

# Ask the Namibian Guides





# Ask the Namibian Guides



by  
Diana Rupp



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This book is dedicated to  
Namibia's outstanding professional hunters.  
Thank you for making possible  
the adventures  
we safari hunters will never forget.



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## Foreword

Jack Atcheson and Sons has always taken the research and development of great African hunting areas seriously. While East African hunting areas were well known by the 1960s, the development of hunting in southern Africa was just evolving in the early 1970s. Around that time, we were told about a region where kudu bull sightings could exceed thirty or more bulls a day—a region that held many bulls whose horns were in excess of fifty inches in length! Kudu hunting in the safari destinations of that era were very good, but on a fourteen-day safari one might see only a handful of kudu bulls, and a fifty-inch-class bull was truly rare. We had to know more!

We, therefore, enlisted one of our favorite critics of great hunting, the late Jack O'Connor, to go and have a good look. Jack embarked with his family in tow to South-West Africa, or, as we know it now, Namibia. Jack hunted with Volker Grellmann of Anvo Hunting Safaris, and upon his return his glowing report confirmed the stories of abundant and huge spiral-horned kudu bulls. Eleanor O'Connor took a sixty-inch bull, and the rest of the O'Connor family took bulls with horns in the mid-fifties.

Jack spoke about the beauty of the land, from mountains to endless savannas, the friendly people, and the quality of the game. We went to work on spreading the news, and since then the Atcheson clan has been introducing hunters to Namibia for over forty years. The hunting scene just gets better and better!

Namibia is one of the few areas in Africa where a safari for the Big Five can still take place. This is a very big deal! There are still many huge kudus, and a few hundred-plus-pound tuskers have been taken recently. The country offers some of Africa's best leopard hunting. Big antelope species like roan and sable are increasing. Rarities like red lechwe, Damara dik-dik, and sitatunga are open to limited hunting.

Some years ago, the government of Namibia formed the Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management (NASCO). This led to the development of fifty-nine tribally owned conservancies in which the local wildlife resources are managed by professional wildlife managers and leased to professional hunting companies, and the camps are staffed by local trackers, camp managers, and workers. Some of these conservancies cover millions of acres of undeveloped wild lands, much like the prime game areas of East Africa. The wildlife has taken on new meaning to local people, and it is flourishing!

On private lands much of the same has occurred. Namibia is covered in endless rich savanna grasslands, and cattlemen have developed water projects for cattle that have greatly benefited wildlife. I visited the minister of Environment, the Honorable N. Nandi-Ndaitwah, in June 2010, and she assured me that Namibia is committed to helping its rural people and wildlife resources to coexist, and hunting will play a major part.

I am really pleased to see a book written to spread awareness of what a great safari destination Namibia is for today's sportsmen. Don't forget to take your family!

Jack Atcheson Jr.  
Butte, Montana  
February 2011





# NAMIBIA

- ★ CAPITAL
- ◎ CITY
- ▲ MOUNTAINS
- ROADS
- RIVERS
- WATER
- PARKS AND RESERVES





# Introduction

## Chapter 1

Of all the amazing animals I saw in the wild on my first African safari, the red hartebeest was the biggest surprise. In photos, these animals look somewhat odd and ungainly, with long, narrow faces and oversized chests and shoulders. But the first time I saw several hartebeests moving across a dusty plain in central Namibia, the sight of them took my breath away. Their coats were a lovely burnished copper, and the dark markings on their faces and black, bent-back horns were a stunning contrast to the red bodies. Nor were they ungainly—they were graceful and beautiful, and as I watched them loping through the African landscape, I could see how perfectly adapted they were to the landscape of central Namibia, its sun-drenched plains scattered with thorn trees, low bushes, and rocky hills called kopjes.



*During the midday hours, hunters often take a lunch break overlooking a water hole, just to watch and photograph the wildlife that comes to drink. (Photo by J. Scott Rupp)*

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*Diana and Scott Rupp with the two red hartebeest they shot within minutes of each other.*

In over a week of hunting, I had the chance to stalk numerous hartebeests, but it seemed that in addition to their other qualities, these animals had eyes on the backs of their heads, for they gave us the slip every time. In the meantime, though, my husband, Scott, and I and our PH, Johan, were having a wonderful time, glassing giraffe and zebra, and proudly putting our first African game kills—warthog, gemsbok, and springbok—in the salt shed.

