

HUNTING IN MOZAMBIQUE

Harry Manners book Kambaku burnt deep into my soul. He, along with others, equally famous, formed a generation of hunters who wrote Mozambique's hunting history, starting out their careers as professional ivory and meat hunters and ending off their careers with the safari industry. In its glory days, Mozambique Safarilandia was one of Africa's biggest safari companies. The civil war of 1972 brought hunting to a grinding halt. This war of independence lasted until the early 1990's and had an absolutely devastating effect of the countries wildlife, conservatively decimating at least 90% of the game population.

After a long hiatus, Mozambique's hunting story has gained a second breath when it re-opened to hunting in the late 1980's and early 1990's. With it have come hunters of a new generation, whereas the circumstances have changed, the senior players in Mozambique are all vastly experienced and hardened professionals, who too will enter into its future legend. Most of them, like their predecessors, have been drawn to Mozambique by the allure of distant and unknown hunting grounds seeking adventure and opportunity.

Providence is the main point of separation between the two generations, Manners and his contemporaries found a veritable game rich paradise. The war had a devastating effect on the wildlife population and the second generation of hunters found mere traces of the game paradise in a vast hinterland. Previously good areas like the Save had their wildlife decimated by the ravages of the war. Fortunately there were still a few pockets of game left, however, nowhere the mother lode . The core habitat is still largely intact and unchanged and the game populations have made a phenomenal recovery but are still nowhere near where they once were. The huge upside of the situation is that few wilderness areas in Southern Africa equal the vast loneliness of Mozambique. For men with vision, the impacted game populations merely represent temporary hiatus as the game populations recover under their care. Mozambique is fast regaining its former deservedly good reputation as a safari destination and will continue to improve with the passing of time.

Any potential client interested in hunting Mozambique needs to understand that they too are pioneers of sorts and as a result, their mindset needs to be adjusted accordingly and they need to have realistic expectations when travelling to recovering areas.

Mozambique's vastness challenges any one mans comprehension and its understanding represents a lifetimes dedication, experience and exposure, this, combined with the present constantly improving circumstances results in fast changing information as game populations rebound and new areas open, which all in all, makes current accurate reporting of the situation virtually impossible as the situation is just too fluid. Based on which, in compiling this chapter I have focused on the three major hunting areas of Tete, Zambezi Delta and Niassa, and with an emphasis of what can be typically expected when hunting them. Just as the Botswana Okavango experience differs from its Chobe experience, so do Mozambique's different areas experiences differ from one another. This needs to be borne in mind- be sure to ob-

tain area specific information when choosing a safari destination in Mozambique, even so, information of areas within areas is critical as even neighbouring concessions experiences differ from one another.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN HUNTING IN MOZAMBIQUE.

ZAMBEZI DELTA

For the purposes of this section, when referring to the Zambezi Delta, we are dealing with Coutada's 10, 11, 12, 14 which collectively cover more than 3200 square miles. From the offset, it needs to be mentioned that this area is unique and the hunting experience differs substantially from the rest of Mozambique. It is bordered on the north by the Zambezi River and by the Indian Ocean to the east. Coutada 10 actually extends to the sea. In my mind, it has always felt closer to a central African experience than a bushveld experience. It is a fine wildlife area and whereas the hunting is good, this area has the potential to return to its exceptional past, where the buffalo population in the late 1970's numbered close on 50 000 animals, in spite of in excess of 10 000 buffalo being shot per annum to feed the surrounding sugar estates.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The players operating in the delta have remained constant with exception of Coutada 12 which is now under the control of Zambezi Delta Safaris, thus making the operators of all four areas now very experienced in the ways of the Delta. Coutada 12 had previously seen a lot of different operators and had a bad run. The area should benefit immensely from the local knowledge that has been gleamed through the hard experience of the delta's most longstanding safari operators. The new owners inform me that whereas most hunting in the delta commences from around June, that 12 needs to be handled differently when hunting buffalo and elephant for the simple reason that, of the four blocks, it is the only one which does not have access to the flood plains which hold the large permanent herds of buffalo that make the other 3 blocks such a sure thing for buffalo. In essence it is a late season area which should not be hunted for buffalo before September- the area needs to be dry to work. Here you are reliant on shooting the herds of forest buffalo which inhabit the concession. They are damn difficult to track, judge trophies and get a decent shooting opportunity when in the depths of the forest and as a result, bulls are mostly shot very late afternoon when they emerge from the forests to feed on the dambos. Good local knowledge of the area, combined with a reduced quota that the new owners have opted for, will give you a reliable hunt. Last year the then operators of 12 sold 23 buffalo hunts. In addition they started hunting too early and capped it off by closing the season to soon. Mark Haldane has committed to a reduced quota of 8 buffalo for the next few years. This should result in a lot less pressure on the area from which it will benefit.

