



Of Baboons and Klipspringers

Hilton Gary Sanders

I had two plains game safaris booked back to back in the Eastern Cape. The first was with Barry Cole and his eldest son, Gareth. The second was with Dr Jose Vieira and his family. I was really looking forward to these safaris as both parties had hunted with us before on several safaris.

As my staff and I travelled down from KwaZulu-Natal after passing through the north-eastern Cape the day before, we scheduled to meet Barry and Gareth. The weather closed in and got bitterly cold. The area we would be hunting was situated near Graaff-Reinet, a part of the country that gets very cold and certainly does not need the addition of a cold front!

By the time we had arrived at the camp a light snowfall had occurred. Just great! However, the skies had opened to reveal stars and a sliver of a moon that bathed the eerie mountainous landscape in a pale blue light, making it almost lunar in appearance.

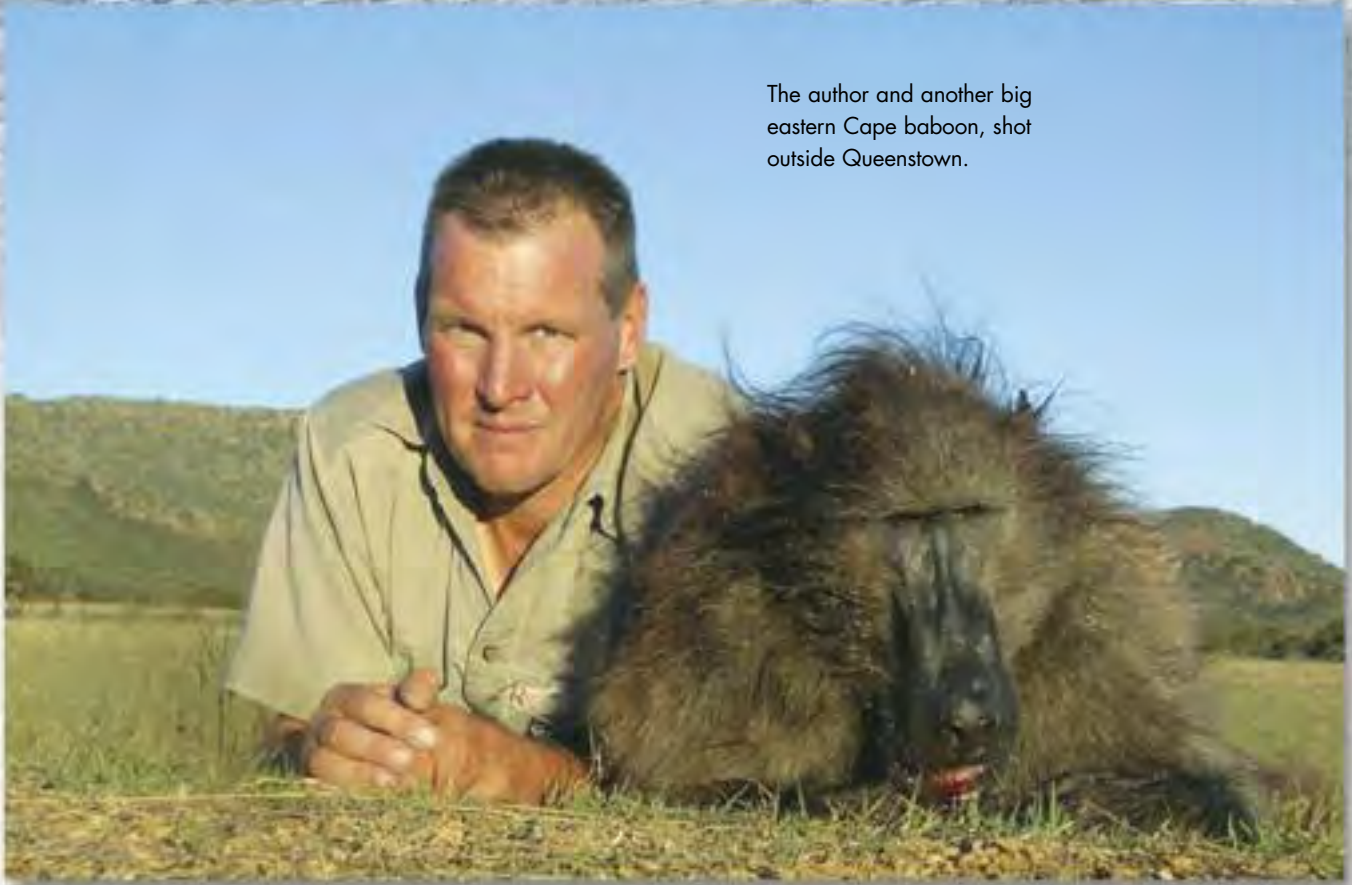
Barry and Gareth commenced their safari with Gareth hunting for a big chacma baboon (*Papio ursinus*). Easier said than done! There are four troops of baboons that frequent the concession of 10 000 ha (22 000 acres) that we were hunting. Two of these troops live on the concession full-time while the other two have only part of their range on the concession.