On the second-to-last day of hunting, just as the morning chill was giving way to another dry, warm day, we followed our tracker and PH as they scrambled up jumbled red boulders covered with sparse grass to the peak of a kopje, which gave us a fine view of the surrounding terrain. The four of us lay prone atop the outcropping, glassing, when four very impressive hartebeest bulls came trotting into view around the base of the kopje.

We lay still, awaiting our opportunity, and when the hartebeest fed to within 150 yards of our position, Scott dropped the largest one with a shot from his .300 WSM. Amazingly, the other three remained, milling around in some confusion, and that gave me the opportunity to crawl up beside Johan, find

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another large bull in my scope, and drop him as well. Scott and I have hunted together a lot, but to this day those hartebeest remain our only “double”—and we could not have been more thrilled with our two outstanding trophies or the experience of an exciting hunt in an exotic land.

It was later that same day that I found myself kneeling next to my most sought-after African trophy, experiencing a dream come true. After a heart-pounding stalk through thick brush, Johan and I had sneaked to within eighty yards of a greater kudu, and after a well-placed shot from the shooting sticks I was tracing the ridges of the curling horns of my magnificent fifty-inch kudu bull. The memories of that day still remain sharply etched in my mind: not just the kudu’s curling horns and white-striped hide, but the dust in my clothes and the thorn cuts on my hands; the go-away bird calling from a nearby tree as we took photos; and the welcome taste of a cold Coca-Cola from the ice box slaking my thirst.

They say your first African safari is a life-changing experience. It certainly was for me, and I feel especially fortunate that I chose what I still believe to be the perfect country for a neophyte’s introduction to Africa. The thornbrush



*The author with the animal she most wanted when she came to Namibia—a greater kudu. (Photo by J. Scott Rupp)*

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savanna of Namibia's central plateau teems with game—warthog, gemsbok, giraffe, kudu, and hartebeest especially, and everywhere I looked, there was something new to discover. From the communal nests of the sociable weaver bird, which looked heavy enough to topple the trees that held them, to mysterious, ancient paintings of ostriches and antelopes adorning the walls of a rocky canyon, the memories of the Namibian countryside are indelibly etched into my mind.

On day two of that safari I wrote this in my journal: *It was blazing hot all day, and then the second it got dark it became really cold riding in that open Land Cruiser, and I threw on a fleece jacket, warm hat, and gloves. But as we headed back to the lodge, the Southern Cross and a zillion other stars and the Milky Way were gleaming brightly in a sky absolutely untouched by any light anywhere. It was spectacular.*

### The Country

Namibia does not necessarily invite comparisons to the broad, lush savannas of East Africa famously depicted in *Out of Africa*, nor does it possess jungles that bring to mind Tarzan. Namibia, located on Africa's west coast, is a land of great contrasts, with dunes and deserts in the west, semidesert plains in the central regions, rugged mountains in the south, and even forests and swamps in the far northeast. Its incredibly dark nights and bright stars make sense when you consider that this is a nation of 317,816 square miles, larger than the state of Texas, with a fairly sparse human population of some two million people (about 6.5 people per square mile). It has some forty-two huntable species of game available, including all the Big Five—lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo, and rhino—and some outstanding bird hunting, to boot.

Namibia is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the west, Angola on the north, Botswana on the east, and South Africa on the east and south. A thin panhandle of land, known as the Caprivi Strip, stretches out from the northeastern corner like a pointed finger, and here the country's borders touch Zambia to the north and Zimbabwe to the east. The Caprivi Strip and the region just south of it, known as the Kavango, are the rainiest areas of the country, flat and covered with dense bushveld. This northern region is where the majority of the country's buffalo and elephant hunting takes place.

