



Glassing for reedbuck while it is snowing!

Hilton Gary Sanders

The afternoon of our arrival at the concession had been marked by very heavy warm winds, just as had our first hunting morning. We were hunting in the hills and mountains along the provincial border of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, only a stone's throw from the international border of South Africa and Lesotho.

We were hunting with returning and long-standing clients of mine, Mike and Sharon Parton. Mike was after another good grey reed-buck (*Pelea capreolus*), a common reed-buck, also known as a southern reed-buck (*Redunca arundinum*), and a southern mountain reed-buck (*Redunca fulvorufula fulvorufula*).

The first day's hunting had been reasonably okay despite the wind. We had seen a good number of all three species and passed up several inferior rams. As we were hunting for a week we did not want to shoot the first ram we saw unless he was a corker. We had worked a good common reed-buck ram of about 15", only to be busted by the wind, but that's hunting. We had also seen an impressive mountain reed-buck ram but when we got closer he was

nowhere to be found as he probably bedded down out of the wind.

In my mind the mountain reed-buck is one of our most beautiful small antelope. Yes, they are small, weighing in at an average of 30 kg (66 lb) and standing about 74 cm (29") at the shoulder. While we are discussing size, the common reed-buck is a substantially bigger animal than the mountain reed-buck, with an average mass of 70 kg (165 lb) and a shoulder height of about 85 cm (33½"). Another point of interest is that both species, especially the mountain reed-buck, have ears that seem far too big for the size of their necks.

Not only is the southern common reed-buck bigger than the southern mountain reed-buck; it is also bigger than all the other species of reed-buck found further north. Reed-buck species occurring further north are: Abyssinian bohor reed-buck (*R. r. bohor*), Sudan bohor reed-buck (*R. r. cottoni*), Nigerian bohor reed-buck (*R. r. nigeriensis*), eastern bohor reed-buck (*R. r. wordi*), and the Nagor reed-buck (*R. r. redunca*). There is also one other mountain reed-buck, namely the Chanler's mountain reed-buck (*Redunca fulvorufula chanleri*).

The mountain reed-buck, known as the "rooibbok" in Afrikaans, is aptly named as its coat has a reddish glow when standing in the early morning sun ("rooi" means "red"). Both the Southern African reed-buck possess a yellowish coat colour but they can also have a greyish look, especially when their dense winter coats are "standing" on end to trap a layer of warm air against the skin. They >>

Hunting the Reed-buck of Southern Africa



Mike and his mountain reed-buck mentioned in the text. Note the chipped horn tips and tattered ears.

>>> both have a white belly and a short but broad tail with dense white hairs on the underside. They lift the tail as a visual alarm to all the other reedbuck in the area, especially when in flight.

The mountain reedbuck is found throughout most of the central, eastern and southern parts of South Africa as well in the south-eastern hills of Botswana along the South African border. The common reedbuck is traditionally found in KwaZulu-Natal, Zululand, Mpumalanga as well as Limpopo Province and Zimbabwe.

At about 2 pm on the first afternoon the wind picked up and started to gain in strength that rivalled the winds of the previous afternoon. It became positively unpleasant, with strong gusts punctuated by dust and the soot from recently burnt firebreaks collecting in the corners of one's eyes and sticking to one's teeth. We decided to head for camp and try again the next day.

An eerie silence prevailed as I got up five minutes after turning off my alarm clock on the second morning. Once dressed, I stepped out into the cold. It was snowing. Soft, wafting flakes were descending slowly; a scene more suited to Europe or North America yet very much a part of this section of Africa!

After a hearty breakfast we bundled into the hunting vehicle and started our 40-minute drive to the area we had hunted the previous day. The snow continued to fall steadily, covering the world around us in a fine white blanket. When almost at our destination it stopped snowing and patches of blue sky appeared through the clouds.

Engaging low ratio we headed up a fairly steep slope. Shibas, my tracker, spotted a common reedbuck which he thought would make a good trophy. It was bedded down on the left of the track that we were on. I proceeded up the slope and then parked the rig