The chacma baboon is found throughout Southern Africa. They

are as synonymous with the large national parks as the elephant or big cats. Not only are they seen next to the roads, perched in trees or foraging for a scorpion or spider under some rock; you will also find replicas of them in curio shops in the form of carvings, on table cloths or adorning a postcard either as a photo or cartoon character.

The colour as well as the length of the coat of chacma baboons varies from area to area. The baboons in the mountainous areas of Southern African have much longer and thicker coats as do those that are found along the Botswana border for instance. I personally think that the thicker, longer coat makes for a more impressive mount. This is even more so on a large 40kg (88lb) male, also known as a dog baboon or bull baboon.

These primates are fairly well known by many tourists as beggars, comics or just downright thieves and thugs. This is especially true of visitors to Cape Point or Table Mountain who have been mugged by baboons. Troops of baboons can be a tremendous pest to crop and small-stock farmers. This is due to their destructive crop-raiding habits as well as their predisposition to killing young lambs and goat kids for food. They are also very adept at killing young antelope, such as baby mountain reedbuck, springbuck, steenbuck and grey duiker. >>



The author and another big eastern Cape baboon, shot outside Queenstown.

>>> Due to the pressured exerted by farmers on these raiding troops of baboons the primates have become very wily. This is the case with the troops on the concession as their habits of eating lambs and lucerne (*alfalfa*) had sharpened up their survival instincts a tad over the last 100 odd years.

It was therefore a good break in our favour when one of the herdsmen told us that there was often a big, solitary old dog baboon that fed on bulbs and suchlike on the flat about 500 m (547 yards) below the camp. According to the herdsman he was normally there around 2 pm to 3 pm. After a leisurely lunch we decided to try and outsmart this male.

Because of the wind and the best available cover, our plan was to creep along a ridge running along the south-western edge of the flat to take a look and see. At about 300 m (328 yards) we spotted the humped up shape of the old man as he sat feeding with his back to us. We edged along slowly from cover to cover, freezing every time the baboon so much as lifted a foreleg or his big shaggy head. Eventually we were at a range of about 220 m (240 yards). Gareth sat cross-legged and nestled his cheek into the .270's stock with the front end sitting snugly in the shooting sticks.

He made an excellent shot, taking the huge old baboon squarely between the shoulder blades. The baboon slumped forward onto his chin and chest not to so much as stir again. Just his shining, long coat was ruffled by a gentle breeze. The first blood of the safari had been drawn.

Later on in the safari Barry and I hunted for a klipspringer. On this concession a quota of two klipspringers per year is allowed as a sustainable take-off. The deep boulder-strewn valleys, cliffs and rocky peaks are home to a good bunch of these unique and beautiful little members of the mini antelope species.

