Bongo and Nyala Distribution

**Western Bongo** – from Sierra Leone east through Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Gabon, DRC (Zaire) and the Southern Sudan.

**Eastern Bongo** – the rainforests of Kenya, notably the Mau Range, Aberdares, Mt. Kenya and possibly still the Cherangani Hills. It ascends Mt. Kenya to a height of at least 10,000 feet (3,048 m).

**Mountain Nyala** – restricted to Ethiopia, in the Chercher, Arusi, Bale and Amorro Mountains, lying east and south of the Rift Valley, in areas exceeding 6,000 feet (1,818 m).

**Nyala** – in the south it is predominantly found in KwaZulu-Natal of South Africa but also introduced to many provinces such as Limpopo, North West, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. Moving north it occurs in Malawi, Mozambique, eastern and southeastern Zimbabwe. Recently introduced to Namibia.

**Western or Lowland Bongo**
*Tragelaphus eurycerus eurycerus*

**Eastern, Kenya or Mountain Bongo**
*Tragelaphus eurycerus isaaci*

**Nyala**
*Tragelaphus Angasi*

**Mountain Nyala**
*Tragelaphus Buxtoni*
The demarcations are indications only.
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This is the fifth and final book in the series on hunting all the spiral horns recognised by both Rowland Ward and SCI. At these times, people often say things like, “If I had known when I began what I know now, I would almost certainly not have done what I did.” Well, I cannot and will not say that about this project. Certainly, many unforeseen things occurred – some of them unpleasant – over the five years of producing a book a year on these amazing animals, but they pale into insignificance when compared to the many positives, the most important of which has been meeting and corresponding with so many new people, as well as many old friends and acquaintances, who have shared my passion for these incredible beasts and who, through their efforts, whether as hunters, conservationists or both, have tried to fight the increasing threats to their existence and help conserve them and their habitats for future generations.

The other major plus has been that these men and women have taught me so much about the spiral horns that have shaped so much of my hunting life and which I have come to love and admire in almost equal measures. And it is the spiral horns and the books themselves which have dominated my life for the past half decade and I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience, even if I feel I have become a very dull person as a result. For five years I have been totally immersed in these animals, their habits and habitats, and all I seem to have been able to talk about has been one kind or another!

They are far too many to name as almost 100 people have written outstanding articles especially for these books and even more than this number have contributed wonderful photographs (which have been such an intrinsic part of this project) and I thank them all again; and, of course, the 24 people – Jeremy Anderson, Koos Barnard, Christophe Beau, Gwyn Brown, Pemble Davis, Paul Evangelista, Danie Geel, Mark Haldane, Robin Hurt, Garry Kelly, John Kelly, Peter Kennedy, Chris Kinsey, Rudy Lubin, Erik Mararv, Christophe Morio, Ross Murphy, Adam Parkison, Mike Prettejohn, Hans Schabel, the late Sherwin Scott, Tony Seth-Smith, the late Tony Tomkinson and Coenraad Vermaak – who have written special articles for this, the last book in the series. All of them have provided photographs as well and these have been supplemented by both professional and amateur photographers whose names appear next to their photographs.

ítica Male and female mountain nyala
Having said that, I would like to make special mention of Raffael Hickisch and Thierry Aebischer of The Chinko Project in the Central African Republic, who gave me access to over 18,000 photographs, taken by their 132 trail cameras at literally scores of different sites throughout the region as part of their research project. In this regard, I would urge you to visit their web site – www.chinkoproject.com – to gain an understanding of the vitally important work they are doing in the region. And also a special word of thanks to both Nejma and Peter Beard for allowing me to quote from Peter’s book, Zara’s Tales, and to use the first photograph taken by him of a live bongo during the day. Peter’s story of his “hunt” for this bongo is one of the most evocative that I have read and, as I have learnt over the years, it is far, far harder to hunt with a camera than a rifle!

This is the second book in the series that has been produced under the guidance of that expert book designer, Peter Bosman and his team and I am very thankful to them for their expert help. They have taught me so much about the intricacies of publishing, although I recognise I still have so much to learn.