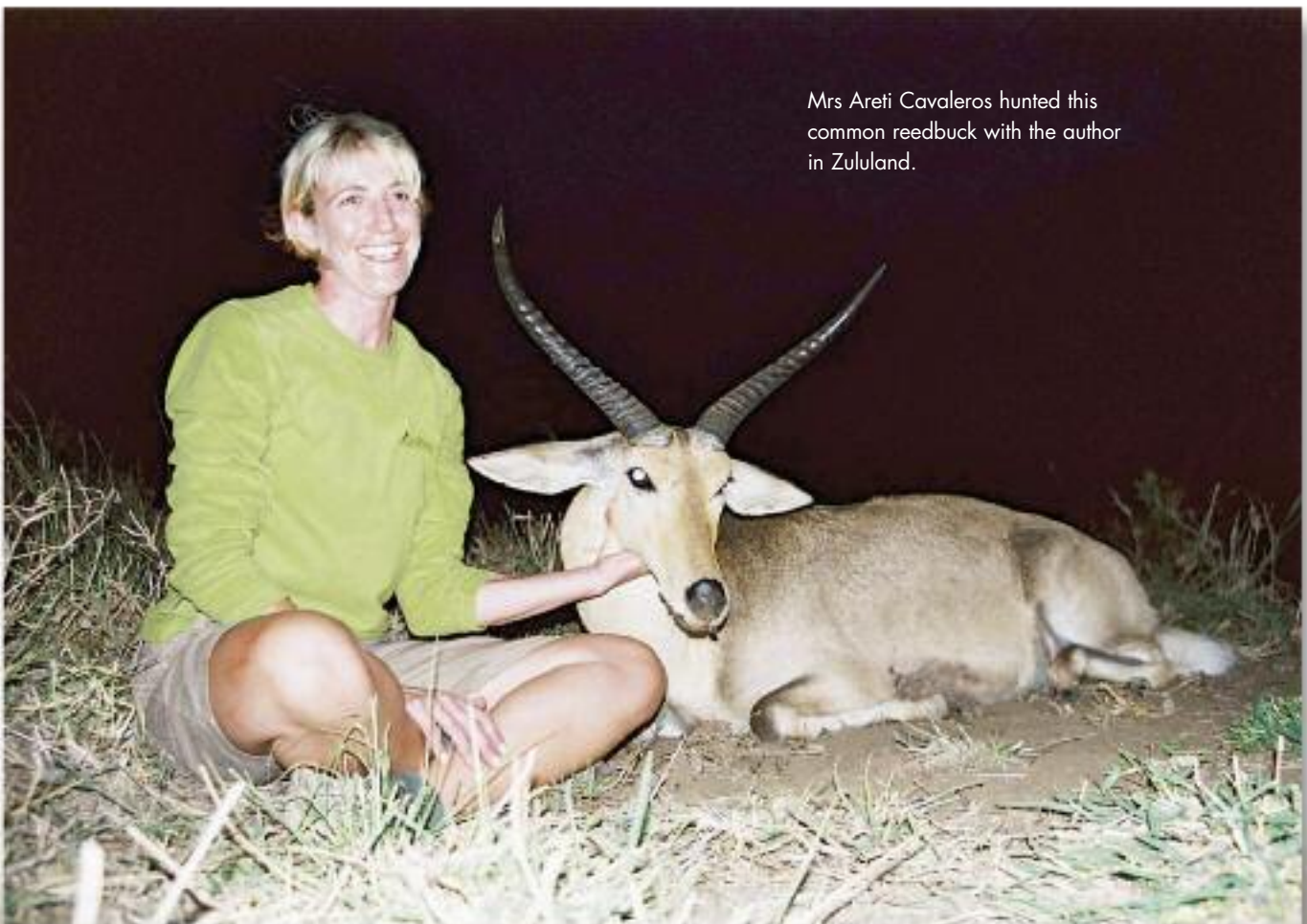
on the leeward side of it. We slowly walked back up the ridge and then down towards the resting ram. The going was slow as we scanned for any telltale signs of the ram's exact position. We spotted the shiny, slightly forward-curving horns of the ram.

The snow began to fall once more, this time carried from right to left by a light wind. At about 30 m (33 yards) I set up the sticks and got Mike set up for a shot. We could not see any part of the ram bar his horns sticking out of the snow-capped grass. I was sure he was lying with his head along his side. Five bone-chilling minutes passed with the wind now driving the snow before it, almost parallel to the ground. Still we were none the wiser as to which way the ram was lying.