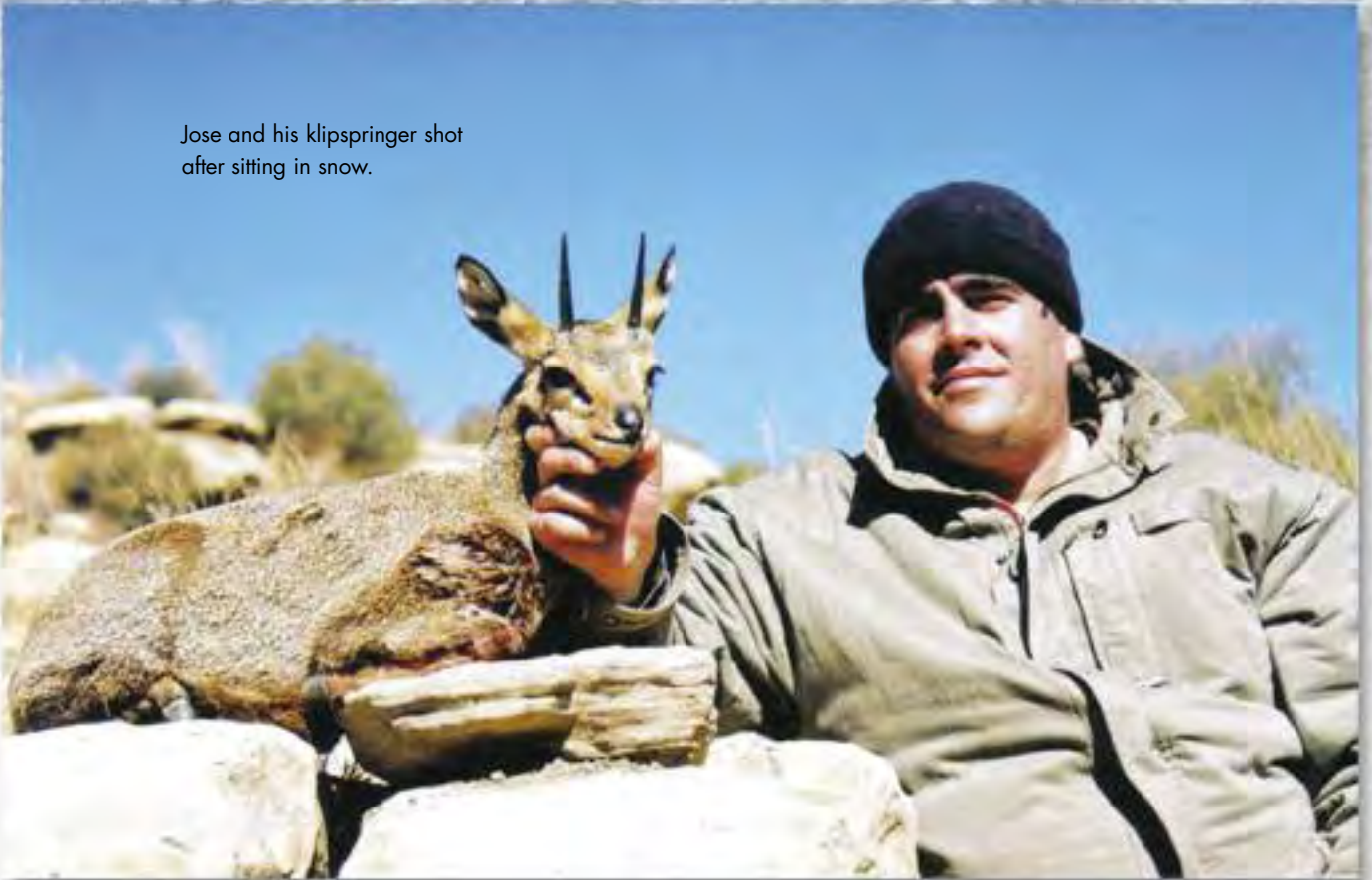
The klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*) is one of the most widespread of the mini antelope species. They are found from the

southernmost tip of South Africa up into Nigeria in West Africa and Ethiopia in East Africa as well as numerous other places south of the Sahara. However, the distribution of this species is not continuous, the reason being that the klipspringer's distribution depends to a large extent on its choice of habitat. It needs rocks, rocks and more rocks, be they in the form of rocky hills, hills with rocky outcrops, rocky ravines or rocky mountainous terrain!