Independent hound pack operator, Theunis Botha, who has hunted 12 extensively, regards 12 as the best concession for leopard in the delta, and while on that topic, hunting leopard in the Zambezi Delta is such a specialized activity, it needs its own dedicated write up.

GETTING THERE

Getting there generally involves three options, the first being catching a commercial flight to Beira and then catching a charter flight of roughly 40 minutes to 1 hour to the concession, the second option being chartering a light aircraft from Lanseria airport to the concession area, clearing customs along the way. The last option involves catching a flight to Beira and then driving to the hunting areas, this is not ideal as the drive is long (9hours) and the roads are dangerous, and will leave you exhausted.

ACCOMODATION

The Zambezi Delta sees a consistent trend of permanent safari camps used in conjunction with fly camps to hunt the extreme regions of the concession, with specific reference to permanent fly camps being situated on the swamp edge in coutada's 10 and 11. In addition to Coutada 11's main camp 'Mangari' they recently revamped the old Portuguese hunting camp 'Champalimo', which served as Renamo headquarters during the civil war. This camp is now known as 'Ngasi' camp and is consists of permanent dwellings.

Coutada 12 has two permanent camps of brick and thatch, the main camp which sleeps 12 and a satellite camp Nyagu which sleeps 2 clients.

Coutada 10 have a wonderful permanent camp that sleeps in addition to a permanent fly camp at the swamp edge built next to the famous Swiss hunter, Gustave Guex's old camp which he used when supplying the Sena estate with meat rations (he shot in excess of 10 000 buffalo using a .318 Westley Richards and also holding the dubious distinction of having been tossed on 6 different occasions by wounded buffalo and living to tell)

Coutada 14' has a single permanent camp situated on the swamp

CLIMATE & TERRAIN

Due to its proximity to the coast, this is an area of high humidity which has a tendency to exacerbate the temperatures. This is a very wet area and many areas within the region cannot be accessed in conventional safari vehicles for at least 6 months of the year. The regions annual rainfall falls between the 45-55 inch range, in addition to which there is an abundance of water from the many rivers and streams on their journey coast wards. A lot of time on the early season hunts will be spent extracting stuck vehicles. The months of June to August are the most pleasant with temperatures ranging between 75-79 degrees Fahrenheit. The early season is characterised by being wet, having reduced visibility and plumes of smoke reaching skywards as the many grassfires rage, set in an attempt to open the visibility through the rank, 10ft high elephant grass. These burns form a second important role in drawing animals to the green, lush regrowth. . September starts getting hot and from there on its gets pretty damn hot with temperatures in excess of 100 degrees Fahrenheit, whereas this may be the

downside, the upside to the situation is the vastly improved visibility as a result of all the burning combined with a lot of trees having dropped their leaves.

The area is extremely flat and low lying and there is a tremendous range in the vegetation, varying from deciduous miombo, dry forest bleeding into gallery forest which extends like fingers into the numerous dambo's as one heads coast wards, followed by Borasus and Mlala palm savanna and finally into the flood plains themselves, with their papyrus and saw grass choked watercourses, small lakes and near stationary rivers as they make their sluggish way seawards. Incidentally, the Mlala Palm plays a pivotal role in the rural Mozambicans life in providing him with a ready source of alcohol (and joy) known as Mlala wine, the plants are tapped (bled) into vessels ranging from discarded coke cans to half coconuts, the sap of which forms a very nutritious drink when fresh but is generally more appreciated in its fermented and more potent form, giving a very noticeable glazed shine to the complexion of its appreciators.