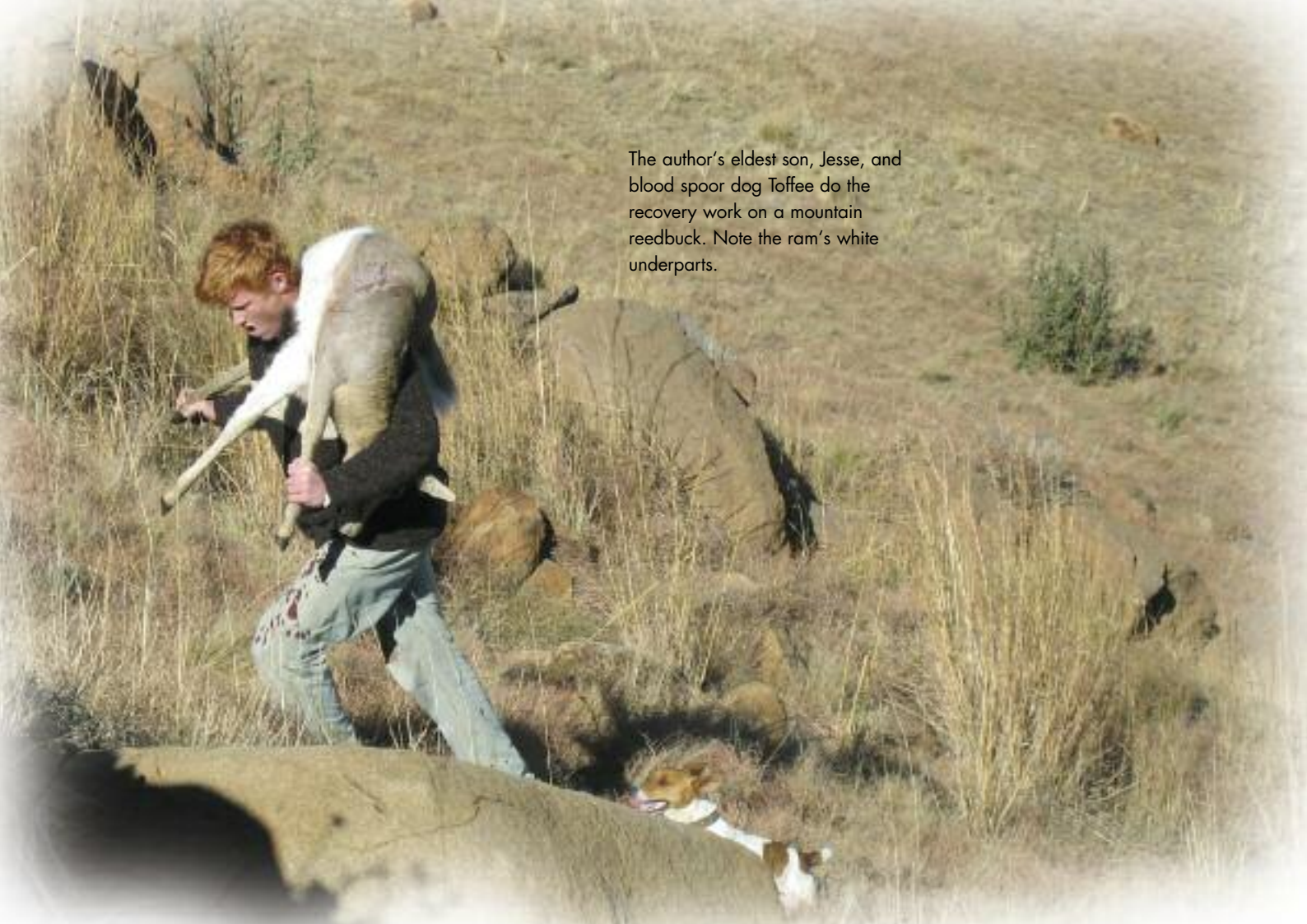
I told Mike to be ready as I was going to clap my hands. When the ram jumped up Mike was to shoot him. Well, not only did the ram jump up but so did two does. They all promptly took off running. Mike could not get a shot as the scope turned the falling snow into a white blanket. As we were cold to the bone we decided to drain the steaming flask of coffee and head for camp and a crackling fire.

The third hunting day dawned with a clear sky and a very healthy layer of ice covering the dam next to camp. The world was a winter wonderland of snow-covered hills and mountains with a frost coating. We had two missed opportunities on a sharp-eyed grey rhebuck ram. We then spotted a mountain reedbuck ram and his harem of eight does.

The mountain reedbuck is far more gregarious than the common reedbuck, being found most commonly in herds of anything from three to fifteen animals. These herds are normally made up of a dominant ram and his females plus their youngsters. Mountain



Mrs Areti Cavaleros hunted this common reedbuck with the author in Zululand.



The author's eldest son, Jesse, and blood spoor dog Toffee do the recovery work on a mountain reedback. Note the ram's white underparts.

reedback rams fight fiercely for control of a herd of females. It is not uncommon to see a young ram hanging around on the fringes of the herd, but staying well out of the dominant ram's way. One will see these herds dotted over the hills in the early morning, each with its own territory.

