



# Newsletter

Featured Animal

Bushbuck

*Tragelaphus scriptus*

VOLUME ISSUE

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## SUNSET BUSHBUCK

The blue wildebeest bull stepped clear, 80 yards out, his body glistened in the afternoon light. He was completely unaware, his gnarled horns spreading significantly past his ears, he was big, a fantastic trophy. Boyd steadied himself on the sticks, ready to shoot, waiting for my signal. My mind raced, last afternoon, the hunt was almost successful, just one more trophy, the experience about complete. "Leave him Boyd", I stuttered, hardly believing as I uttered the words, simultaneously standing up before I could change my mind, watching as the startled beast snorted and tore away into the thick Eastern Cape bushveld. Mixed emotions taunted me as we walked back to the pick up truck, it was after all not my hunt, Boyd wanted a bushbuck, from the outset of the hunt, his goal was the elusive thicket dweller.

We had hunted the mountain grassveld before changing camps to the valley bushveld, a thick almost impenetrable tangle of branches and thorns, with almost no visibility. Boyd already had an impressive list of trophies, all except one-his bushbuck. Winter frontal systems with their lashing of rain and cold air had blasted the southern part of South Africa and coupled with a good season and plenty of food in the thickets meant that the shy bushbuck did not need to leave the shelter of the thick bush. Days we had hunted the kloofs and valleys, between rain showers we glassed sun soaked spots, watching for a glimpse of a ram sunning himself in the weak winter sun.

Back at the truck we drove along silently, disbelief that I had passed up a great opportunity. As we reached a lonely rock outcrop overlooking a deep valley that cut steeply down to the Fish River, we both knew that this was the last throw, the sun was slowly sinking towards the horizon. The weather had settled into the perfect winter afternoons so common in the Eastern Cape after the frontal storms had passed. Quietly we found perches affording views down the steep valley below, gaps below the rocky ledges offering scant glimpses of grassy patches between the thick bush. Thoughts tumbled along as the setting sun bathed the valley in a golden light, bushbuck time was fast approaching. As a youth our main hunting was for bushbuck and to this day it is still my preference. As I enjoyed the view and scenery, I reminisced how my Dad always taught us patience, hunting bushbuck in the afternoon was a lesson in patience, about quietly waiting, making sure you are placed and absolutely still well before "bushbuck time", the period when the sun disappears and it gets dark, when they start to move about and feed. We all watched possible spots, I concentrated on a narrow pathway under the rocky outcrop. Almost magically a ram appeared, the pathway going from empty to having a beautiful dark ram at the blink of an eye, quietly feeding along. I don't know how long the ram ing along in the late afternoon. A low whistle caught Porta, my trackers attention and he quickly brought Boyd closer. We positioned Boyd and waited, the ram obscured behind the brush as he fed along the pathway. The light was fading, would we get enough time? The ram fed behind a bush, we waited, light fading as fast as our hope, had he slipped away unseen? The thick valley bushveld provided the ultimate cover for the ram. Just as we were about to give up hope, the ram stepped clear and Boyd's .30-06 was on target. Boyd collected his Bushbuck, a fantastic trophy, the gamble was good, this time.

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## Bushbuck – Fact File

Many will recognize that the Bushbuck is the emblem that adorns the Hunt The Sun logo, this is with good reason as I consider it the ultimate of all Southern African game. To this day I only need to see a picture of a ram for it to stir up memories, days of beautiful winter afternoons, gatherings of family and friends at hunts, conversations around tables groaning under good food and stories, told by wise old men! We would hang around the fire, listening to the day's fun again being recounted spiced liberally by the inverse ratio of how full the bottle on the counter was, stories of how he missed the ram, or successfully shot it, comparing it to a Botswana buffalo or lion hunt, awakening dreams of exotic destinations. As the evening grew later we would quietly sit, remaining as inconspicuous as possible lest we were sent to bed. Finally exhausted we would be sent to bed, to dream dreams of big black rams falling to our shots. Every young boy aspired to the day when he would too be given the nod, allowed to take his position as hunters, until finally the day too would arrive. Trophies were never measured by horn lengths, but by the weight of the ram, 160 pounds on the hoof was a monster! Legendary rams were named, wily animals with cunning attributes that managed to evade the hunters again and again.