GENERAL HUNT INFORMATION

Hunting Leopard in the Zambezi Delta

By Theunis Botha

Anyone choosing to hunt leopard in the Zambezi Delta needs to give special consideration to using a trained pack of hounds should they wish to attain any degree of success. The reason being that in addition to the leopard being targeted over baits with gin traps by poachers, there is a proliferation of prey species, most of it taking the form of red duiker, suni, civet cats, warthog , bushpig, olive baboons, oribi, bush buck, reedbuck and cane rats to name a few. I believe it is safe to say that a leopard is incapable of travelling more than a couple of hundred yards without bumping into one of the abovementioned species. Taking these two factors into account, the leopard here are notoriously difficult to bring into a bait and even harder to keep on one. Quite simply, if you want one of these beautiful, heavy set forest leopard, you need a good pack of hounds.

None of the resident outfitters own their own hound packs, rather, they contract the services of professional hounds men. The client must understand that this is charged as a separate hunt fee, not a kill fee, and it will be paid to the pack owner irrespective of whether or not a cat is successfully hunted. This is in addition to the cost of the safari and runs in the region of \$4-5000.

Once the decision has been made to use a pack, it needs to be understood is that, due to extremely trying conditions, the pack must really know its oats. Of critical importance, the pack must be a pure leopard pack in order to negotiate the obstacle of numerous other and lesser feline distractions such as civet cats and genets. Hunting the Zambezi Delta with big game hounds represents a very special challenge for all hounds men that attempt to hunt in this wonderful coastal rainforest.

It is a tropical area with high humidity early in the season (80% and more), and heavy dew and mist during the night. Later in the season it becomes bone dry with huge forest fires which sweep through the area. The end of the season sees the beginning of the new rainy season with one tropical low pressure storm after the other. All this has a huge affect on how hounds can be used effectively.

Hounds are relative newcomers on the scene in Mozambique. All pioneers had hunting dogs and hounds that they lost as soon as they came north of the Orange River due to disease, snakes and crocodiles. With modern medicine hounds have now spread north through the billary and tick infested hunting grounds of Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia to the tsetse fly ridden northern Mozambique.

Using scent hounds to track leopard is one of the most misunderstood methods of hunting today. People immediately think of a pack of dogs tearing the leopard apart. Scent hounds rarely make contact with the leopard, and are used as tracking aids bringing the leopard to bay or treeing it, so that the hunter that is following on foot can get a clear shot. Like bird dogs, scent hounds have been bred for centuries to be shot over.

We started to hunt the Mozambique Delta in year 2000; it was mostly an experimental hunt to see if it is doable. We arrived to be faced by numerous problems. The leopard did not come to bait, they were used to being baited and gin trapped by poachers over the years. The roads are overgrown in grass and leaves thus it is very difficult to see tracks.

We solved problems as they arose. The tsetse fly was so bad in many areas that sometimes the hounds would run back to the vehicle and hide in the back. This we solved by hunting during the night and by insect proofing the backs of our Land Cruisers. To be able to hunt at night we had to have very steady and game proof hounds that we could trust without being able to see them work. The forest floor is crawling with small suni, Blue Duiker, Giant Forest Rats and Civet Cats by the thousands. All this made it more difficult for the hounds' man to keep his hounds true on leopard, not to talk about monkeys and baboons. This made it difficult for hounds from other predator packs to adapt to the leopard only hunting style that is needed.

Due to the lack of roads our clients have to be very fit and tenacious to follow the hounds on foot into the most remote areas of the rainforest during the night. The big problem here was how to navigate back to the vehicles after the leopard has been shot. The whole hunting party invariably ended up being lost after every hunt, with long debates between trackers and hunters of where the vehicles had been left hours ago. Garmin saved the day on many occasions.

We run packs of four to twelve hounds per pack, depending on what the scenting conditions look like. I like to run my packs a little on the bigger side, up to twelve hounds. This gives the hounds the edge when they are working big male leopards. The darkness also made the leopards very brave and aggressive, which made them very difficult to tree and keep treed. They would rather fight on the ground than

tree. The noise generated from one of these running battles between a big male leopard and the dogs in the pitch darkness will send shivers up your spine as you follow behind, waiting for the leopard to lose its nerve and tree.

The climate and conditions also had a very negative affect on scent. Scent being what the hounds can smell and cannot smell. It took me years of frustration to realise the profound effect of atmospheric pressure on the scent. High pressure is the hounds' man's best friend forcing scent to lie low where it is easily reachable by the hounds. A low pressure on the other hand forces the scent to rise above where the hounds can reach it. We have on numerous occasions witnessed our hounds losing a fresh leopard trail due to a low pressure front coming in from the east coast. I once saw a leopard run across the road and offloaded all my hounds to find that they could not smell anything except my old strike dog, Flippie, on top of my dog box; he could smell the cat three metres up in the air, but lost the scent as soon as I offloaded him onto the ground. As the low pressure went past and the pressure started to rise again the scent came back down and the hounds could follow the leopard once more.

