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• Foreword •

"... if you have seen a red lechwe bull plunging through the shallows of the Okavango in a halo of spray, with the sun converting individual droplets into sparkling diamonds, its image will remain engraved in your heart and head forever."

These vibrant word pictures from Peter Flack's latest book crystallize the essence of the African hunting safari and its astonishing power over the human spirit. The safari experience encompasses a multiplicity of mini journeys that challenge and invigorate all our senses, leaving us changed and inspired. It enables us to seek what that great 20th century Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset termed "a vacation from the human condition".

H*unting* I*cons of* A*frica* takes the reader on an exceptional journey of discovery through Africa, from the coastal forest lushness of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa to the forbidding aridity of the Ennedi Mountains in north-eastern Chad, over the tough, high altitude country of Ethiopia, down to the limitless horizons of the Serengeti Plains of Tanzania, across to the dark, heat-soaked world of the rain forests of the Central African Republic, Cameroon and Gabon, into the glorious open spaces of Zambia and Zimbabwe, and then southwestwards to the desiccated beauty of Namibia before heading home to the ironstone rocks and tough shrubby veld of the Karoo.

Our guide speaks with authority and first-hand experience stretching over almost five decades. His hunting adventures have resulted in his harvesting 119 of the 128 indigenous African game species currently available on licence among 15 African countries. Eleven "introduced" species have been deliberately excluded as they are not endemic to Africa.

Icon. The word indicates an object of veneration, a symbol of excellence or of elevated status. The author is very quick to point out that his choice of 25 African animals as hunting icons is deeply personal and inevitably subjective and that many readers will wonder why certain species have been left off this list. It is the very unusualness of some of the choices that makes for a refreshing safari. Yes, lion and leopard feature, but it is the presence of animals such as the giant forest hog, Barbary sheep, striped hyena, caracal and Cape mountain zebra that makes the reader sit up and pay attention.

Many factors influenced the author's choice, such as rarity of the species, exceptional difficulty of the natural habitat of the species in question and the resultant difficulty of the hunt itself, the special link between an animal and a particular country or region, or the indefinable charisma an animal carries that often has

nothing at all to do with size, beauty or entrenched reputation for dangerous behaviour. One hunter's icon will often not be that of another hunter, but the common denominator is a thoroughgoing passion for Africa's wild places and wildlife and the certitude that hunting in Africa is an "ever-evolving journey of discovery and self-discovery", to quote the author.

Heading Flack's list is the bongo. He hunted bongo on two occasions in the Central African Republic. This type of hunting, done on foot and not with the aid of

dogs, embodies skill, endurance, courage, exceptional physical and mental toughness and patience under arduous conditions before one of the most elusive, beautiful and scarce of African game animals can perhaps be found and taken. This kind of self-discipline and tenacity are a feature of the author's hunts and a potent factor in according iconic status to the animals that feature in this book. His second bongo now heads Rowland Ward's Records of Big Game – The Book, as Flack calls it.

Racket-tailed roller

Hunting in Africa takes one to poorly known, often very dangerous places. Flack's conferring of iconic status on the Barbary sheep or aoudad, native to Chad, hinges on its status as Africa's only indigenous sheep and its quite frankly terrifying habitat in a very dangerous country. Anyone suffering from vertigo or agoraphobia would never have survived this Flack safari as it entered the forbidding Ennedi Mountains of north-eastern Chad, close to the Libyan and Sudanese borders, surrounded by the immensity of the waterless, Saharan sea.

Flack took a very respectable aoudad high up on a rocky fastness. Fate also saw him survive an ambush by AK-toting Arab nomads before he and his party were ordered out of the region for security reasons. Some 78 people – men, women and children – were slaughtered in a neighbouring village a day after the ambush. The recovery of Flack's aoudad a full year later under extraordinary circumstances makes for one of the most riveting tales to come out of African safari literature in recent times. The author's incisive observations about Chad also demonstrate his unflinching dedication in confronting unpalatable political truths and telling it like it is and not as one would wish it to be. Chad collapsed into a state of anarchy and the author tells of "the most destructively poor, lawless and incompetently corrupt country I have even seen on our continent".

Tribal animosities, slaughter of wildlife and all-round chaos in Africa's fifth-largest country have a kindred soul in the neighbouring Central African Republic, described by the author as having "grossly incompetent and criminal governments" and "presidential kleptomaniacs". Commercial bush meat poaching is also at epidemic levels in places like Cameroon where police officers and wildlife officials alike are in cahoots with the poachers.

In his quest for giant forest hog in the Central African Republic, Flack discovered for the first time the tremendous difficulty associated with hunting this animal. Its black colour, its predilection for dense cover, its low-to-the-ground profile and its habit of feeding at night certainly earned it iconic status. This animal, together with the forest sitatunga and the dwarf forest buffalo, rank high in Flack's list of iconic African animals. Acute senses, camouflage colouring and secretive, retiring natures all pose huge challenges to even the most seasoned hunter. It is the sheer toughness of the hunt for certain species that accords them iconic value in Flack's opinion and it is a major theme throughout this book.