Most of the country's population—and many of its plains-game and leopard-hunting areas, including the site of my own first safari—are in the

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central plateau, where elevations range from 3,600 feet to some 6,000 feet. This is also the location of the capital city, Windhoek. East and west of this plateau are spectacular desert areas.

The Namib Desert on the west is a relatively narrow belt that runs the entire length of the country along its coastline, and is known for its magnificent sand dunes. The Namib region includes Namib-Naukluft National Park, the tourist region of Swakopmund, the Skeleton Coast, and Damaraland in the northwest. Then there is the Kalahari Desert on the east, which is known for its long strips of dunes and excellent populations of gemsbok and springbok.

Unsurprisingly for a country comprised largely of desert and semidesert, Namibia boasts a lot of sunshine—some 300 days a year are sunny, on average. Summer (November through March) is the rainy season, and during that time 20 to 28 inches of rain may fall in the northeast, 12 to 20 in the central highlands, and often less than two inches in the western deserts. Average temperatures in



*The night skies in Namibia are unforgettable.* (Photo courtesy of Joof Lamprecht)

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the winter months, when most hunting is done, are 77 degrees F at midday and 32 at night. In summer it may be 104 at midday and 77 at night.

Although its human population is relatively low, Namibia is an extremely diverse country. Most Namibians fall into one of eleven ethnic groups, including the San, Nama, Khoi-Khoi, Herero, Himba, Kavango, Tswana, Caprivian, Ovambo, Damara, and Rehoboth Baster peoples. Some 15 percent of the population is of European descent, primarily Germans, Portuguese, and Afrikaners, and there is a significant Asian minority as well. English is the official language, but German, Afrikaans, and indigenous languages are widely spoken.

Namibia was a German protectorate, known as South-West Africa (or German South-West Africa) beginning in the 1880s. However, after World War I, South Africa was given a mandate to administer the territory, which continued until the country officially became independent in 1991, making it the last country in Africa to gain independence.

Namibia has excellent infrastructure, among the best in Africa. It boasts 19,885 miles of paved and gravel roads, and most are well maintained. The major international airport, known variously as Hosea Kutako International Airport or Windhoek International Airport, is located twenty-six miles east of the capital city of Windhoek. It has regular air service from Johannesburg, Frankfurt, and London. There is a good network of telephone landlines throughout the country, and most towns have cell phone coverage.

The majority of the country—the south, east, west, and central regions—are malaria free, as there are no mosquitoes to speak of. However, if traveling or hunting in the northwestern or northeastern areas of the country, malaria prophylaxis is recommended. Otherwise, no inoculations are required, but when traveling to Africa it's always a good idea to get shots for yellow fever, meningitis, and hepatitis A and B.

### The Hunting

As a whole, Namibia offers close to fifty huntable game animals, although not all types are found in every area of the country. In addition, not all of these animals are actually indigenous to the country; many have been imported for breeding on game farms, where huntable populations have been established. Namibia does have a number of indigenous species that are available nowhere else in Africa, including the Hartmann mountain zebra, the Damara dik-dik, and the black-faced impala. Namibia is also the only country that has a CITES quota for cheetah. However, it's important to note that although both black-faced impala



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*A giraffe pauses for a drink.* (Photo courtesy of Jofie Lamprecht)

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*Namibia has a large leopard population, and the cats are hunted in many areas of the country. (Photo courtesy of Dirk DeBod)*

and cheetah can be legally hunted in Namibia, these trophies cannot be imported into the United States.

Animals officially listed as “available on license” in Namibia are: baboon, blesbok, Cape buffalo, Chobe bushbuck, bushpig, caracal, civet, cheetah, Nile crocodile, Damara dik-dik, southern bush duiker, Cape eland, elephant, Kalahari gemsbok, genet, giraffe, red hartebeest, hippo, brown hyena, spotted hyena, black-faced impala, southern impala, black-backed jackal, klipspringer, southern greater kudu, red lechwe, leopard, lion, nyala, oribi, ostrich, porcupine, southern roan, common reedbuck, black rhino, white rhino, common sable, serval, Zambezi sitatunga, Kalahari springbok, steenbok, tsessebe, warthog, common waterbuck, Angolan defassa waterbuck, wildcat, black wildebeest, blue wildebeest, Burchell (plains) zebra, and Hartmann (mountain) zebra.

