

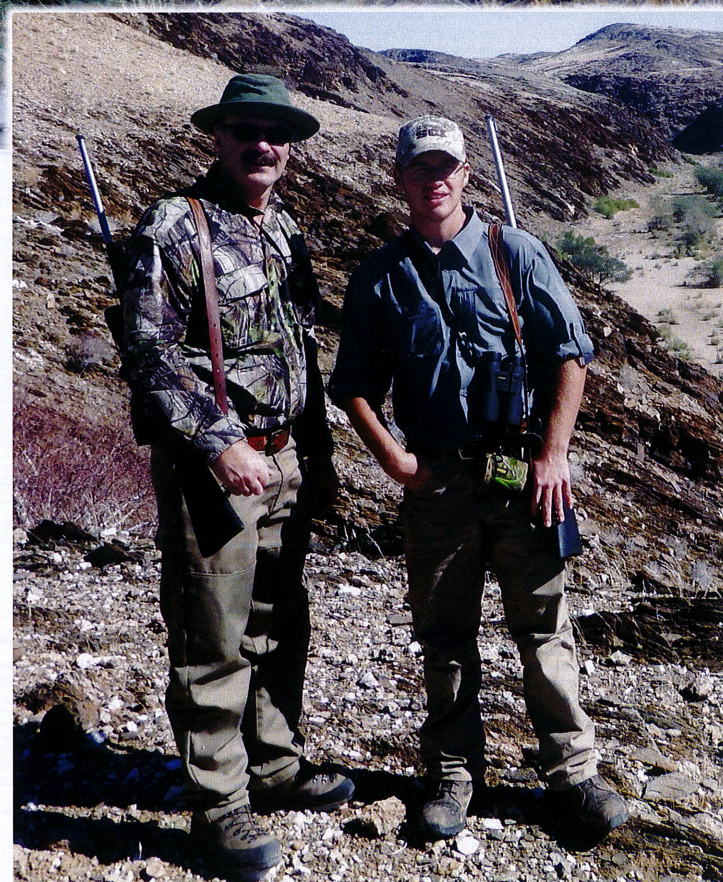
Fast Leopard, Slow Gemsbok

By Brent Nelson

The Minnesota SCI Expo is always a great place to discover awesome hunts. At a past Expo, I met Makadi Safaris and booked the hunt of a life-time. Based in Namibia, they are known for great leopard and plains game.

Let me backtrack four years. My cousin Dylan was about to enter high school and I told him as a graduation present, I would take him on an African safari. He reminded me of this promise last Fall. Seeking great hunting in a safe destination, which would provide him (and me) an unforgettable experience, I chose Namibia. Namibia is one of the safest African countries. I was a perfect location.

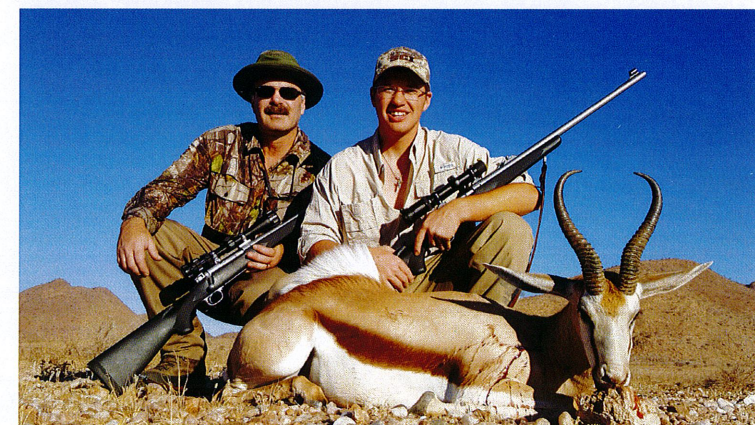
Although my wife kept reminding me this was about Dylan, it seemed a perfect opportunity for me to check one off my bucket list – the elusive leopard. Although Makadi generally books 12 day leopard hunts, my schedule required Dylan and I to get a lot accomplished in 8 days. The weather forecast for Windhoek, Namibia called for 40°-65° every day. Makadi has



two hunting camps, one near Windhoek with lush vegetation, and the one I went to, 150 miles west on the edge of the desert with temperatures averaging 15° warmer, making me wish I had packed my summer gear. The outfitter had done some prebaiting and had seen three nice Toms on the trail cameras. However, in the week prior to our hunt, two of them had started fighting and stopped coming to the bait.