The other problem that we faced was heavy dew in the early morning hours. I ran a big male leopard on the limit between Coutada 11 and Coutada 12 when the dew started. I had the cat up and running and it was a matter of minutes before we would have had him. It sounded as if someone had turned the volume down on the hounds as the dew came in. They eventually went completely quiet and lost all scent.

The forest leopards are very at home in the top of the trees. The trees are very high with dense canopies, lots of vines and a whole world of hiding places. It sometimes takes hours to find the leopard in the treetops. 90% of the leopard we shot ended up being treed in Pangapanga forest. These trees are barer and the grass below them is head high. For some reason this is the leopard's habitat. I don't know why but a possibility might be the abundance of red duiker found here.

We also found quite a lot of spoors on the many winding rivers that go out onto the floodplains. Another favourite place for leopard was the Shona like depressions filled with water that was used by all the game to come and drink, you would invariably find a big male staking out one of these waterholes as his own. Some other areas for big toms were on the edge of the floodplains in the long grass and thickets. This terrain suited the leopard very well; he can hide in the tunnels of the vegetation, which makes it difficult for the hounds to put enough pressure on the leopard for it to tree.

Over the years we have done quite a few successful bow hunts. The Erickson family, fantastic hunters, shot numerous leopards with bows over our hounds. For leopard hunting with bows the hunter needs to be able to take very long shots. The reason for this is that the trees are very high and this increases the distance between the hunter and the leopard, secondly, bearing in mind that a bow does not kill a cat instantly, if you are standing either directly under the tree or very near to it when shooting, you have no reaction time to sort a charge out if the cat comes down and, in all likelihood, you be on the receiving end of a good scratching. (Having already been mauled twice, Theunis is not up for testing the third time lucky theory. Speaking of which, having read numerous accounts of hunters wrestling wounded leopards

over the years, I asked Theunis how he fared in this regard. He responded by saying that you should go home, find a housecat and try killing it barehanded and then multiply this by 50 (This should give you a pretty fair indication of what you are up against). The ideal situation is a treed cat that is looking upwards as if to try and get even higher up (read further away) as this is a good indicator of the cat's frame of mind. A cat staring intently at you as you approach is a different proposition entirely and should set the alarm bells ringing. In a nutshell, the near maximum effective shooting distance of a compound bow is about as close as you really want to get and a recurve bow's effective distance is too close, placing you well and truly into the danger zone.

We do not like to take female leopard with the hounds. We will always try and make sure that we cast our hounds on a male track. We can also call the hounds off the cat if we see that it is a female or a small leopard that we would not like to shoot. This is not a preferable method because it places both the hunters and the hounds in danger. That is why, after the last 20 years of hunting leopard, I established an accurate method of judging the size of a leopard based on a system of measuring the stride length and track size that enables me to calculate the weight of the leopard. This is done using a combination of track size, toe size, stride and body width.

As with all trophies, anyone can tell a big cat track but very few people can tell you how big the cat actually is. Being able to accurately establish this before releasing the hounds is of critical importance prior to releasing the hounds. It has to be on a shootable cat. Bearing this in mind, I began measuring the vital information before we shot the leopard and then I weighed the leopard afterwards.

Track length

10cm + indicates a big male, 9,5cms is a shootable male but one needs to look at the toe size and imprint and a track of 8cm or less in length is a young male or female.

Body/ Stride size

This is the measurement between the tracks, centre to centre (needs to be illustrated with a drawing) 43" plus- this is a huge male which will weigh between 83-86kgs. A 40" stride will give you a big male weighing between 70-80kgs. A 38" stride will give you a male in the 55-65kg class and a 35" stride will be that of either a small male or a large female in the 45-55 kg class.

Body Width

If you are measuring the stride of a small male or big female and you are not sure the gender of the cat, then the body width will show you what it is. A distance of 18-20cm between two front feet is a male, less than 18cm between the two front tracks is a female and should not be hunted.

Toe Length

Atrophy male will have a toe length of 3 cm. the heavier the male, the more prominent the toe imprint.