Bird shooting in Namibia, though often overlooked by hunters more focused on big game, is excellent. The country boasts a large diversity of game birds, including Namakwa dove, mourning dove, Cape turtle dove, Namakwa sand grouse, Burchell sand grouse, double banded sand grouse,

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red-billed francolin, Swainson francolin, guinea fowl, red billed teal, Egyptian geese, and spur-wing geese. In many cases, bird shooting can be combined with a big-game safari.

Hunting is controlled by two government agencies, the Ministry of Wildlife and Tourism (MET) and the Namibia Tourism Board, under which all professional hunters have to be registered. Namibia's requirements for registering professional hunters are quite strict. To receive the "professional hunter" designation, applicants must undergo a lengthy training regimen that requires them to become extremely knowledgeable about game and nongame wildlife. The qualification process includes passing several exams, both theoretical and practical. The entire process of becoming a fully registered PH can take up to four years.

The hunting season in Namibia begins 1 February and ends 30 November. All safari hunters must have a valid hunting permit from the MET specifying the species they intend to take, which your guide will obtain for you. Just make sure he has it when the hunt starts. A maximum of two animals of the same species may be taken on a safari on one hunting permit. Hunting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. It is illegal to hunt at night, or with an artificial light. Namibia's rules say that one guide may hunt with only two hunters at a time.

Namibia has an active and influential professional hunter's organization, the Namibian Professional Hunting Association (NAPHA). While professional hunters in Namibia are not required to be members of this organization, the vast majority of them are. NAPHA's Web site ([www.natron.net/napha/](http://www.natron.net/napha/)) provides a listing of all its members along with contact information and other up-to-date information that is helpful to anyone considering hunting in Namibia.

In recent years Namibia has become one of the most popular destinations for safari hunters, both first-timers and old Africa hands alike. In 2007, Namibia hosted an estimated 6,100 international safari hunters, which makes it the second-most popular hunting country in Africa, after South Africa. Hunting takes place on many types of landscapes, including low-fenced livestock ranches, high-fenced game ranches, communal conservancies, government-owned concessions, and game reserves.

Ranches are generally privately owned or leased to the hunting operator. Communal conservancies are usually tribal areas where several communities have joined together to create a conservancy that must meet certain requirements and is then given its own hunting quota, with the local people as the stakeholders

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and beneficiaries of the hunting revenues. Currently, there are some fifty of these conservancies around the country, with more in development.

Importing guns into Namibia for hunting purposes is easy and hassle-free. A maximum of two firearms (rifles or shotguns only—no handguns or semiautomatic rifles) are allowed, along with sixty rounds of ammunition per rifle per hunter. (Shotgun shells can be purchased in the country if necessary.) An application form for the temporary import of firearms is available at the police booth at the airport and can be filled out upon arrival.

This is a simple process. You'll need to provide proof of ownership of the firearm by producing U.S. Customs Form 4457; your passport; home address; address where your hunt will be conducted; a return airline ticket; and the serial number and caliber of your firearm(s) and amount of ammunition. No permit is needed for bows; however, crossbows are not allowed.

### About Professional Hunters

*At the head of a safari, the hunter finally combines the duties of a sea captain, a bodyguard, a chauffeur, a tracker, a skinner, a headwaiter, a tourist guide, a photographer, a mechanic, a stevedore, an interpreter, a game expert, a gin-rummy partner, drinking companion, social equal, technical superior, boss, employee, and handy man.*

Robert C. Ruark, *Horn of the Hunter*

In Namibia, as in all of Africa, hunting guides are called professional hunters, or PHs. This is not just a term. African professional hunters are, indeed, professionals. This is especially true in Namibia, where the training requirements for aspiring PHs are especially stringent. In other places in the world, if you are unlucky, you may end up with a hunting guide who has little familiarity with area and the game. In Namibia, that is highly unlikely. The professionals who take hunters afield in this country are not only experts on the game animals, they will likely be able to identify every songbird you spot, tell you the scientific names of trees and other plants, expertly work your digital camera, whip up a delicious barbecue in the field, and probably talk knowledgeably with you on just about any subject you might wish to discuss.