Mature common reedback rams prefer to spend their time alone on the whole. They can often be seen in the company of other females or young rams. However, this is not strictly a herd structure but more often a loose association. One often finds solitary rams and to a lesser extent does bedded down during the heat of the day. I have found many a common reedback bedded down on the burnt stubble of a firebreak where they like to feed on the short, new regrowth.

We got into shooting range of the herd which were scattered from a gully on the side of the main mountain to the base of the mountain where it meets the valley floor and the brush-lined stream. We carefully set up the sticks and glassed the gully for the now whistling ram. Often it is the sharp nasal warning whistle that alerts the intrepid hunter to the presence of both mountain and common reedback. This ram was warning his harem of our presence and the possibility of danger. If only he knew!

Mike took aim and fired his Sako Forester in .243". The shot was low and slightly right, hitting the slope under and a tad behind the ram's front legs. He took off like a cat on a hot tin roof. The entire herd ran helter-skelter for the top of the ridge behind them and to their left. As is often the habit of these little animals, the herd came to a stop on the crest of the ridge and looked back at us. It was just on 400 m (438 yards) with the sky as a background. We decided to let him go and try to work him again.

We waited as the herd disappeared over the crest in the direction of a shelf on the face of the mountain a little to the west of our position. This shelf was also a good bit lower than our present position. When resting up out of the wind these little animals like to lie up on these shelves out of the wind and in the sun. This habit has allowed us to secure many a good ram for our clients by coming from above the shelf without being detected. One is almost never able to see the resting mountain reedback from below these shelves.

We slowly moved into position above where I thought the herd had now disappeared to. At first we only spotted a couple of does and a young ram. Then, to the right of these, we saw a few more does and youngsters. Suddenly I saw the ram as he carefully picked his way through the rocks obliquely away from our position and a bit further to the right of his ever-alert does.

Again we got Mike set up on the shooting sticks. I instructed him to aim at the back of the ribs on the ram's right-hand side with the intention of the round traversing the chest to the left shoulder. Again the rifle barked; this time it was spot on. The ram arched his back and brought up his tail to flash the white underside on taking the shot.

THWAAK! The sound of the bullet hitting home reached our ears. The ram took two tottering steps and then flopped over nose first. Mike had himself a superb 7½" warrior of the mountain with tattered ears and the ends of his horns chipped. (Roland Ward minimum is 6½" and SCI minimum is a score of 20.) With the photo session over we were treated to a spectacular sunset.

On the sixth day of the safari we shifted the actual hunting to another spot in the mountains. Early in the morning we had >>

>>> been beaten by a good common reed-buck as he had disappeared into a sea of tall thatch grass in a basin between two hills. We spent close on an hour glassing the basin, an area about as big as one and a half soccer fields. Not a sign of the ram. We saw a couple of young rams and several does, all of which were bedded down out of the chilly wind that was now blowing from the snow-capped hills.

We decided to head into the hills and look for a grey rhebuck and then to come back to the basin in the late afternoon. I have found this to be the best time to hunt common reedbuck as they get up from their day beds to feed.

We did just this and got up on a rocky ridge overlooking the basin with the wind in our faces. We glassed for about half an hour and watched as one after another the bedded reedbuck stood up, stretched their muscles and got down to a bit of personal grooming before starting to feed. However, not a sign of the trophy ram! Had he somehow gone up and out of the basin without us noticing?

It was getting late and the sun was already headed for the western horizon. I was thinking that in about ten minutes we would have to call it quits for the day. The next instant the ram popped out of the thatch grass almost under our noses at the base of the ridge we were standing on. Quickly we got Mike's son Geoffrey set up on the short shooting sticks. He made a perfect



Mike and Geoffrey with the common reedbuck mentioned in the text. 🏠

shot that dropped the ram in its tracks. The ram measured a good 15½". 🐾

The Box H Big Game Hounds Specialist Hunting Outfitters

Email: theboxh@umvoti.co.za

www.huntingtheboxh.co.za

THE BOX H
Specialist Hunting Outfitters.

We are Dedicated to Hunting and Service Excellence!
Southern African Plainsgame & Big Five Trophy Hunting at its Best.

Specialising in
Aardwolf, Hyena, Serval, White Tailed Mongoose etc
The Mini Antelope Species
Bushpig and Caracal over Hounds
Hilton & Robyn Sanders

mobile: +27 72 372 9065/+27 82 428 6641
email: theboxh@umvoti.co.za
website: www.huntingtheboxh.co.za