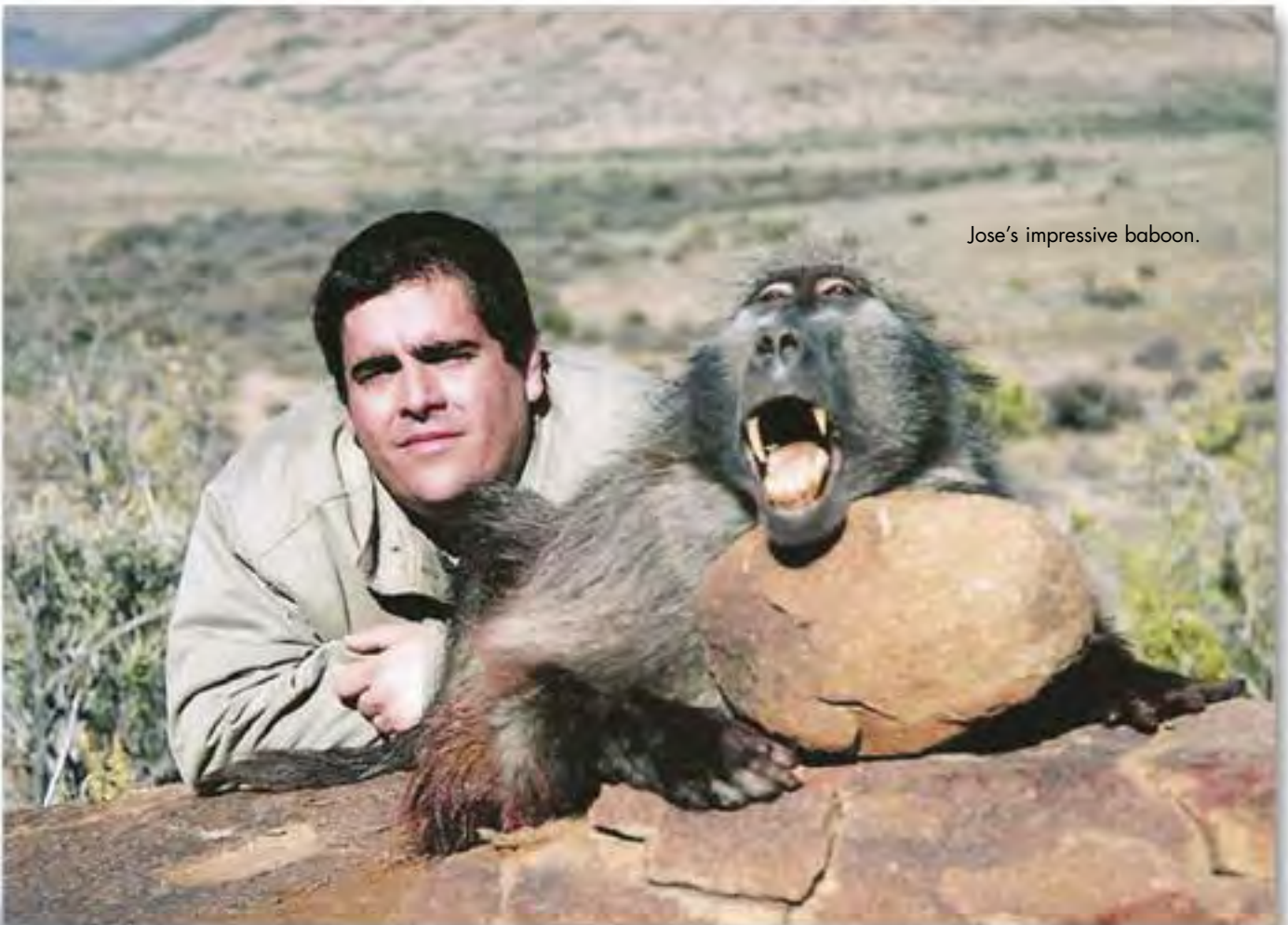
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I've been fortunate to have hunted klipspringer in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The terrain that I have hunted them in is as varied as the three countries themselves. Rowland Ward lists a minimum measurement of 4½" to gain entry into their *Records of Big Game* and SCI requires a minimum score of 11 to enter a trophy in their record book. >>>

Jose and his klipspringer shot
after sitting in snow.



Jose's impressive baboon.



>> In South Africa I have hunted klipspringers in the misty Drakensberg mountain range in Mpumalanga Province. Incidentally, this is where some of the biggest trophies have been harvested (see the beautiful ram hunted by Lorinda van der Reyden on page 37 of the June/July 2009 issue of *African Outfitter*). I have also hunted them in the cold, drier mountains of the Eastern Cape. In Namibia we hunted them in the sun-baked yellow hills of the Khomas Hochland and in Zimbabwe we hunted the klipspringers, also fondly referred to as "klippies", in the jumbled boulder piles of the Matopos Hills.

Barry, Gareth and I had spent two days glassing the lower valleys, screed beds and high crags for a good ram. We had seen a bundle of klipspringers and several reasonable rams, but all had been perched on rocks in very inaccessible places. The snow and ice patches made for difficult footing and in some places were downright dangerous. We therefore confined our hunting to where we could safely walk, clamber or scramble with the least chance of coming to grief.