When Robert Ruark wrote so glowingly in *Horn of the Hunter* of his African mentor, Harry Selby, he captured perfectly the way most safari hunters feel about their professional hunters. Professional hunters—the good ones, anyway, and almost all of the successful ones are good—are some of the most remarkable people

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you will ever meet. They must be all of the things that Ruark mentions—people able to get along well with clients from all walks of life. Anyone who has spent much time in hunting camps knows that hunting may bring out both the best and the worst in people, depending upon the hunter and how things go. Professional hunters, as a rule, are good at all of the things you hire them for—finding game, helping you get in position for a shot, helping you learn about and appreciate Africa—but they do much more behind the scenes, keeping their camps and the safari running smoothly, whether that means making emergency repairs to a Land Cruiser or soothing a client who has made a poor shot.

When your safari is finished, you will likely remember the good times you had with your PH as strongly as you remember your perfect shot on a gemsbok or the kudu that silhouetted itself on a ridge at last light. Conversely, choosing the wrong PH can mean that your safari is not as enjoyable as it could be—after all, personalities and safari goals differ, and a hunter whose goal is a leisurely safari will not be happy with a PH who hikes over hill and dale, and vice versa.



*Highly sought-after plains game species such as the sable are increasing in numbers in Namibia, and are on license in many areas. (Photo courtesy of Dirk DeBod)*

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*Scott Rupp with an outstanding warthog.*



*The author and professional hunter Johan Kotzé admire a nice springbok. (Photo by J. Scott Rupp)*

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*Sociable weaver birds build enormous nests that look as though they will topple the trees they are built in.*



*On a typical plains-game hunt, the hunting party drives slowly through the landscape in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, stopping frequently to glass for game. (Photo by J. Scott Rupp)*

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*One of the many unusual animals you may see in Namibia—a Cape pangolin. (Photo courtesy of Diethelm Metzger)*

My experience has been that, contrary to the old Gregory Peck-movie cliché, today's PHs are consummate professionals. The majority of them are family men with strong core values of honesty and fairness, and they will do everything in their power to ensure that you have an enjoyable and successful safari, often going far above and beyond the call of duty to do so. That said, it is also contingent upon you, the safari client, to know more or less what you're getting into. Of course, if you've never been on safari before or you've never been to a particular country, you can't know exactly what to expect. But you can do enough research to give yourself a general idea of what various PHs and outfits offer and how they do business, and try to find one that fits you the best. After that, you'll want to be open-minded and ready to live the adventure you've dreamed of for so long. As in any hunting, nothing on safari is guaranteed.



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You may not get exactly what you came for, but if my experience is any guide, you will, in the end, get much, much more.

### The Ultimate Source

When I first started looking into traveling to Africa, I discovered that most of the information available was written by outdoor writers who did a good job of describing their own experiences, but often had little in-depth knowledge. I felt it would be more enlightening to speak with the real experts—established professional hunters who conduct dozens of safaris every year. Not only would they be the best sources of what a safari would really be like, they could give solid advice on what to bring, what to hunt, and what to actually expect. My goal was to get the information straight from the ultimate experts—the PHs themselves.

In these pages you'll hear from some of the top PHs in a country known for its outstanding hunting and expert guides. The PHs who were interviewed for this book are all long-established professionals representing a wide range of expertise: Some are plains-game experts and others are dangerous-game specialists. Some hunt on private farms; others hunt on wilderness concessions. While they may not always agree with each other on every point, the combined wisdom of these professionals will leave you with an excellent overview of what to expect from a safari in Namibia and how best to prepare for a hunting adventure in this magnificent country.

Once you've read their advice and suggestions I feel sure you'll be more confident about the experience you'll have in Namibia—and you'll doubtless be excited to visit, revisit, and hunt in this jewel of the Dark Continent.

