddenly stopped. A small herd of around twenty deer was feeding about eighty yards in front of us in a grassy meadow. Behind them was a palm forest. In the group along with several hinds, calves, yearlings, and two-year-olds were three big stags. There was insufficient cover for stalking straight ahead, so we had to take a circuitous route and attempt to approach from the other direction. Backing up as quietly as possible we made it to the adjacent forest, circled past the 100-foot waterfall, and climbed back up the hillside. It took us roughly twenty minutes to get into position

on the opposite side of the browsing stags. Moving at a snail's pace we carefully snuck up the stony slope on our bellies, checking the situation often through our binoculars. The herd was still grazing at about forty-five yards. Using a palm tree as cover Lionel pointed to a big stag and whispered, "forty yards." Promptly I drew back my Elite GT500 bow and aimed at his vitals. Suddenly, however, the stag looked at us and bounded off, taking the other deer with him. We followed the herd for a moment, but when they started running uphill we decided to break off and return to the lodge. That was a nice first encounter and I realized Rusa deer presented a real challenge. That eventful first evening came to a close following a wonderful dinner at the beach bar, surrounded by the melodious sounds of the Indian Ocean.

During our stalk the next morning we saw many hinds and some good stags in several small groups, but were unable to get within bow range before the females saw us, barked, and dashed our hopes. Late in the morning it literally began raining buckets and we had to call it quits for the day.

The following three days were spent enjoying the many attractions that Mauritius has to offer. We relaxed on the beach, visited Port Louis, did an underwater sea walk, watched dolphins, enjoyed lobster, tasted Mauritian rum, and visited Vanilla Crocodile and Turtle Park, with its monkeys, aquarium, and the second biggest insectarium in the world. Despite the good times I couldn't help but think about those big Rusa stags. I was happy when it was time for hunting again.

For my third hunt we started at the southwest corner of the hunting grounds. We crossed a harvested sugarcane field before being swallowed by dense, dark woods with thick subtropical vegetation. Our route took us uphill through fifteen-foot-high bamboo with stalks as thick as drain pipes before entering a mixed forest with heavy brush. We then took cover to glass for deer in the meadow in front of us.

It wasn't long before we spotted hinds, calves, and five stags with trophy-sized antlers in the tall grass. Suddenly, I glassed a good stag with a nice symmetrical rack lying in the grass closer to us than the other deer. The stag was only about forty yards away. This was ideal because no other deer were lying near him. He was actually already within shooting range, but there was no possible shooting lane and not enough space in the brush for me to draw my bow. I had to get closer.

Serpentine-like I crawled forward on my belly inching closer trying to get into a better shooting position. After what felt like an eternity I was twenty-two yards away. Nothing had changed, and the situation was still calm with the stags lying in the grass. I had run out of cover and now the challenge was to get into a kneeling position for a shot. In slow motion I raised my upper body. The stags still hadn't seen me.

My left hand clasped the Gripwerks quilted maple grip, and I slowly brought my 70 lb. bow to full draw. When I was ready, Lionel imitated the sound of a fawn, but it didn't impress either the stags or the hinds. Nothing happened. The deer didn't move. After about







forty seconds I let the bow down slowly. They still hadn't noticed me and a minute later I drew again. This time Lionel roared like a big stag. Although it sounded a bit funny, all the animals were suddenly on their feet. The stag I had targeted unfortunately was facing me. "Stay calm, Frank, hopefully he will turn broadside," I thought. Luckily, he indeed turned left and stood broadside for a few seconds. Before he could vanish, I touched my release and sent my arrow on its lethal journey. The stag jumped up and kicked like a mule before he ran downhill with the others.

My blood pressure at that moment was probably in the highest range on the scale, and I had to sit down to gather my composure. After a few minutes Lionel and I crawled forward on our knees to a slight ledge to peer downhill. The group of deer was standing roughly ninety yards away, close to the edge of the woods. Through our binoculars we checked to see if my stag was with them. It wasn't. We decided to wait forty-five minutes before taking up the trail.

The wait seemed like an eternity, but finally we started to investigate the situation.

With the herd of deer now long gone we searched the point of the shot for the arrow and blood. We couldn't immediately find either. Every hunter knows that this is a sinking feeling, and needless to say I got a little nervous. We scoured the vicinity of the shot intensely and then decided to work our way through the bush not far away from the edge where we had last seen the stag. Then we followed the general path of flight the deer took. After approximately a hundred yards we spotted a dark-brown object lying on the steep slope at the edge of the woods. There lay my trophy Rusa stag!

Lionel congratulated me heartily. We were both more than happy. What an exciting and challenging hunting experience! We took photos in the fading light before we drove back to the hunting lodge to celebrate with a nice cool Mauritian beer.

After a few more days at the beach and sightseeing on the beautiful island, we made one last drive through the Bel Ombre hunting estate. As we drove I relived this memorable hunt and was very happy to have experienced such a fantastic hunt and vacation in a tropical paradise. I would like to thank Lionel and Kathleen for their kind hospitality. Like always, "Waidmannsheil."

Epilogue

n November of 2013, three years after the hunt in this article my wife and I were fortunate enough to return to Mauritius. Once again we had a wonderful time. We were warmly welcomed by Lionel and his family, had a great stay at the Heritage Le Telfair Resort, and enjoyed perfect organization by Le Chasseur Mauricien.

On this trip I was lucky to be able to take my third gold medal Rusa stag with a bow and arrow. The stalk was exciting and physically demanding due to the steep terrain. Stalking in ninety degree Fahrenheit temperatures uphill and downhill, always keeping the wind in our favor, with many detours to prevent spooking females, was extremely challenging. After a full day of stalking we were finally able to get within range of a really old Rusa stag – later we called him 'Methuselah'. The twenty-seven yard shot with my Mathews Z7x bow was true and the great stag went down' quickly, rolling downhill. The second trip to Mauritius was just as exciting as the first. I would recommend this hunt to anyone. For more information contact Lionel Bethault: www.lechasseurmauricien.com

