



We regret that Hugo was hunting in Africa when we went to press, and could not provide us with the names of his hunters or the measurements of their trophies.

Right: Hugo now hunts elephant in Botswana, and eight of his hunters have taken good bulls.

By Brooke ChilversLubin

PH Hugo Seia: *Mundjamba*

The Mountain-Elephant Man from Angola

It was the year that the end of the hunting season in C.A.R. coincided with the government's decision to fly collectively to France, and all the non-Africans were thrown off the flights to Paris. When normal service resumed, the PHs (and their wives, like me) gave up their precious seats on the next overbooked flights to their hunting clients and, for a few days, Bangui had some of the old-time feeling, with PHs from all over Africa crossing paths. The atmosphere at the airport during the endless waiting was weary but gay - and it was there I met Hugo Seia the first time.

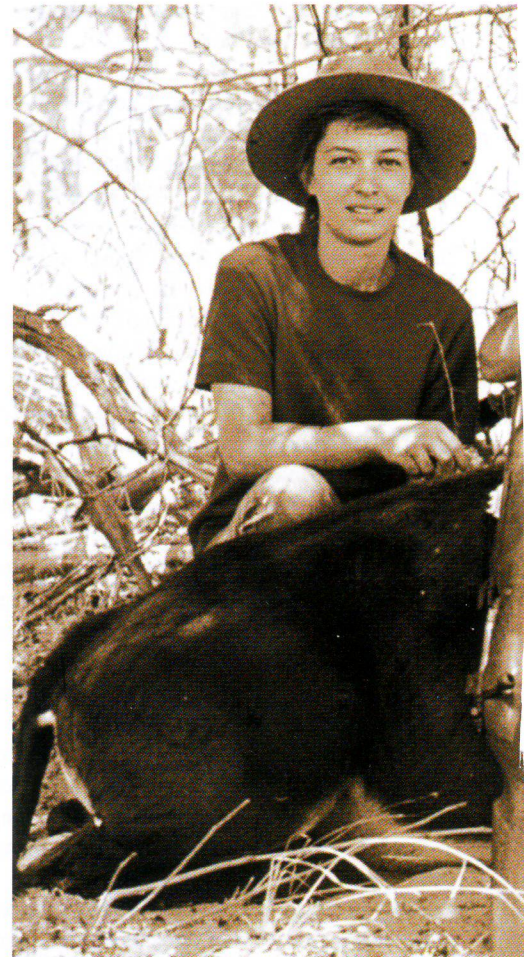
That elegant gentleman with an impressive moustache and a trunkful of hunting stories from a lifetime in Africa, now has white hair, but then, masked by blonde highlights, so do I.

Hugo was born in Angola to parents who were three and five years old when they arrived from Portugal with *their* parents. The lovely photo of his mother petting a pet leopard in Hugo's book, *Mundjamba* says it all, as does the gift of a small double-barreled 9mm shotgun on his eighth birthday, and a 9.3 x 62 FN rifle at age 12. "All my memories are related to

the Dark Continent, to my Motherland, to wild game and hunting," writes Hugo in his 385-page African autobiography, covering his birth to 1995, when this remarkable signed and limited edition was first published by Trophy Room Books.

His surprise second book, *In Any Kind of Cover*, was published in 2001. This invaluable, more technical book about the actual hunting and killing of elephant, buffalo and cats is a genuine "must-read" for anyone hunting big game, especially hunters going for one of the Big Five for the first time. Hugo recounts many of his best hunting stories here, using them to illustrate the lessons he has learned in the bush over 40 years - some of them the hard way. He gives fact-based practical advice, as in the chapter dedicated to elephant. After hunting some 1,000 elephants (including his own personal record of 49 kilos of ivory per tusk in Angola), he reminds matter-of-factly: "Accuracy is very important when shooting elephants... Bad shots bring trouble."

Hugo gives solid descriptions of elephant, buffalo or cat behaviour: singly or in groups or herds; the calibres he has used and the results he's seen; the effects



of softs vs. solids; where to shoot and why; safe shooting distances; changing winds, fake charges, bullet velocities, etc. I wish every safari hunter would read this book. Twice.

His hunting life in Angola, Namibia, Sudan, Central African Republic, Zambia and Tanzania, translates into pursuing hundreds of elephants, dozens of lions and leopards, buffalos, hippos, *Sipata*, the 3,000-pound, 20-foot crocodile, giant or royal sable (whose biggest recorded specimen measured 65"), Lord Derby



Hugo and Maria Alice on a day that almost ended in tragedy.