I have a friend who says that the more people you invite to a function, the more you disappoint and irritate, but I will have to take this risk and hope it does not apply to the number of people I want to thank for their support, encouragement and help over the course of this project as a whole. Apart from the love of my life, my best friend and wife of 44 years, Janie, and our four much loved and admired children, Lisa, Troy, Rich and Eileen, I would like to make special mention of and offer my sincere and heartfelt thanks to Renee and Derek Carstens, Don Cowie, Gerhard and Connie Damm, Rowan Dickerson, Peter Diekmann, Dick duPont, Eben Espach, Neels Geldenhuys, the late Geoffroy de Gentile, Robin Hurt, Cathryn and Pete Kennedy, Chris Kinsey, Harry Katrakilis, James Mellon, Christophe Morio, Cath and Kevin Robertson, Nassos and Jason Roussos, the late Sherwin Scott, the late Tony Tomkinson and Michael Viljoen.

Of course there are countless professional hunters, trackers, skinners, drivers, camp staff and others – including members of the medical profession who have patched me up as best they could on a number of occasions – far too many to mention by name, without whom these books would not have seen the light of day. You know who you are and I thank you most sincerely for your contribution to these books on the wizards of the hunting world.
The conversation Peter Flack mentions as having launched his remarkable series of books on Africa’s spiral horned antelopes, took place in a quiet, book-lined loft in a Newfoundland home, built one year before the War of 1812. Across the weathering and tumultuous change of two centuries this proud edifice still stands, its broad shoulders set squarely back, its determined façade within a stone’s throw of the wild Atlantic’s reach. Remarkably, in addition to our shared ocean, we now know that the very rock upon which this retreat from madness stands was once part of the African continent, a long-ago migrant swept to destiny by the beautiful chaos of tectonic tides. How fitting, then, that a Newfoundlander and South African might discuss the world of nature in just such a location, our own destinies having been thrown together by a no less remarkable series of fateful intersections. In addition, we too have journeyed through an existence dominated and shaped by the natural world and most especially by the endless capacity of wild creatures to enthrall and inspire us.

Perhaps it is this delicate layering of realities that keeps the memory of those few moments of quiet dialogue so relentlessly clear in our minds. But even this cannot explain fully the remarkable fact that, some five years later, the idea that emerged in the dappled light and murmurings of that historic Newfoundland space now rests completed, sighing a little perhaps, with this volume you now hold in your hands. Cherish it. To witness and recall the birth of an idea is a rare thing indeed; but to seize upon it from the moment its frail wings have dried and shepherd its journey to fulfilment, this is to fall through the rainbow, to travel unerringly and unguided, except by the trail of light all ideas leave in their wake. Yes, it is a journey of inevitable challenge and exertion and of false trails and tiny details that arise to overwhelm and distract. But once the pursuit is over and possession is realized, then the idea is finally real!

With completion of this fifth book in his series, Peter Flack has gifted us with just such a rarity. From the moment our dialogue ended he set out to rescue the idea, forming and holding it in his mind, setting it in amber, tethering it to reality, tenuously at first and then with greater and increasing certainty. He set his sights squarely upon its pursuit, evading the challenges and likelihood of failure and never faltering, even when faltering must have seemed like a very good idea indeed. I have reflected on this, watching the books emerge, each one with a gestation of about one year, like something biological, animalistic. I sensed how each new volume infused greater vitality to the larger idea, like individual corals forming a reef or the
flocking of small birds. Indeed I have travelled from my study in that same historic house where the idea was born and imagined my South African friend in his own retreat, looking seaward and working at his forecastle desk perched upon the second floor of his Cape Town home. I know of his unending dialogue with writers and publisher, the frustrations of seeking photographs and writing captions, the relentless editing and the grumpy musings over his own sanity and someone’s audacious tardiness! And, of course, the inevitable question: Why am I doing this?

It is this question, above all else, that matters most. It might have many answers, of course; but only one is factual, only one is true. Certainly Peter Flack needs things to do; he would be unbearable even to himself if he were idle. Such a life would require only a small apartment in the Bastille’s darkest recess and permanent prohibition of visiting rights and perhaps a pen and paper, like the Marquis de Sade. But the reason this series of books was conceived and completed lies in other elements of his character. Peter Flack represents that remarkable amalgam that has emerged throughout the history of wildlife conservation; namely, a man who in his heart and intellect is a hunter but who is to such an extent inspired by the wild creatures he pursues that he comes to view their natural persistence as the greatest objective of his life.

