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# Bowhunting Rusa Deer on the Island of Mauritius

BY FRANK BERBUIR



During a hunting show in Germany a booth offering an attractive combination of hunting and holidays on the island of Mauritius caught my attention.

East of Madagascar, the island of Mauritius lies roughly 1,243 miles from the African continent. Bowhunting on this Indian Ocean paradise out of a 4-star resort and spa sounded very interesting indeed. So I got acquainted with PH and SCI Member Lionel Berthault of Le Chasseur Mauricien. Born in France, Lionel has lived in Mauritius since 2003. A very nice guy, he's also a passionate rifle and bowhunter who started hunting at age six by accompanying his father. At 15, he obtained his French hunting licence and later worked with the French government hunting authorities.

Lionel is the personification of the PH and outfitter, agent and organizer. His descriptions, photographs and references convinced me and my "non-hunting Missus" to book the Golden Medal Package, which offers a trophy eligible for entry into both the SCI and Rowland Ward Record Books.

What, you might ask, can one hunt on Mauritius? There's an old and important tradition there of hunting the rusa deer (*Cervus timorensis rusa rusa*) that were first imported from Java in 1640. Male rusa deer are a bit scraggy but nevertheless a gracious stag with heavy, six-point antlers. During the rut, which starts at the beginning of July and lasts roughly two months, they sometimes "decorate" their antlers with tufts of grass, branches and leaves. European wild boar, hare, pheasant, quail

and helmeted guineafowl are also available.

Our 11-hour flight from Paris took us to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport where Lionel was waiting for us. The sun was shining, and the thermometer read a comfortable 75°F (24°C). The hour's drive to the hotel in his double-cab Toyota led us through small villages and huge sugarcane fields with the Indian Ocean to our left and interesting mountain scenery to our right. We arrived at the Moevenpick Spa & Resort in Bel Ombre, a beautiful complex right on the Indian Ocean, reminiscent of the Taj Mahal, and quickly settled in.

Our luxurious cabin, surrounded by pine and palm trees, looked onto our own beach; 30 metres from our room were the crystal-clear waters of the Indian Ocean – fantastic. Breakfast and dinner buffets, a spa and wellness center, water sports, and an 18-hole golf course five minutes away by taxi – a perfect combination for a hunting holiday with non-hunting friends or family.

That afternoon, I slipped into my Sniper Africa Camo clothes, grabbed my bow, and drove with Lionel to the 3,500-hectare Bel Ombre hunting grounds in the mountains roughly 10 minutes by car from the hotel. There is also another hunting area west of Bel Ombre called Case Noyale, close to the Black River Gorge National Park area. The comfortable hunting lodge, stocked with plenty of tasty Mauritian Phoenix beer, is situated on top of a mountain offering an awesome view from the terrace of where we'd be hunting over the next few days.

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I made some practice shots with my bow to check that everything was all right before we started hunting. The “concession” is mostly mountainous with steep slopes, meadows, pine trees, broad-leafed trees, and subtropical forest with tall and thick bamboo, small creeks, and a 100-foot-high waterfall.

Hunting is only by spotting, walking and stalking – no tree stands or blinds, and absolutely no hunting from the car! Soon enough, we spotted a small herd of Java deer roughly 800 yards away from the lodge in the valley, and decided to walk down and check them out. We crossed a small creek and worked our way, uphill and downhill, through dense stands of bamboo. Good physical condition is definitely an advantage for stalking here.

Suddenly Lionel stopped – two females were lying in the high grass 50 yards in front of us. If they saw us, their barking would betray us. We hid behind a grass-covered hill and he tried to push them along by imitating the fawn distress call. It worked – they moved away. As we continued downhill Lionel stopped again – at 80 metres a small herd of about 20 rusa deer were feeding on the grassland between us and the palm forest opposite – cows, fawns from the previous year, yearlings, two-year-olds, and three big stags with huge antlers. We had to make a wide circle to get closer because they were close to the forest and our sparse cover would not be sufficient for a stalk. Slowly we backed out and made a loop through the thick subtropical forest, past the waterfall, and along the sunken course of a river before we climbed up the slope again.

About 20 minutes later we were opposite where the stags were browsing. Quietly and slowly we sneaked up the stony slope, then lay on our bellies and looked through the binoculars. The herd was still browsing at about 45 yards. We moved behind a palm tree as cover. Lionel pointed to a big stag and whispered, “40 yards.” I didn’t hesitate and drew back my Elite GT500 bow.