In the Central African Republic, the author had to take shelter from an army running amok in the capital, Bangui, where soldiers were killing people at random. The country shut down all flights in and out of the country as mortar bombs fell, one actually landing in the hotel bedroom where the author had stayed on entry into the country. Hunting giant forest hog was never portrayed as easy, but outright urban warfare was not supposed to have been "on licence" either.

Eyebrows will no doubt be raised at Flack's inclusion of the striped hyena as an icon. His reasoning why all the hyena family – the spotted, brown and striped hyena and the aardwolf – should be included in an African trophy room, and his effective demolition of the prejudicial nonsense that has been peddled about concerning this formidable, master predator will straighten many a spine and debunk much of the rubbish still in circulation about this "Voice of Africa". Flack is an erudite man, but his writing is accessible and mercifully free of pomposity. His advocacy of the hyena is based on scientific evidence and solid research. Acute senses, extreme resourcefulness and toughness, an anything but cowardly nature and the scientifically backed fact that spotted hyenas consume in the region of

60% of their own kills and not those of others will come as a revelation to many readers. Flack goes so far as to state that hunting a top trophy hyena "is every bit as difficult as it is to hunt a mediocre lion or leopard". These are the words of a hunter with "bush credibility" going back decades and, as such, they can be trusted.

When considering surprising inclusions on Flack's icon list such as the cunning, aggressive caracal, it is helpful to remember that he is a game rancher of note in the Karoo who is well acquainted with the plight of all small carnivores and their place in biodiversity conservation. The caracal, like the other small cats such as the serval, African wild cat and African black-footed cat, have been treated as vermin by farmers and considered fit only for extermination. Flack's argument for the nurturing of these small carnivores and their inclusion on hunt quotas is an education in itself as he explains how hunting has been the salvation of South Africa's most endangered species.

Flack is provocative in his confrontation of the lack of dynamic cheetah conservation policies in Namibia and the position of animal rightists on this issue. The cheetah, another of his icons, is a "travelling cat" that covers vast amounts of territory. Flack has successfully hunted cheetah with dogs and explains how this is indeed the ethical way to do it and that it is a tough hunt and not remotely like "shooting fish in a barrel".

Cattle egret

Significant space is devoted to the zebra family, in particular to the Cape mountain zebra. This animal was teetering on the very edge of extinction in 1950. Today, the species has recovered and the author makes a well-argued case for its inclusion in the record books. Reference is made here and at regular intervals throughout the book to authoritative sources on the animals in question, indicating careful research and solid grounds on which the author bases his views. Another feature of the book is the care with which the author identifies his professional hunters, trackers and camp staff, thereby revealing his appreciation of their crucial role in the safari experience.

In pursuing these icons of Africa in all their variety, from yellow-backed duiker and grey rhebuck to sable and forest elephant, Peter Flack has also known the darker side of humanity as seen in the guerrillas in Chad and as typified by poachers in many places. The reader is with the author when he comes across a zebra mare in foal on the Serengeti Plains in Tanzania, unable to move, one of her rear legs all but severed by a snare. The reader experiences the anguish of the author as he puts down the mare and her unborn foal to prevent further suffering. The reader also faces down slob hunters and inebriated, uninvited people in camp. The reader is right there, on this grand safari into Africa, in the company of a man who lives and has made a very considerable personal investment in the ethic of the hunter/conservationist.

This book's message is potent: "controlled and ethical hunting within the framework of sustainable utilization is one of the best weapons that biodiversity conservation has in its armory". The reader is now invited to take that "vacation from the human condition" and accompany Peter Flack on safari.

Fiona Claire Capstick
Waterkloof, Pretoria

• Acknowledgements •

I have been truly blessed by the friends and family I have. It is fashionable to say that you can choose the one but not the other to excuse or explain eccentric or unacceptable family members but not in my case. I would not change any member of either group and especially not my family. Without them and the love, safety, security and friendship they have provided, I know I would not have attempted many of the things that I have tried. They are the ones who have given me the courage, secure in the knowledge that, if all else failed, I would always have their unconditional love, a roof over my head, a warm meal and clothes to share. They have been and are the most important people in my life and I will never be able to thank them enough for all they have done for me.

On a more pragmatic level, I would like to thank and acknowledge the huge contribution made by my editor, Jane Halse and my graphic designer, Lionel McMurray. They are both perfectionists and at the top of their respective professions. This book is a credit to their skill and art. They have both taught me an enormous amount of what goes into the production of a book of this nature and I wish I had met them many years ago, at the start of my attempt to become an author and not at the end, as I fear this will be my last hunting book.

Fiona Capstick (who wrote the Foreword), Gerhard Damm, Kevin Robertson, Gray Thornton and Craig Boddington who not only reviewed the book and made many acute and useful comments and suggestions but also had some good things to say about me and the book itself – a big thank you to each of you. I really do appreciate what you have done for me.