Other days would be spent hunting bushbuck with dogs, a trained pack of hounds and beaters that would drive the buck out of the thickets to carefully placed positions that were historically etched into the history of the area.

Lots were drawn for positions, the bank manager always seemed to be in good luck! The baying dogs would drive the rams past the guns, dogs were and are still revered in certain parts of the Eastern Cape, considered more valuable than gold. Good dogs, are still thought to bring their master a ram!

If I had to choose only one species to hunt, it would be without doubt, the bushbuck, hunted in the various terrains of the Eastern Cape, if only for the memories, the smell of hoppers gun oil and the bragging rights after a good shot.

### Physical Characteristics

The bushbuck has geometrically shaped white patches or spots on the most mobile parts of the body the ears, chin, tail, legs and neck. Males or rams (which have horns) make the markings more visible during highly ritualized displays during which they arch their backs and walk in a tense, high-stepping gait. These displays, used for impressing and intimidating females and rival males, usually make fighting unnecessary. The hierarchy among males is age-based; as they get older and the chestnut color changes to dark brown, the white markings becoming more conspicuous.

Only male rams have horns, which are between 10 and 20 inches long and spiral straight upwards.

	Male	Female
Mass	42kg	28kg
Shoulder height	79cm	69cm
Mating season	April/May	
SCI min	31	
Rowland Ward min	15	

At 10 months, young rams sprout horns that are strongly twisted and at maturity form the first loop of a spiral. Other antelopes with spiral horns are sitatungas, bongos, elands and kudus.

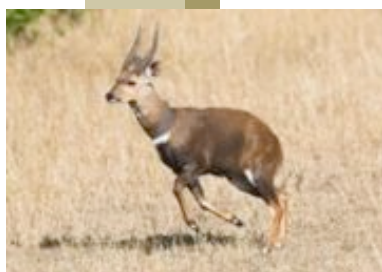
### Habitat

Bushbucks are forest-edge antelopes. They live in habitat including rain forests, montane forests, forest-savanna mosaics and bush savannas.

### Behavior

Bushbuck are basically solitary animals. Most group associations, except for a female and her latest young, are very temporary and only last a few hours or days. These antelopes have small home ranges, which may overlap with those of other bushbuck. Even so, there still is not much contact as adult individuals prefer to stay by themselves in their separate areas. Mature rams usually go out of their way to avoid contact with each other.

Usually they are crepuscular and are most active during early morning and part of the night, bushbucks become almost entirely nocturnal in areas where they are apt to be disturbed frequently



## Fact File cont.....

during the day. When alarmed, individuals react in a variety of ways. If they are in forest or thick bush, they may "freeze" in one position and remain very still, their coloring camouflaging them. Sometimes they will sink to the ground and lie flat, or they may bound away, making a series of hoarse barks. When surprised in the open, they sometimes stand still or slowly walk to the nearest cover.

Bushbuck are not territorial but will defend an area that a female in heat is using. After giving birth, the mother cleans the newborn lamb and eats the placenta. She leaves the calf well hidden. When she visits and suckles it, she eats its dung so no scent remains to attract predators. The young lamb does not accompany its mother for long periods during the day until it is about 4 months old. A female and her lamb often play together, running in circle chasing each other.

### Hunting

As a young child I vividly remember the annual bushbuck hunts. The first day of the season was a holiday and was always a festive affair. Hunters were assigned positions and areas to hunt. The morning hunt was quietly moving along areas adjacent thick bush or through pathways in the thick valley bushveld, watching for rams moving about the business that rams do on crisp winter mornings. Alternatively we watched across valleys, shivering in the shadowed side watching a sun drenched hillside. Often just a horn tip or a flashing tail would give them away

Afternoons are spent watching fringelines, waiting quietly for the buck to appear from the thick cover to feed on new grass, although browsers they will not hesitate to use grass. It is important to be in position well before time, remaining absolutely still and to be well camouflaged. The ram will nervously watch from the thick cover until he is sure that the area is clear, not only of predators but also from rival rams before stepping into the clearing. Rams are more often shot at dusk.

Hunt the Bushbuck with the 7x57mm, or better, a 30 caliber rifle with suitable 160 to 180 grain bullets that will not be easily deflected. Shots are often taken into brush favouring heavier slower bullets. When spooked, his alarm signal is a loud, hoarse, dog-like bark, often the first time that a hunter will know that his approach has been carefully watched. Slow movements, stopping often to watch and monitor your surrounds are the recipe for success.