“All my memories are related to the Dark Continent, to my Motherland, to wild game and hunting”

is a God. “Man cannot figure nature,” writes Hugo. “If he does, he won’t win.”

Starting his hunting career as an ambitious *Chefe de Posto* (the youngest of his generation) in Angola, his job included “obtaining information about the needs of the local people.” Conveniently, this often meant supplying villages with fresh meat, or taking care of problem lions in herding areas, and naughty elephants wreaking havoc in agricultural areas... and many, many, many that were not. “I hunted many elephants, more than I ever should have hunted,” he confesses, after a youth with an avid hunter as a father during the “free hunting law” period prior to 1956 in Angola when “it was more important to spend the night killing crocs than playing cards.” Back when there probably were too many crocs – or elephants or lions.

“Africa was different. Men were different. Hunters were different. The world was not the same,” he says, lamenting an Angola whose wildlife will never really recover from almost two generations of civil war.

Like so many of Africa’s white families, Hugo’s was handed its fair share of hard kicks: his father’s premature death (a man who shot one thousand buffalo with his Mannlicher 9.5 x 57); an Angola that he and his family were forced to flee, the safari industry closing in their tracks. One of his few but great regrets is the loss of his entire Angolan trophy collection, which included a giant sable he took far from its home in the reserves of Kalandala and Luanda, and was probably one of the best ever taken.

Hugo is very frank and doesn’t hesitate to name the scoundrels who paid their PHs with bad cheques, or the business partners who cheated him, or the bad days of hunting in Sudan – so bad, he hardly discusses it. Only four men ever “made life impossible on safari.” Hugo declines to tell all but one story.



One of Hugo’s greatest regrets is the loss of his Angolan trophy collection, including giant or royal sable.

eland and even the wild camels of Angola(!). Hugo speaks very naturally about the hunting life: its landscapes, its sunsets, its day-to-day routine; its long string of clients who become friends, its cooks and trackers and colleagues, its close calls and its bad calls; its calibres and the bullets that break up or miss... and inevitably, at some point, wound.

There are plenty of those stories, too. As Hugo writes, “If the hunter’s shot does not

stop the charging animal, there are no reflexes, no actions, no thoughts which can save the hunter’s life. Only God can do it.” In 1992, Hugo stepped on a Gaboon viper and was seriously tumbled by a surprised buffalo – all on the same day. Not long after, he survived a full-out tackle by an unwounded leopard that, unarmed, he stumbled upon while looking for “the perfect place to build a blind.” That he is alive to write his books is proof that there



Hugo with a Portuguese hunter and an outstanding buffalo in Tanzania.



Hugo has probably hunted sitatunga in every country that offers it.



Hugo and Maria Alice with a black rhino from Angola.

There is more to hunting than killing animals, and Hugo captures the spirit of the hunt.

Ultimately, Hugo's books are a tribute to Angola, a country he knew intimately from the equatorial forests of the north facing Zaire, to "The Land at the End of the World" bordering the Caprivi Strip. If you ask Hugo today where "home" is, despite his family's life in Portugal, the answer is still Benguela, Angola.

His books are also a special tribute to many unforgettable elephant hunts, earning him his nickname, *Mundjamba*, and include his three-year quest for *Bulvue*, an elephant whose killer would be called "*Elephant Soba*" or "Father of the Elephants," an elephant, with a front foot diameter of 25 inches, that travelled hundreds of miles every year.

The many pages of black-and-white photos are a worthy monument to the times Hugo experienced, and the many good hunters and their families he encountered. It is almost as if he knew it was all going to disappear, and wanted to preserve these images for all time. At present, I know of no other PH who has showed such attention to his hunting archives.

We should also be grateful that he has preserved dozens of stories from the hundreds he has heard, that might otherwise be lost - "some similar, some touching, some imaginary, and some just stories coming from rich or naïve imaginations of men living in the bush," including the African belief that, "a child, by simply touching the wrinkled skin of a pachyderm, gains knowledge and sexual strength."

There is more to hunting than killing animals, and Hugo captures the spirit of the hunt. He experiences the nature around him, asking himself questions about game distribution and sub-species each time his experience expands another step across the continent. He is one of the few men qualified to compare the buffalo of northern Angola with the buffalo of Sudan and C.A.R.

As he encounters life and death situations, Hugo questions the hazy spiritual relationship between man and animal, recalling the time an elephant literally spared his life. And yet, only hours

Brooke: If you could return to any time or place in Africa, where would that be?

Hugo: Well, do not forget that I was born in Angola. So was my wife, Maria Alice, and our daughters, Carla and Marina. Angola is my country, where I would settle again if I were younger. Unfortunately, my daughters cannot live in their country.