Thus in his many excursions throughout Africa in pursuit of these highly diverse, intelligent and arresting beautiful creatures, he has come to see the spiral horned antelopes as emblematic of the world’s they inhabit. They are inseparably interwoven with the wider tapestry of life native to some of the most wondrous and irreplaceable ecosystems on earth. Indeed, in many ways they define these natural systems and are, in the minds of many, inseparable even from the national identities of the regions in which they live. Peter Flack’s hunting experiences and those of his many co-writers have provided rare insights into the behaviour and ecology of these wild others, nine beasts of such beautiful African names as kudu, bongo, nyala, and sitatunga. To a North American ear they slide like warm oil amongst the senses, brimming with exotic resonance and allure. In bringing these wild creatures and those remarkable human journeys amongst them to the reading audience, Hunting the Spiral Horns lays before us the still wondrous sense of a limitless world and the intoxicating thresholds we may cross when indulging our own capacities in pursuit of our longest and most formative ecology - that of the hunter.

But it does more. From the narratives coursing through these volumes leaps a grand exemplar of the animal-human relationship that so shaped our own species’ rise to existence. We, the observer, the tracker, the hunter, the thinker, the storyteller; what would we be without them? They have fed our bodies, intellect and imagination for millions of years along the evolutionary road we travelled. They and our pursuit of them, made us human. As the miracles of parietal art throughout Europe and pictographs from around the world demonstrate, we struggled forever to convey their pervasive influence upon our perception of the world and ourselves. Only in modernity’s last few idolatrous centuries have we seemingly forgotten the indelible signature of the wild others we once called brothers. And perhaps only in the last few decades have we really struggled to understand how we could love them, honour them and hunt them still.

Well, we must all wait to see how this modern confusion will play out; but in the meantime we can seek evidence of these great truths in Hunting the Spiral Horns. It is impossible to read the reflections of these many authors without understanding that those who have pursued these creatures on animalistic terms
have come to see in them beauty that cannot be lost, inspiration that must never be extinguished. Through the days and weeks of endurance and discomfort, of pushing physical and emotional limits come the hunter’s insights, the hard won knowledge of personal encounter and unique engagement. Who else would follow the spiral horns through the thickets and swamp, through the heat and darkness, through their world on their terms? And what puerile reflection could conceive that such knowledge might come from armchair reflection? Knowledge of the wild others comes hard; though love of them comes easy.

Little wonder, then, that conservation concerns sinew their way through these volumes. They emerge from the hunting observations and adventures portrayed throughout this work and culminate in Peter Flack’s forthright concluding chapter, in this the last book in the series. Here we see in full expression the reason why the original idea was seized upon and why five books have now been devoted to the magnificent spiral horned antelopes of Africa. It is because these wild creatures matter and because those who have come to know them well have come to care profoundly for their future. In extending the many challenges and perilous future of these creatures to the wider realm of African wildlife, these concluding remarks demonstrate the historic role of the hunter as spokesperson for the wild others they pursue and protect.

The spiral horn series was conceived in the small Newfoundland community known as Harbour Grace. Fitting it seems that the notion of grace should lie at the beginnings of this journey, should so describe the beauty and capacities of these great beasts and so aptly describe our gratitude for their existence and our aspirations for their future. To Peter Flack and his colleagues one can only say, thank you, your journey was worth it. It is by the light of these pages that others will follow.
Introduction

Peter Flack

It may sound melodramatic but it is nevertheless true – bongo changed my life. In researching this book, I tried without success to find the one in which I had read about a famous East African professional hunter who hunted bongo for some 30 years without success. Initially, I thought it was one of the books written by J.A. Hunter but, despite scouring the pages of his many works, could not find the reference I remembered.

What amazed me when I read this account was, firstly, that someone as famous and experienced as the hunter concerned could not find an animal in Kenya he had sought so assiduously and for so long and, secondly, and maybe more importantly, I had no idea what he was talking about. To my shame, I must admit that, in my thirties, I had not the faintest inkling what a bongo was. I suppose the only thing in my favour was that I immediately set out to try to find out more about this mystical and magical animal, and the more I found out, the more magical and mystical it seemed to become.