Bushbuck in my opinion do not have the greatest eye sight, which hardly matters in the thick impregnable bush that they dwell within, hearing and smell are however highly acute. Hunting Bushbuck can be very similar to hunting the American White-tailed deer; still-hunting can be very productive or one can try moving quietly through the bush, probing the dense cover always cognizant of the wind.

Shot placement is extremely important; from any angle, place your shot so as to penetrate and pass through the chest cavity. You do not want to wound a bushbuck, as even though he is relatively small he can be extremely dangerous. A wounded or cornered Bushbuck is known to be very aggressive and will not hesitate to charge. If your wounded Bushbuck escapes to dense cover, which he will certainly try to do, be very cautious in your pursuit. Next time someone offers the opportunity, grab it keenly, you wont be sorry.



## Shooting with an Audience – by Karl Schaffer

Its a very chilly morning, we're all bundled up and moving a bit slowly. We drive to an area we're to hunt this morning and meet up with Eddy, the son of the landowner. Eddy, like a lot of South Africans is pretty stocky like a tree trunk and has that muscled body of an athlete. In his late 40's now, he, like all male white South Africans, played a lot of rugby in younger years. His father couldn't join us this day due to his recovery from rugby knee injury from years ago. Eddie is like other South Africans I've met, he's very polite, friendly and welcoming.

After a brief conference on where to start our hunt, we all pile into Evert's hunting truck and head up a dirt road into the brush choked thickets. Evert is in the back of the truck where he can glass the hillside with David, Hannes, and Eben, Eddie is driving slowly up the road winding into the hills, I'm in the front passenger seat, which, by the way is on the left side of the truck.

As we slowly drive up the hillside, everyone is watching the far side of the canyon opposite us. I'm not too focused on watching for game, these South Africans are going to spot anything and everything before my old, weak, American big city eyes will. I focus on the beauty of the thickets, the red clay of the ground, the shale and boulders that litter the dirt trail we're driving up. Suddenly there is pounding on the truck cab, Evert, old eagle-eye, has spotted a bush buck ram

Eddie quickly has his binoculars up and is focused on the far hillside. I follow suit but absolutely cannot see what they are looking at. Eddie patiently directs my vision to a small opening in the brush about 375 yards away. I renew my efforts and suddenly the form of the ram appears. And it's been there the whole time.

Evert has dismounted the back of the truck and approaches my side where he whispers for me get out and bring the rifle. I quickly load the old Mauser, close the bolt on the empty chamber, and follow Evert up the road. We ease along slowly, using whatever obstacles we can to mask our movement. Our path is actually parallel to the direction the bush buck is feeding, we don't close the distance much at all. When we're a hundred yards from the truck Evert sets the shooting sticks and I place the rifle. Evert continues to look over the ram which finally gives us a good look at his horns. Evert's comment is immediate "He's a shooter."

I'm standing on the face of a hill, rifle on the sticks, bullet now in the chamber, looking at a smallish antelope at least 300 yards away across a canyon. There is no way I can make this shot. I tell Evert "No good, too far. Can we get closer?" He responds that we can't, if we move, the bushbuck will be completely screened by brush and we won't have a shot

I quickly remove the rifle from the sticks and lower myself to the ground and wrap the sling of the rifle around my left elbow which tightens the rifle stock in my hand. I tighten the sling behind my left elbow, tightening it even more. I flash back to rifle class at the Yakima Junior Sportsman Club when I was 14 years old. Some things you just don't forget. Evert eases down beside me, shortens the shooting sticks by retracting the legs, lifts my rifle barrel and places it on them. It helps steady the barrel even more. I locate the ram which is still feeding, unaware that we're there. It is a darkish, gray charcoal chocolate color and it looks very far away. Evert is laying next to me and, as if reading my mind, whispers in my ear "You can make this shot." I ask how far it is to the bushbuck, he responds "300 yards." I've practiced shooting at 200 yards in the past year and done pretty well but this will be my longest shot of my life.

