



© Ingrid van den Berg-AfricaImagery.com

Generally measuring between 70 to 90 cms (27 to 35 inches), the thick and heavily built, widely ranging puff adder is responsible for over 60% of serious snake-bite accidents. Prior to striking, it gives warning with a deep, hollow, unforgettable hiss.



Nyoka!

Just as the cat moved closer, my hunter Tom bailed out of the back of the blind at Mach 2. The leopard shot off at the same speed. I turned around, and there in the middle of the blind was a big, a very big puff adder.

By PH Lou Hallamore

I was back in one of my favourite hunting areas, Chete, on magnificent Lake Kariba. The aim of the safari was buff, of course, and the Rolls Royce of big game – leopard. It is rugged country punctuated by lots of rocks, home to the hyrax. And, as we Africans all know, lots of hyraxes means lots of snakes.

My client, Tom Cooper, is an excellent shot, and it was not long before the leopard baits were up. George, my eldest son, was also baiting with his hunter. We'd decided to split the concession into two so that the baits wouldn't overlap. It wasn't long before both of us were in blinds with big toms on the take. It was looking really good.

The previous season I had located a brute on one of the many road junctions in the area. I went straight there, slapped up a bait, and bingo! Tom and I had already recced the blind position. Too many PHs drive along, find this Hemingway-type tree, and put up the bait. The leopard feeds before the hunters realize, "We haven't thought about the blind, have we?" The rule is simple: Think 'BOB,' which stands for Blind - Obstacle - Bait; that's the order to use when baiting for leopard.

We set up the blind and it was good. I was reluctant to cut away too much bush leading to the bait tree, as it would leave an obvious channel. That afternoon we stopped the vehicle a good kilometre away and walked. Approximately 100 yards away from the blind we stepped onto the cleared path and snuck in. I had briefed Tom that the only noise allowed was breathing, and even that was too much! The hours ticked by, and at a still light 6.00 p.m., he came. The noise was terrific - deep, deep grunting. Forty-five minutes later we could still hear him growling. But no show. Darkness came and we had to pull off a hot extraction.

We slipped back the next morning, long before it was light. The same deal – lots of



"I don't tolerate snakes in camp," says PH Lou Hallamore. This monster banded-cobra was killed in the safari camp kitchen.

noise, no show. Remember: Most of these cats on government concessions have attended Harvard and know the plot. Once it got light we did a reece, and lo and behold! Mrs. Jaws had been in attendance, hence all the growling. She had eaten, but he had not. From long back I know that, once the girls are involved, there's no plan. Some things never change.

I had told Tom I had an ace up my sleeve, way up the river, only accessible by boat. A few seasons back I had found another brute. Nobody had ever baited for him. We slipped in with our bait. 'Jaws' attacked it the first night. With our backs to the lake, the blind site was good, but I was unable to put up my collapsible blind. Instead, we had a huge tree dead centre, around which we built the blind. I could stand up without being seen. We slid in and started The Big Sit. I like to get into the blind by 3.00 p.m. A lot of PHs question this, but I have learnt through experience that if you want to shoot a cat in daytime, which is the rule in government concessions, you had better be there early. Under normal circumstances it takes the birds and bees an hour to settle down anyway.

Right on six, Jaws started up very close to the bait. I stood up and started to glass the

area. Out of the corner of my eye I saw his tail moving as he grunted. Just then Tom whispered, "There's a snake in the blind." I whispered back that he should watch the snake and I would watch the leopard.

The leopard moved towards the bait - I could clearly see its outline through the thick bush. Tom was agitated and kept telling me about the snake. "What colour is it?" He whispered back that there were some white markings on it. Relief. Definitely not a mamba or cobra.

The cat moved closer, and right then Tom bailed out the back of the blind at Mach 2. The leopard shot off just as fast. I turned around, and there in the middle of the blind was a very big puff adder, which is equivalent in danger to a very big rattlesnake. I stood dead still. He moved on right through the blind and out the other side. But the leopard hunt basically was over. We free-spoiled him, we built alternate blinds, we did the whole deal, but Jaws was gone for good. Tom and I had a good laugh, but it could have been ugly.

Every client asks about snakes. Never say he won't see one! I remember a lady hunter asking me as she arrived in camp if there were any snakes. "No," said I as I walked her into her

chalet where there was a spitting cobra coiled up on the bed.

Without doubt, the most aggressive snakes are the mambas. Twice I've had them strike my car, which got the team in the back a little excited. I also had one come straight down the road, targeting the car. I stopped and reversed; it calmed down and slid away.

My great friend PH John Sharp and I were hunting Malangani when a huge puff adder was crossing the road. John pinned him down with the Land Cruiser, pulled out his Jim B knife, cut its head off, turned round to me and said, "That's for old times sake." While hunting with the famous author, Wilbur Smith, John had picked up a puff adder that bit him. He lost a finger; in fact, nearly his whole arm.

I was born in Zimbabwe and have lived here my whole life. I have never known a white person to die from snakebite. Rural blacks, yes. Out there, there are no hospitals. For the overseas hunter, not shooting straight at the Big Five is much more dangerous than any snake. *They'll smoke you, if you don't do it right.*

PH Lou Hallamore doesn't tolerate snakes in camp, and reminds hunters to follow his example and always carry a flashlight at night. 🇿🇼