On 7/17/17, we arrived at Makadi's beautiful six-bedroom lodge. Dylan and I were the only hunters on their immense hunting area and immediately began our quest for fresh leopard bait. Dylan was after a gemsbok and a zebra. Our hunting area, "Ilala" was semi-desert and open with no cover areas except the river valleys where the leopards lived. The open areas between the valleys required shots in excess of 250 yards. The gemsbok eluded us all day but mountain zebra are plentiful there, and toward the end of the day a zebra finally came within range. Dylan bagged him at 260 yards with a 1x4 power Swarovski scope on a Winchester Model 70, .375 with 260 grain Nosler bullets. The bullets performed perfectly, with the shot going through the zebra's shoulders and lodging in the skin on the far side.

Makadi had set up six baiting areas so we needed a gemsbok or another zebra. The next day, the gemsbok continued to elude us, but Dylan got another zebra. After lunch, we went to the baiting areas which were spread over a 25- square mile hunting area. It took us all afternoon to place the zebra as bait. There are no lions in the area and the cheetahs only eat fresh meat, so we were able to hang the bait from trees about three feet off the ground. The following day we checked the baits and three had been eaten. The trail cameras showed 3 female leopards. Our Professional Hunter, Jacob Van Der Merwe, (an outstanding PH) knew one large cat had previously hit one of the baits so we decided to set up near that baiting area that afternoon. Unfortunately, the winds were varying too much making it too risky to be close and low, so we set our blind on a 100-foot high rocky river bank, 140-yards away from the bait, making for a long-angled shot. At 3:00 p.m., we laid down a plastic tarp behind a pile of rocks and put our sleeping bags over it, preparing to stay for the sunset and sunrise hunt. While laying there I could hear little critters crawling under the tarp and when I asked Jacob what they were he said, "probably mice, scorpions, or snakes – most aren't poisonous." That small four letter word "most" prepared me to keep a wary eye watching guard all night. Thankfully, at sunset a leopard came in and Jacob checked the cat with his binoculars and said to prepare to shoot a big Tom. The leopard was standing on its hind legs swaying from side to side as he dined on our zebra bait. My shot had to be timed to the sway. I shot with a lit reticule 3x9 Trijicon scope on a Winchester Model 70, 30-06, the cat fell flat but was still moving so I fired again. My dad had hand loaded the 150-grain Nosler bullets for me which worked perfectly as both went in from the back and fully expanded, flattened out and were in the far side of the skin only creating two small entry holes. Jacob and I were very happy and he said that was the fastest leopard hunt he'd ever guided. We were in



our blind for about three hours.

Now that my bucket list received a big check, we were off to hunt plains game for Dylan. Although gemsbok were numerous, they were also very elusive, staying more than 400 yards away. Along the way, Dylan bagged a beautiful springbok. We saw red hartebeest, kudu, warthog and waterbuck but not gemsbok. While at a watering hole having our lunch, Dylan did bag a jackal which was hanging around looking for an easy lunch.

The gemsbok, at the top of Dylan's list, kept eluding us. On the last hunting day, I talked to Jacob about switching to a different animal. Jacob said, "don't worry, we have all day." Just before noon, we caught up with a group of gemsbok about 220 yards out. Dylan bagged a nice one fulfilling his wish list. Opposite of many hunts, we had a very fast leopard hunt and a very slow, but worth the wait, gemsbok hunt.