

HUNTING WITH THE CAT MAN

PH JOHAN STRYDOM SURVIVES SECOND LEOPARD ATTACK IN 4 YEARS.

O for 3, that was my record for leopard hunts...Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Mozambique, long trips with no results.

I met Johan Strydom at the convention in 2004. He billed himself as "the cat specialist with hounds" and claimed an 80% success ratio on Leopards which is phenomenal, considering most Leopard hunts are probably at 20%. He hunted the leopards in northern Namibia, along with Cheetahs for non-Americans.

As he was booked for 2005, I booked a hunt for September 2006.

Our date of departure was August 30th, 2006, the same day a hurricane was due to hit south Florida and West Palm Beach where my wife, Juanita, and I live. Not a good start for my latest Leopard quest. We contacted US Air and since we were traveling to Joberg, via Dulles in Virginia I asked to move my departure up 1 day and stay overnight at Dulles. Sure they said for a change fee of \$275 each. No consideration is given until the airport is closed or the flight is canceled, which would have been too late and we would have missed all our connections. We ended up on a Delta flight for a little less money, which turned out to be a smart move as they did close the Palm Beach airport, even though the hurricane missed South Florida.

We arrived in Windhoek, Namibia, on August 31 with a gun, no luggage and no bullets. This Leopard quest is looking pretty shaky. At Johan's suggestion we decided to wait for the next flight which had the luggage. We stayed in a hotel in Windhoek for the night. The hunting area was 4 hours north of Windhoek which we did the following day, missing the first hunt day.

Day 1 and 2 were uneventful even though they did find an old Leopard track the second day. We pretty much determined that the Leopard went into the adjoining farm and Johan felt he would eventually come back, so we left it alone for the day. I wanted to get a dik dik, the smallest antelope in Africa and Namibia is one of the few places you can get one. I did get a nice one the second evening.

Day 3: Johan sent out 2 trackers at day break to see if the Leopard had returned and it appeared it had returned during the night, new tracks were found. It was decided that Johan and another PH plus 2 trackers plus 11 dogs would head in 1 direction and Juanita and I, with another tracker, and the owner of the 30,000 acre farm we were hunting, Gunther Heimstadt, would go in another direction and look for fresh tracks. Juanita and I were in the back of an open land rover with the tracker, Gunther driving. The last thing Johan said to Juanita and I was, "whatever happens, do not get off the truck until I tell you". Off we went.

It was not long, before a call came over the radio, and before we knew it Gunther slams on the accelerator and off we go, with him yelling to us that the dogs are on a track, hold on. Johan had told us that 99% of these hunts end up with the dogs getting a track, the cat runs for a mile or more, runs up a tree, the hunter drives up, gets out of the truck, shoots cat, takes pictures, hunt over. Read on.

As we approach a large open meadow at break neck speed, we can see off in the distance Johan's truck and some other commotion going on. As we get closer, we see the dogs creating quite a stir, Johan is on the ground behind the dogs, the trackers and other PH are in the truck. Then we see it, a big tom Leopard, in the middle of the barking dogs, going nuts, nowhere near any trees, this cat is ready to fight. Chaos is the only way to describe the situation. I am fixated on the cat, with Gunther yelling at me, don't shoot the dogs, don't shoot the dogs, wait, wait.

Without any warning the cat bolts from the dogs and heads straight for our truck and starts to jump in the back with Juanita and I. Gunther slams on the accelerator and the cat misses us by less than 5 feet. The cat turns and heads straight toward Johan. In less than a second, Johan is on the ground, the cat is on top of Johan who instinctively covers his head with his arms to protect himself. The dogs immediately go for the cat and manage to get it off Johan, saving him from serious injuries and maybe his life. The cat turns and heads back for our truck and tries for a second time to jump in with Juanita and I. Gunther again slams on the accelerator, saving us for a second time. The dogs are now back surrounding the Leopard, which continually makes a shot risky, to not kill any of the dogs.

The cat is now in a sitting position, looking like another truck charge is about to happen. In a split second the dogs move and I attempt to shoot the cat, with my 300 Win. Mag. in the chest, my only shot. As I shoot the cat opens its mouth and the bullet hits him in the lower jaw knocking it down. The dogs are back on it again and the fight continues with the cat using its claws to try and fight the dogs. The dogs clear for another split second and I am able to make a second shot which kills the Leopard. Amazingly, the instant the dogs realize the cat is dead, they stop all the barking, and walk away like nothing ever happened. Johan has been bitten twice, scratched in the scalp and is bleeding badly. Gunther is yelling at Johan to get in the truck and get to the closest doctor about 2 hours away. Johan is yelling to his guys, get the camera, pictures first. Juanita is a mess. Since I never took my eyes off the cat I hadn't realized that she was crouched down in the corner of the truck and she was pretty shook up. After the picture taking Johan was taken to the doctor for tetanus shots and bandages, but he was very lucky, it could have been much worse. I told Juanita that she may very well be the only woman currently in the USA who can say they had witnessed a Leopard attack.

After the Leopard we returned to South Africa where Johan has a very nice lodge, restaurant, and bar set up, a B&B would be a good description. We hunted for Caracal and Serval. I did get a Caracal but no Serval.

Another highlight was a trip to a privately owned Lion farm. The wife of another PH was the manager and it was quite an experience to get a private tour of these big cats, including Rambo, a very large white male, which they estimated was worth a million dollars for breeding.

So my Leopard quest is finally over, we now have 2 of the big 5, Buffalo and Leopard. Were not done just yet.

Ted Burgess