This period of my life also coincided with my fascination with Henry Morton Stanley, or Bula Matari – the Breaker of Rocks – as he was known and, in particular, his attempt to rescue Emin Pasha (in reality, an Austrian called Eduard Schnitzer, a man of dubious morals and reputation and then Governor of Equatoria Province) from the advancing Mahdist hordes. To do so, he travelled up the Congo River and through the Ituri Forest, which just so happened to be one of the favourite haunts of this fascinating spiral horn. Together, the two passions collided and I began to search earnestly for a way to hunt a bongo in or about the Ituri Forest.

As I have written elsewhere, and I hope I will not bore you by repeating it here, it took me two years to organise the safari in the southeastern corner of the Central African Republic, as it was as close to the Ituri Forest as I could get. After my arrival, it took a further 10 days of dawn to dusk tracking of the same bongo bull before, after sleeping on his tracks in the forest that night in my clothes and without food, the following morning, at about 08h30, I shot the magnificent bull through a tree trunk with my custom made .416 Rigby, topped with a 1.5-6x42 Zeiss Diavari Z low light scope, loaded with 400 grain Bear Claw softs.

I was 42 years old and, although I had hunted extensively in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, it was my first major hunt outside of southern Africa and, to say I was hyped up for the occasion is to imply that John Smith, South Africa’s rugby captain, was vaguely enthusiastic about playing in the final of the Rugby World Cup. I have never trained as hard before or since for a hunt and, towards the end, was running 48 kilometres a week, cycling a further 48 kilometres on a stationary bike and gyming every morning. I had practised so

A Western bongo sculpted by John Tolmay, an ex-Zimbabwean professional hunter now living in the USA.
much with my .416 on the range that my friends used to tease me as each of the cartridges cost more than a hamburger at our local steakhouse.

I had read everything I could lay my hands on, most of which related to the Eastern, Kenya or mountain bongo and felt that my chances of success were way less than 50%. By the tenth day of my safari I was a believer. I had never hunted harder or with a more expert hunting team in my life and yet, despite their obvious skills, experience and determination, I was in a state of advanced despair. I had never come across conditions less favourable for hunting or a more favourable habitat for the undoubtedly clever and wary animal I was pursuing. I was dog tired from the continual creeping, crawling and bending through dense forests which hardly ever allowed me to stand upright and was amazed at how the bongo seemed to ghost so easily and silently under and through thickets through which we had to hack our way with machetes.

My mental state had also taken a pounding. I found the green on green desert of the bakos (fingers of rainforest on the banks of streams that penetrated the savannah and where we found most bongo activity) claustrophobic. There was nothing to take my mind off the fact that my body was taking punishment. No distraction of a bird here, a mammal there, an interesting insect. Just green on green on green with an outlook of 20 to 30 paces at best and usually a lot less.

The bull made bananas of us. There were times he would let us come so close we could hear him breathing and, at other times, the sound of his teeth ripping at the vegetation, but he always outsmarted us as we neither wanted nor had dogs to bay the bull. This was a classic track, walk and stalk hunt. And then, by midmorning, he would start walking in a rough figure of eight pattern as he sought a place to rest and ruminate in the heat of the day and, inevitably, we gave him our wind. He would then run out of the finger of rainforest, across the intervening savannah and into a further finger of forest and stand in the fringes watching his back tracks. Hopeless!

After nine consecutive days of failure, eventually we succeeded and, as Martin Voungouessy Tito, to give him his full name, stood side by side with me, his arm
around my shoulders, next to the unbelievably beautiful bongo bull, a dull tan and brown butterfly fluttered out of nowhere and landed between the heavy, long, lyre shaped horns. Tears suddenly streamed down my face in an unstoppable flow. Not that I was weeping you understand but more that all the complex emotions of the previous nine days simple overflowed. I have never known a cocktail of emotions to rival those I felt then or in the following days. Every few hours my feet found their way back to the skinning shed and I gazed yet again at the dramatic mask of the bull which, even in death, had not lost one iota of his majesty. On these walks I experienced the most peculiar sensation. It was as if my feet were not in contact with the ground, as if I was walking on air!

And the thought entered my head for the first time that maybe, just maybe, if I kept on preparing, researching, training and practising, with time, I might become a decent hunter. I also knew that, more than anything, I wanted to try to feel this incredible sense of euphoria again.

And looking back, despite the fact that I had already hunted for many years, in many places and for many different species, in a sense, my hunting career, such as it has been, started then and there in that patch of intertwined, dry, dessicated, head high savannah in almost the middle of darkest Africa.