The klipspringer is a sociable little animal and normally occurs in pairs or small family groups, a pair with one or two years' offspring in tow. One also finds solitary rams; these are either young rams without a mate or older to old rams that have been driven from their mates and territory by stronger and younger rams.

Even though the klipspringer's favoured habitat is steep rocky areas it is not uncommon to find them feeding on the flats and valley bottoms. Here they feed mostly on leaves and wild fruits with grass forming a smaller portion of the diet. They are totally independent of water but will drink regularly if it is available. If one disturbs them on the flats they literally head for the hills with a good dash of speed.

We had parked the hunting truck on a flat spot just above a stream crossing where the stream and mountain track intersected in a sharp bend. Slowly we walked down the track in an easterly direction. We would stop every so often to glass the steep valley sides on our left and right. Away, off to our right, we spotted a herd of seven mountain reedbuck grazing



Gareth and his dog baboon.

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in our direction. Their coats gleamed gold in the sunlight.

After we had walked and glassed a distance of about 300 m (328 yards) we bumped into a small group of klippies with a clatter of small stones and an explosion of leaves. They had been feeding next to the track on our left. At first we did not see the fleeing animals; we only heard their progress as they sped away through the undergrowth. Oh boy, did they cover ground fast! We only saw them as they started up the base of the slope.

I was battling to get the binos onto the individuals in the group long enough to see if we had a reasonable ram in the bunch. Once they had reached a big boulder the size of a bus the three little animals came to a halt, perched on their toes, looking back at us. I told Barry that the ewe was on the left, the young ram in the middle, and the old ram on the right. They were about 200 m (218 yards) from our position. I told Barry I was sure that the ram had only one horn. Barry asked if it would make >>

>>> Rowland Ward, upon which I replied it would probably just squeak in. He said that it was good enough for him and that he would take a shot if presented with one.

With that the little bunch bounced off the rock and out of sight. Barry asked for my jacket so as to improve his half-lying, half-sitting position over a rock on the side of the track. He was now more comfortable and ready to take a shot if the opportunity came.

All of a sudden the three klippies appeared further up the slope; they were now about 250 m (283 yards) from us and at an angle of about 45 degrees. I scanned the three to pick out the ram; he was in the centre and standing side-on. Barry held a tad high on the little fellow's shoulder and squeezed the trigger of his custom .338 Win Mag.

I saw a cloud of whitish grey form a halo around the ram in the binos as the bullet hit; a split second thereafter the ram collapsed on the spot. The remaining two klipspringers peeled off the rock left and right in a perfectly choreographed ballet.

Barry had his ram; he did only have one horn and the interesting thing is that there had never been a second horn. The skull was as smooth as a female's where the second horn should have been – a true unicorn! Both Barry and Gareth continued to collect several other trophies before heading home.

On the next safari with Jose we hunted several species, including an East Cape kudu in a snowstorm. Thereafter Jose also hunted a klipspringer that had us sitting for almost an hour with our butts in snow waiting for a shot!


Jose also took a good baboon, a huge dominant male that was a member of one of the troops that frequently crossed the eastern boundary on the concession. We had spotted the feeding troop from a scrub-covered ridge and used the low ground

and scrub vegetation as cover to affect a successful stalk. With a bit more manoeuvring we got ourselves in position for a shot just as the troop was climbing up another scrub-covered hill opposite us.

As the troop scaled up a low, broken cliff the big dog baboon spotted us and barked his defiant warning at us. He was joined by two other big males. However, neither of them was as big as him. Jose was looking at the same male and I advised him to place a shot on the animal's chest. But the males were on the move again, bringing up the rear of the troop.

The huge male swung up a small tree trunk to reach a higher ledge. As he stepped out into the open he turned to face us and bounced on his sturdy front legs, uttering yet another deep guttural bark. The echo of his bark had not yet died away when Jose's Styre Mannlicher barked, sending a round into the front of the old baboon's engine room. The baboon stood up on his hind legs and then keeled over and fell off the ledge.

This old baboon was indeed a magnificent fellow with long canines and several fresh, deep gashes that, without doubt, were obtained in a boundary dispute with another troop.

The thrill of outsmarting big old baboons and their rock-dwelling neighbours, the klipspringers, is one of the highlights of my hunting excursions. 

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Barry and his unicorn of a klipspringer.