When looking at an 8,5cm track you must check the toes, if the toes are smaller than 3cm then the cat will weigh approx 45 kgs. A cat with a 9cm track and 3cm toe will translate to a shootable 55kg cat. the stride on such a cat will be between 38-39". The stride being the distance between the centre of the front two track imprints and the back tracks. If a cat has been feeding off either a bait or a kill, his weight can be up by about 15%. Leopard shot off tracks at the end of a full moon phase will weigh less as result of the difficult hunting conditions due to brightness of the moon.

For some reason I found most leopards on the higher elevations of 100m or more above sea level. It seemed like the bigger toms would venture out on the lower lying areas in the late afternoon, but they always returned to the higher elevations when we tracked them.

The area being extremely challenging to hunt made us resort to some interesting measures. I did a hunt for Jan du Plesis (Jan Tier) where we nearly worked the client to death. We had 46 baits out and for some reason we could not find a single track in the 14 day hunting period. We were feeding Civets and Water Mongooses with all our baits. The lack of sleep turned us into zombies that were not doing anything coherent. On the last day before the client had to leave one of the trackers suggested that we visit the old tribal chief of the area. We got there and the old chief immediately suggested we do a ceremony with their forefathers' spirits. The ceremony entailed asking these spirits for help in finding a cat on the clients last night. We were seated and the spirits were invoked. The chief did this by offering them tobacco, beer, maize and sugar. Half way through the ceremony his wife reminded him that he should call upon the in-laws' spirits as well which he promptly did. He ended the ceremony by taking a sip of beer and spitting it out on the client's gun. We left him feeling much better knowing that both sides of the family supported us for tonight's hunt. We again did our bait run, checking all 46 baits, with no luck. As we returned to camp we drove past the chief's village and my one dog, Jackie, barked as she picked up the scent of a leopard from the back of the unimorc. We immediately stopped and started looking for tracks. Jan, who is an excellent tracker found half the imprint of a pad on the side of a mole heap. This was enough for us to cast the hounds and we were off. We shot our leopard 7 am the next morning and the clients charter flight left at 9 am to Johannesburg. To say the least this resulted in some serious festivities in camp, which left us with our livers worse for wear the next morning.

The biggest leopards we found at Coutada 12 and the biggest one we ever shot was with Bahati Safaris. I found that the Zambezi Delta had an abundance of Leopards with healthy balance between males and females. The only factor that will destroy this is the encroachment of people on the hunting reserves. As long as we can control poaching and encroachment effectively, Mozambique will always have a bright hunting future.

GENERAL HUNT INFORMATION

BUFFALO. The delta has fantastic buffalo herds and whereas you run a good chance of finding a forest herd, in all likelihood, you will head for the swamps for you buffalo, safe in the knowledge that you will get your opportunity. This is true of any hunt booked in the area other than Coutada 12, which, as mentioned, does not have access to the swamps. With exception of Coutada 14, the main camps are generally situated away from the swamp and entail a 2-3 hour drive to the swamp edge. Both 10 & 11 run fly camps on the swamp edge. 10's camp is next to the ruins of the famous hunter Gustave Guex's old camp. From here if you are hunting in either 10 or 11 you will debus and then get into the amphibious Argo craft, which will take you on a bumpy 1-2 hour journey into the heart of the swamps where the large resident herds are found. Coutada 14 opt for a more traditional and rigorous approach whereby you use mokoro's and foot to get into the buffalo herds, this is not for the faint hearted and can probably be likened to the rigours of a African foot safari combined with Alaskan bugs and quite a bit of water thrown in for good measure. Regardless of which area you hunt, you will have a hell of an experience.

The area is extremely flat and devoid of trees and the buffalo herds are located by glassing for the ever present flocks of cattle egrets. Fortunately, there is always a constant, fairly robust breeze blowing off the coast, which not only assists in making the approach to the buffalo easy, but also keeps the bugs at bay and helps cool you down, this is welcome indeed as the swamps in late season can be hot. Essential kit is a wide brimmed hat, long trousers, gloves to prevent being cut by the saw grass and fast draining footwear that provides good ankle support, a bug mask in your kit wont hurt either. The area can be very difficult underfoot as in places the mud dries hard to the pock mark/holes made by passing herds of buffalo & elephant.