I've also researched my 30.06 bullets and I know the trajectory for the 180 gr. projectile out to 400 yards. I tell Evert that the bullet should drop 7 inches or so from gravity at 300 yards. He agrees. I note that there is no wind to blow the bullet off of it's desired track. I consciously slow my breathing, longer breaths, deeper, slow pace, I find the bush buck in the crosshairs. I raise the point of aim of the crosshairs to the very top of the ram's shoulder, pause for a moment, and squeeze the trigger.

At the crack of the rifle, I immediately hear the “thump” of the 180 gr. bullet smacking into the bushbuck. But I’ve lost sight of the ram with the upward movement of the rifle’s recoil, though it was ever so slight from the muzzle suppressor. I am immediately anxious that the ram has jumped, wounded, into the brush where it is one of the more feared animals in South Africa. And just as quickly I hear Evert’s always calm voice say “He’s down.” My fear of a wounded bush buck evaporates. I’m on my feet, slapping Evert on the back and then I give him a big hug. This is the animal I’ve been waiting for almost two years.

I turn back to the truck and I take note of the “peanut gallery” (for those who remember Buffalo Bob and Howdy Doody), five men in the back of the truck have been watching the whole thing, my first hunting audience. I also notice they are all smiling and then the congratulations start coming.

We pile into the truck and drive around the rim of the canyon, maybe a half of a mile to get to where we can walk (or slide) down to my ram. My bushbuck, who Evert estimates at being 10 years old, lays dead where he stood, dropped in his tracks. I am honored again with congratulations and backslaps from my audience. And Evert, you were the maestro, you are the one to be congratulated. Thank you so much for the confidence, support and instruction.

*Check out more of Karl’s interesting stories*  
[www.beingkarl.wordpress.com](http://www.beingkarl.wordpress.com)



*The location of the bushbuck, you can see the road where I took the shot in the distance.*



*The audience (Peanut Gallery)*



*Me with my old bush buck, and Evert the Maestro*

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Joe and Ronnie who got engaged while on Safaris with us. What a romantic setting with the back drop of a beautiful African sunset.



## Nyala Hunting in the Eastern Cape

Phil Heise shot this fantastic Nyala, stalking up to within 20 yards!



## From the Bow Blind

Incredibly 2012 has more than half disappeared. Thus far it has been a busy season with some magnificent trophies. Our team have been on track (pun intended) to produce the type of excellent hunting experiences that we are known for. So far our winter has been a cold one but the veld and animals are in remarkably good condition. Mid winter rain has upped the soil moisture and together with good prospects for early rain our spring should be fantastic. We have exciting developments happening and I want to encourage you to keep tabs on our facepage ([www.facebook.com/HuntTheSun](http://www.facebook.com/HuntTheSun)) to keep track on some of our latest developments.

South Africa remains the ideal hunting destination, safe environment with first world medical facilities coupled with some of the finest plains game hunting available today. It is the first season of hunting between our central camp in the Northern Cape and our Southern camp in the Eastern Cape and we are extremely happy with the results. We will continue to brand a premier experience and are committed in our quest in not only a quality ethical hunting experience, but also an environment that caters for all our hunting friends and their families.

We are however also in the process of expanding slowly into Mozambique and can now also offer limited opportunity in Namibia and Zambia as well as continuing coupling with a few good Zimbabwean colleagues. We trust that the rumblings from our Northern borders are all just that, mere rumblings by politicians and not the death of some magnificent hunting areas. My family and I remain in good health and we daily count our blessings.

Your African PH,  
Mike

## Apprentice Hunter

Ragnhild has joined our staff as an apprentice hunter. From Sweden, she has quickly adapted to the African lifestyle. Apart from learning about hunting, she also manages the WTW project and looks after our facepage, a brilliant initiative on which to put all our photos, stories, news and just have a lot of fun in the process! Link on to [www.facebook.com/HuntTheSun](http://www.facebook.com/HuntTheSun) to catch up on what we are up to!





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## WTW

Once again thanks to the generous donations of our hunters we were able to buy more school uniforms for the children at the local school. Twenty of the most needy children in the school each received, a set of clothes consisting of a pair of shoes, two trousers, two shirts, socks, jersey and a jacket. A big thank you to all who gave so generously.



Ragnhild will be managing the walk the walk project so please contact her at [ragnhild@huntthesun.com](mailto:ragnhild@huntthesun.com) for donations and project information.