At the moment I aimed on his vitals, the stag looked at us and jumped off, taking the others with him. Cautiously I let off the bow. We tried to follow the herd but when they started running uphill, we stopped and returned to the lodge.

The next morning, by sunrise at 6:30 we were on the opposite side of the hunting area where the deer often spend the night. We found a group of 30 animals and stalked them, although it started raining. The rain got worse and we had to pause under a palm tree. By 9:00 a.m. it was raining cats and dogs, so we went back to the hotel for a shower and breakfast. Unfortunately, the weather was not in our favor for the rest of the day.

The next three days we spent at the beach, visited Port Louis, did an underwater sea walk, watched dolphins, and feasted on lobster and Mauritian rum. Then it was time for hunting again.

During the morning stalk we saw females and several good stags but could only get to within 70 yards before the females saw us, barked, and killed

our luck. So we visited Crocodile and Turtle Park, with its monkeys, aquarium and the second biggest insectarium of the world.

The next morning, I was back hunting with similar results. That afternoon, we went to the south-west part of the property, walking through a harvested sugarcane field before being swallowed by dense, dark woods. We crossed a creek where I enjoyed the gurgle of water and the sparse rays of sunlight that found their way through the thick subtropical vegetation. We moved uphill through 15-foot-high bamboo with stalks as thick as drain pipes before entering a mixed forest and heavy brush, then took cover to spot for deer on the meadow in front of us.



There were cows, fawns, youngsters, and five stags with trophy-sized antlers in the high grass. One had a 37-inch rack, which would mean a much more expensive trophy fee than I’d planned. But to his left, a good stag with nice, symmetrical antlers was lying in the grass. This was an ideal set-up because no other deer were lying behind him. We were about 33 metres away, but there was no shooting window and not enough space for me to pull the bow. We decided I should belly-crawl closer on my own, and I moved forward inch by inch to get into a better shooting position.

At a snail’s pace I crawled. After what felt like an eternity, I was now only 20 metres away. Nothing had changed. The stags were still lying calmly in the grass. The challenge was to straighten up to shoot from a crouched kneeling position, sitting on my heels – and I would have no cover. The stags still hadn’t seen me, so I raised my upper body in slow motion and sat on my heels.

My left hand clasped the Gripwerks quilted maple grip and I drew the 70 pounds slowly to full draw. When I was ready, Lionel imitated the sound of a fawn, but it didn’t impress either the stags or females at all – nothing happened. After 40 seconds I let the bow down slowly, always looking at the deer so as to not spook them.

Two minutes later, they still hadn’t noticed me. I drew again and this time Lionel roared like a big stag. It sounded a bit funny, but suddenly all the

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animals were on their feet. The one I aimed at was facing me. "Stay calm, Frank, hopefully he will turn broadside," I thought. The hunting gods were in my favor. He turned left and stood broadside for a few seconds. Before he could walk downhill, I released the trigger of my Scott release and sent the Carbon Express Maxima Hunter arrow with the G5 Tekan II broadhead on its deadly mission.

The stag jumped up and kicked out with his hind legs before he ran downhill with the others. My blood pressure was in a range that cardiologists wouldn't recommend, so I sat down for a moment. We crawled forward on our knees to look downhill and saw the group standing roughly 90 yards away close to the edge of the woods. With the binoculars we checked to see if my stag was with them, but he wasn't there. We decided to wait 45 minutes, which seemed endless. Meanwhile, the animals had left the spot and we searched for the arrow and a blood track.

In spite of intensive searching, we found neither. "Damn, this will be no laughing matter," I thought to myself. We walked back to where I'd taken the shot. Perhaps he had bedded down in the woods. About 100 yards farther we saw a dark-brown object lying on the steep slope. It was not a stone, but my 400-pound trophy rusa stag.

Horrido! Waidmannsheil! Congratulations! My eyes were shining with joy, our delight nearly endless. What an exciting and challenging hunting experience! We made photos in the falling light, and then it started to drizzle. While preparing the animal for a shoulder mount, we saw that my carbon arrow had penetrated both lungs, an invariably lethal shot.

After several more days at the beach and sightseeing on the beautiful island, we made our last game drive through the Bel Ombre hunting estate and I savored this great combination of bowhunting and real vacation. Thanks to all who made this trip happen, especially Lionel and his wife Kathleen. 🐾

About the author:

Frank Berbuir, a German hunter and SCI member, is passionate about the outdoors and hunting – especially bowhunting, which he has practiced for more than 10 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 quality auditor in the automotive industry.

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