Despite all the hardships, the buffalo make up for this and some!. You will see lots of buffalo. There are conservatively 8000 buffalo in the swamps, and more importantly, due to the terrain, they are accessible. Testament to this is that very few hunts go past the first day in the swamp without a client either shooting his buffalo or getting opportunity to do so. Once the herd/egrets have been spotted, the stalk is planned and the approach is made on foot. In these situations, the herd will either be resting or feeding. Within the tall reeds and vegetation there are wonderful open areas of short cropped grass which enable the hunters to view the entire herd. Closing with the herd is normally accompanied by a few adrenalin pumping moments as egrets flight up right at you feet followed shortly thereafter by a buffalo crashing heavily away from you through the reeds as you cross the many meandering rivers/ watercourses which make their way to the sea.

It must be said that the large buffalo population, combined with the terrain in which they are found and the constant breeze which blows makes this a phenomenal bow hunting venue. The vultures know this too, and if one looks into the heavens, you are sure to see the attendant vultures circling in lazy arc's as they follow the hunter, often more confident of the outcome of the hunt than the hunter himself. This has come to be a Pavlov's Dog learned association. These birds can be of great assistance in locating a dead buffalo, as they generally find it before you do and descent in their hundreds, where they all come from and how they get there so fast remains a mystery, however, it is safe to say that you will slaughter your buffalo to an audience of a few hundred of these birds who will sit 50 yards distant watching you

every move until such time as you depart whereupon they descend upon the remains en masse. The happy, but weary party will then begin the journey back to the swamp edge for a nights deserved rest.

The forest buffalo are somewhat of a different proposition. Local knowledge will dictate known areas which the herds are frequenting, safe in the knowledge that the buffalo will be using the open dambo's to graze. This is mostly done at night but occasionally the herd will enter these dambo's late evening, thus presenting the hunter with his opportunity. The herds can be tracked in the forests but it is extremely difficult to select a trophy under these conditions as in most cases you only see parts of various animals.

ELEPHANT. This area produces beautiful long ivory in the 45-60Lb class with the occasional bull approaching 70lbs. The best time to hunt elephant is late season and not before August. This is the dry season when the elephants migrate en masse into the swamps, where at times, there can be in excess of 400 elephants in the swamp with a number of shootable bulls there at any given time. For some reason the elephant found here are not huge in body and probably quite similar to the Tanzanian elephant found to their north.

The swamps are truly vast and regular use of aerial surveillance is used to locate the general area in which the elephant are congregating, GPS coordinates taken, followed by a return to the area the following day in an argo to pick up where one left off. This generally takes place as the hunters fly from Beira in the hunting area, and along with the hundreds of buffalo which are spotted from the air, which in addition to being a wonderful spectacle, this adds a real sense of excitement and anticipation to the hunt.

If you go after an elephant in the forest, you definitely have got nerves of steel as this is very, very close quarter stuff. Importantly, you must resign yourself to the fact that you need to forget any trophy expectations which you may have, as in these instances, the chances of the elephant choosing you are probably just as good as you choosing it. If a small elephant or the wrong elephant is shot/ your guide shoots the elephant in self defence you will have to grin and bear it.

CROCODILE. There are two options here, the first is to hunt the crocodile within the concession you are hunting on one of the many rivers or pans, the second being a day trip to the Zambezi river for hippo and crocodile. As a general rule however, if you want a big crocodile, a trip to the Zambezi will be required. Realistically, no one really goes to these areas specifically to hunt a hippo or crocodile and they are generally shot as an afterthought once the main objective has been fulfilled. Whatever your choice, it must be remembered that if you are going to take this seriously then you will need to do it early season (June – August) when the water is at its coldest. Past this, the crocodiles do not come out to bask in any fashion that could be described as reliable. The Zambezi River produces crocodile in the 13-14' class.

LION. This area at present is very poor for lion and most of the operators within the region have either placed a self imposed moratorium on lion hunting or quite simply, do not take it too seriously. Every season sees one or two lion being shot, the truth be told, this is either

done at night with a territorial recording or by accident. Whichever way you look at it, there is no degree whatsoever of certainty and should you happen to shoot a trophy male in this region you can consider yourself fortunate indeed. I have no doubt that this is merely a temporary situation, as there is no reason why the lion population will respond to the very healthy antelope and buffalo populations, thus getting their numbers up to being huntable.