To me, a book of this nature without good photographs is like a rifle without a trigger and I would like to express a special word of thanks to the brilliant photographers who have so kindly and freely given me a selection of their work to use in this book. To Theo Pretorius (a truly gifted and dedicated professional filmmaker and photographer who took all the museum photos), Catharine Robertson (another brilliant professional photographer), Neil Wright (an ex-professional photographer and current pastor), Jan Kleynhans (a current professional bow hunter), Geoffroy de Gentile, Francois Guillet, Matthieu Labourer, Schalk Tait and Christophe Morio (exceptional French professional hunters all) and gifted amateur photographers such as Sky Hartog, Adrian Goeller, Paul Evangelista, Paul Schwartzinski and Andy Gooch (who shortly plans to bring out a book of photographs covering scenes from the Murchison Falls in Uganda to the Sudan – please keep an eye open for it), what can I say? Thank you very, very, very much!

Peter Flack

• Introduction •

I am an African. My mother's family arrived in Cape Town in 1776. My father's family was not so lucky and, much later, was deposited on a beach near present day Port Elizabeth at the start of their new life in Africa. In my own lifetime, I have been lucky enough to manage mining businesses in nine African countries and to hunt extensively in 15. Altogether, out of the 36 countries that make up Sub-Saharan Africa, where 99,9% of all hunting takes place on the continent, I have travelled widely in 18 of them. I do not mean to imply by this that I am an expert on Africa. In fact, I am extremely wary of experts. After all, an "ex" is a has been and a "spert" is merely a drip under pressure.

Uganda kob

I think it is hard to be definitive about anything in Africa and I sometimes think that, if Africa does not confuse you, then you may not be properly informed. Similarly, if you do not love Africa and hate it at one and the same time, then you may not have spent enough time nor visited sufficient places on the continent.

I started hunting when I was a little boy and shot my first game animal, a grey rhebuck, when I was nine years old. Although there was a time when I started to hunt on other continents and ran the risk of being called a dilettante, for nearly 20 years, I have confined my hunting activities to Africa and been on literally hundreds of safaris in the 15 countries referred to, namely, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

By my count, there are 189 species and subspecies of game animals in Volume I (the Africa volume) of Rowland Ward's Records of Big Game (usually referred to by most hunters, over its 117 year old existence, simply as The Book). Of these, 139 are currently available to be hunted on licence but 11 are introduced species (not endemnic to Africa), such as hog deer, sika deer and so forth. Although I have

Nile bushbuck shot on the shores of Lake Albert, Uganda, with my friend and colleague, the well-known South African hunter, Eben Espach.

hunted seven of these animals successfully, I have eliminated introduced game animals from my list and, in any event, none of them, in my opinion, constitutes an icon or, in fact, is anywhere near to top trophy status. That leaves 128 African game species and subspecies currently available to be hunted on licence. I say, "currently" because things in Africa change quickly, often and not always for the better. As such, this 128-member list is a moveable feast and expands and contracts. For example, black rhino has recently been added after an absence of many years and so have Uganda kob, Nile bushbuck, Ugandan defassa waterbuck and Ssese Island sitatunga which have all been closed since 1979 or before. Having said that, I have been lucky enough, over the years, to hunt 119 of them successfully. I did not deliberately set out to do this. It came about more as a result of my wish to see different areas of Africa, to walk in the footsteps of some of the African hunting legends and, of course, to hunt some of the animals that they did.

Through a great deal of good fortune, only nine game animals currently available on licence remain unaccounted for in my museum. They include the Bates' pygmy and royal antelopes, Livingstone's suni (not the suni from KwaZulu-Natal which I do have), black and Maxwell's duikers, East African roan, Barbary wild boar, Ssese Island sitatunga and black rhino. I hope to reduce this number further as I have hunts planned to Ghana (black and Maxwell's duiker), Uganda (Ssese Island sitatunga) and Morocco (Barbary wild boar). Both the royal and Bates' are strictly nocturnal and the rules of Rowland Ward's Guild of Field Sportsmen, of which I am a member, currently forbid shooting other than with natural light and so, to

Black duiker

all intents and purposes, they are also unavailable – at least to me.

I may never complete the list and there are times when I hope that I don't because, if I were to do so, what would I have to look forward to? There are also times when I become irritable with the arbitrariness inherent in the taxonomic description of certain animals and I have refused, for example, to shoot an East African roan when I had the opportunity because, in my humble opinion, it was no different to the ones I found in West and South Africa.

I hope you will not think I am being boastful mentioning all the animals I have been lucky enough to hunt successfully. I mention this more to establish my bona fides and so that, if I omit an animal from my list of the top 25 game icons of Africa, you will not think I have done so by mistake.

To me, however, all Africa's game animals are special. All are beautiful and it is very difficult to choose just one animal which I find the most special or beautiful. There are some, though, that have an aura about them, something which, although not necessarily Nelson Mandela charismatic, is, nevertheless, indefinable and special. Something that sometimes goes beyond the obvious, beyond just being the biggest, the most beautiful or the most dangerous. Something that almost automatically attracts a hunter's attention. These are the animals which, when their name is mentioned around a campfire, instinctively make me feel as if I want to put up my hand and ask, "Can I please hunt one of those?"

These are the iconic animals of Africa, some of them being the top trophies to which we as hunters aspire but not necessarily so. Some animals are obvious