What has changed the most in Africa in your 40 years of hunting?

My dear Brooke, that is a subject for a long book. A terrible tragedy has already happened in Africa. So few countries are still open for hunting compared to 20 years ago. And look what has happened to the quantity and quality of trophies now compared to 15 years ago. Without naming a specific country: Do you think any hunting concession, even the biggest and most rich in game, can survive being subdivided into two, and sometimes into three concessions, with the same quota for each area? Do you think a hunting area can recuperate from shooting 20 lions, when 15 years ago only four were allowed to be taken?

How have safari clients changed over the past 30 years?

Fortunately, despite ever shorter safaris, not in a bad way. Most of my clients are very ethical hunters. Some, however, are willing to do anything to get the trophies they want for the record book, and that's not good for the future of the hunting industry.

You've hunted many countries. Where are you hunting now?

In addition to Tanzania, I also hunt Botswana, with Mark Kyriacou. I must say that Botswana is the most organized country where I have worked as a PH. The government has the hunting well controlled; species are closed if the quantity or quality goes down. The quality of what we can hunt is very good, and I believe Botswana is now the best destiny for hunters looking for elephant. Camps are also first class.

I thought you had decided to stop hunting elephant.

Yes, when in 1992 I went to Bushmanland for an elephant hunt, I was quite sure that it was my last one. The quality was getting poor, and I did not want to take my clients for a ride. After 2000, however, when I went on an elephant safari to Botswana, I realized that I could get my hunters nice trophies there. Since then, eight of my hunters have taken good bulls.

You've written a lot in your books about the rifles you've used on big game and the results over the years. What do you carry these days?

For the last 22 years, I've been using a Mahilon .460 Weatherby Magnum. I have no other big game rifles. As for ammunition, for lion and buffalo I use Bearclaw loaded for me by Ross Seyfriend, and Weatherby solids for elephant.

You are very clear in your books about your ideas for solving some of Africa's wildlife problems. Is there a solution to poaching?

I talk about my specific ideas in *In Any Kind of Cover*. Yes, poaching could be solved - if it could be done in the proper way by independent people.

Based on your experience in the field, do you think that hunting for any species anywhere should be closed at present?

No doubt that some species in some places should be closed for at least a few years. Like roan. Like elephant, in some places. Botswana closed elephant and everyone can see the improvement now. Lion, too, in some countries should also be closed. Fifteen years ago, any client had at least one chance to get a good maned lion during a classic safari. Now, sometimes three weeks and up to 17 baits are not enough to get a nice lion.

What advice would you give a young PH starting out today?

The only thing I would say is: Go get another job. Real trophy hunting is not going to go on for many more years - at least not the way we know and respect it. In the future, hunting will take place only on fenced ranches.

What do you think the status of wildlife in Angola might be?

Unfortunately the long war destroyed my country. Very little game is left.

Do you think there's a chance hunting will ever reopen in Angola?

Probably for my great grandchildren, but hunting for what? Rats?

As he encounters life and death situations, Hugo questions the hazy spiritual relationship between man and animal...

later, he killed that elephant. Other times, he lets go the buffalo or leopard that almost ended him. Men with this amount of experience in hunting wild animals do not have to explain.

All PHs have a streak of masochism, and Hugo confesses that there are places, like Mamué, Angola, that were pure hell for someone else, but paradise for him. Hugo's beautiful wife, Maria Alice, who carried her babies while sitting in cat blinds and followed him elephant hunting, emerges in these pages and photos with her own heroic quietness, following the uncertain roller-coaster and havoc of the post-Colonial professional hunting career.

Hugo knows that era is over when the universe of hunters knew no geographic boundaries, when safaris lasted 30 or 40 days, when hunting clients "in order to get a good trophy, didn't care if they had good food, or poor accommodation. It didn't matter if they went days without a shower and if there were no cold drinks in camp. They ignored the heat of the day and the cold of the night."

The 1971 Angola Safaris brochure reproduced here is of another time, listing its hunting areas from the "Namib Desert, Moçamedes District on the West Coast, thru Huila, to the Cubango and Cuito Rivers in Cuando-Cubango District." This was when the trophy fee for lion or greater kudu was \$50.00.

Times have changed, but Hugo remains an outstanding example of a professional hunter. Lucky for us, between hunting seasons, he is always busy on another book, another batch of photos. And that, indeed, is good news.

Mundjamba and In Any Kind of Cover are available as signed limited editions only; there is no trade or popular edition, so be prepared for the \$125 plus shipping price tags. They can be ordered from:

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