PLAINS GAME

SPECIALITIES. For me, this area has a few real jewels, reasons in themselves to visit this wonderful area. Grouping them, I would place the hunting of suni, red duiker, nyala and chobe bushbuck in an absolute league of their own and something to be experienced. The trophy quality of these species is unbelievable and the opportunities abundant. These species, and others, fall within a similar habitat, suni prefer an open understorey within the forests, red duiker, love the fringes and nyala and bushbuck will be found in the dambo's/ pans in the late afternoon. Within this same habitat you will also find sable, lichtensteins hartebeest, livingstones eland, waterbuck , warthog, bushpig, oribi, common reedbuck, southern bush duiker and blue duiker. What is really great about this hunting is its relaxed but yet action filled pace. This is a place to really enjoy the safari, whilst doing some great hunting. The only area which does not really offer this is 14 which is more of a specialist buffalo/elephant area- not to say that they do not have good game, its just not as good as 10,11 or 12. All permits in Mozambique need to be purchased up front. Given this situation, a lot of people find choosing the smaller the smaller stuff a bit confusing, it is also fairly costly, and based on this the client normally opts for 2-3 of the smaller species, fortunately, Mozambique classifies all of the small antelope as Cabrito's and can be shot on the same licence. Please remember to use solids on these small antelope as expanding bullets out of high velocity rifles do the most amazing things to them. You cant go wrong with a .375 with solids as a lot of the time you will also be shooting through brush. Don't shoot them on the shoulder either if given the choice unless you have a damn good taxidermist or enjoy amputee mounts.

This hunting begins the minute you leave camp in the morning as red duiker are found on the roads and their edges, and depending on the route chosen for the day, you will either return to camp for lunch or take a chop box with you and have lunch in the field followed by a siesta to pass the midday hours. The vegetation is spectacular and varied as you pass through tropical forest with the climax canopy intact towering above you its numerous lianas draped untidily which then turns into gallery forest interspersed with grassland, and dambos, to a mosaic of deciduous miombo taking you right up to the palm savanna with its towering borasus palms which precede the swamp edge. As an indication of numbers, area 11 has close on 1500 sable on its own. There are approximately 2500 waterbuck along the swamp edges within the concessions and of the 15 nyala bulls taken last year in 11, 8 went over the magical 30" mark, with the best bull being a spectacular 32". Speaking of which, very rarely is a suni of below 4" shot and the red duiker are of equal quality.

The sable quality is not great but you will shoot a good solid bull in the 36" + class, but bulls exceeding 40" are the exception and not the rule, still, you will have a damn good hunt and an animal to be proud of. Tsessebe are good, so are the waterbuck and eland, reedbuck are

average and oribi are poor. Bushpig are thicker than the fleas on a mangy kraal dog and you will literally find a sounder under every pile of lodged grass. The area produces some beautiful warthog which are surprisingly heavy in body.

A word of caution needs to be made here, as the early season plains game hunt is not nearly as good as a mid August and onwards hunt. In a single word- Grass!. June still finds the region very wet with the resultant grass and vegetation really limiting visibility. As the season progresses the national sport changes from playing soccer to starting veld fires, which is a good thing, because not only does it open up the visibility, the re-growth also acts as a magnet in drawing the game out of the depths of the concession areas. It must be remembered that due to the vastness of the concessions and the limited infrastructure within them, that any fire started generally is in close proximity to one of the hunting tracks which helps to concentrate the game and make it more accessible.

Another caution is that the Marromeu is very wet early season and this renders a lot of the hunting tracks either inaccessible or borderline marginal which results in your hunting vehicle getting stuck on a regular basis, especially if you are hunting in the vicinity of the swamp edges. Expect to get stuck at least once a day on an early season hunt, don't let this bother you as your staff will get you out of the situation and at the safari end you will still have shot your animals, getting stuck or not.

Anti Poaching Initiatives

The delta concessions have done wonderful job in combating poaching. The single biggest problem being the extensive use of gin traps which are made to the most horrendous proportions using the truck leaf springs from the numerous wrecks scattered throughout Marromeu and the surrounding area. These traps are capable of holding anything from a suni to a full grown buffalo bull. The best policies are those which include the local communities. Coutada 11 employ a 22 man anti poaching squad which is broken down into 4 units , each unit being drawn from one of the 4 villages in the area. They keep their area clean of poaching, get paid for doing so, and get meat if doing a good job. Collectively, they have removed over 1800 gin traps in 4 years in Coutada 11 alone. Rewards are paid for traps brought and these are then offered for sale to the clients as a part means to finance the anti-poaching initiatives .