And so it began – the real, deliberate quest for all the spiral horns available on licence and recognised by both Rowland Ward’s Records of Big Game and the SCI Record Book of Big Game Animals – and ended only four years ago as I stood next to Jason Roussos on the steep slopes of Lemedo in the Wollaety Hills of Ethiopia’s Omo Valley, with a quality Abyssinian greater kudu bull at our feet on my sixth attempt to outwit one.

I cannot pretend it was all beer and skittles and I went through a patch where I became so determined to complete the quest that I endured more than enjoyed some of the hunts and, with the crystal clear vision of hindsight, became a miserable pain in the behind to boot as I remorselessly drove myself and my hunting team to succeed. I wish I could take back those days. I wish I could apologise to the people I offended. The only good to come out of them was that I eventually came to my senses, recovered my equilibrium and have never allowed a hunt to assume that degree of importance in my life again.

Mountain nyala were high on my to do list after Lord Derby’s eland, which I hunted in the same concession where I hunted my first bongo and yet, despite all
the lessons I had learned in researching my successful bongo and eland hunts, my first hunt for a mountain nyala was an unmitigated disaster. I made an elementary mistake and relied completely on the advice of one man I believed was far more experienced than me. I took his advice at face value, not bothering to research the matter further, nor realising, firstly, that he had received a heavily discounted price in return for writing a favourable article on his hunt and, secondly, there were rumours he had unknowingly been taken into and had shot his mountain nyala in a national park. At any rate, in a combined five extremely strenuous weeks at altitudes regularly over 13,000 feet – our showerless base camp was at 13,400 feet – neither I nor my hunting partner saw a mature, adult, male mountain nyala. At different times, we were both shown a young, immature bull with 18 inch horns – on comparing notes we were sure it was the same animal – and, with increasingly hysterical shouts, urged to shoot it which, of course, we both declined.

It was a very expensive mistake, especially as the outfitter encouraged me to buy $11,000 worth of licences – in Ethiopia you pay for them in advance and there is no refund should you not shoot the animal – in respect of animals which I never saw and which no one else had seen in the areas in which I hunted. As I explained to his booking agent when he offered me a subsequent half price hunt to make up for one of the worst hunting experiences I had ever suffered through, “While I can always make more money, I can never recover the four weeks I wasted with your outfitter and nothing I experienced then, or you have told me since, leads me to believe that an action replay will have a different outcome.”

It was a wise decision and, at a subsequent SCI convention, Hector Cuellar’s daughter, Alexandra, kindly came to my rescue and introduced me to Nassos Roussos. So began a series of hunts in Ethiopia with both Nassos and his son, Jason, which I shall always cherish and resulted in successful hunts for all the endemic game Ethiopia has to offer, including two mountain nyalas, the second of which ticked all the boxes for me.

While common nyalas no longer have the cachet they once had and can be freely hunted in many parts of South Africa, including a horse breeder’s garden in the Klerksdorp Municipality where a bow shooter walked up to within 20 paces...
of a semi-tame animal, killed it and then unashamedly claimed it as the new world record. I am happy to say that, once the circumstances of its death became known, it was not allowed in Rowland Ward’s record book despite the literally scores of hysterical threats and foulmouthed insults by the “professional hunter” who accompanied the shooter. Having said this, many game ranches offer challenging free range, fair chase hunts for these spectacularly beautiful antelopes and they are still available in limited numbers in Mozambique where the biggest of the species are said to reside. I speak from personal experience when I say that, to find a plus 30 inch bull is as, if not more, difficult than finding a plus 60 inch Southern greater kudu. To date, I have tried each year for nine consecutive years, including this year in Mozambique’s Zambezi Delta and, although I came within half an inch on one occasion in KwaZulu-Natal, have never managed to shoot a bull which exceeded the magical limit.

My spiral horn journeys have taken and continue to take me across the length and breadth of the continent I have come to love and hate in almost equal measures, introduced me to people, places and experiences I shall cherish long, long after my eyes are too dim to shoot and, of course, were the inspiration behind this series of books, which my good friend, Shane Mahoney, was so perceptive to suggest I should try to write and edit. It is fitting that this inspirational and charismatic man should have written the final foreword to the book series to which he gave birth and I thank him sincerely for this and so many other things with which he has enriched my life.