



WOUNDED LION!

It had got away into thick cover. Now they'd have to follow it in bush so thick they often had to crawl on hands and knees

By **THOMAS HARDIN**



Partly eaten zebra bait is examined on plain. Lions have gone to cover.

Africa's dangerous animals are so powerful physically, so accustomed to being lords of their habitat, that fear just is not in their characters. Lions, in addition to natural arrogance toward all other animals, including the human, can also lick their chops in a very suggestive way. It gives one a ticklah and humiliating feeling of being edible.

I had not had any experience with lions until very recently on a safari in Tanganyika, East Africa. We drove up to a lion bait and saw a pride of lions lurking in the vicinity. They just stood watching us languidly while we drove around them in the hunting car, inspecting them to see whether there was a trophy male amongst them. We were a jeep load of armed men, but to one lioness we were something strange which she obviously considered taking on. Her gesture was slight, but terrible. She made a quick-motioined crouch, exactly like your cat does when she thinks of pouncing upon something. The difference was that if your cat weighs three-and-a-half pounds, this cat weighed about 160 times more.

My hunting friend Pablo Bush Romero had a passion to kill a lion, as great as the passion I used to have to catch a big catfish. I had no reason to kill one [Continued on page 88]



Pablo Bush Romero (left) and Derek Dunn, his white hunter, congratulate each other over lion killed at close quarters.

Wounded Lion!

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and did not want to. But Don Pablo has been amassing a big educational trophy collection of the world's animals for a school in Mexico City, and a lion was essential to this. So I had taken out only a general hunting license, as a special license for lion costs quite a bit more. But I was going to help by killing the lion bait.

I got off to a very bad start in my department.

"There," said Derek Dunn, one of our two white hunters, "is our lion bait." We were looking at a great herd of plains animals, mostly Grant's gazelles. "Get out and walk the legal 200 yards from the car and wallop that buck. That one with the big horns."

Paul handed me a beauty of a very light foreign-made rifle, a .30-06. I got out of the Land Rover and took a sitting position taught me many many years ago on a Marine Corps rifle range, to do as instructed. I missed, and got walloped by recoil. I cursed the current phenomenon, one of my favorite pet peeves for cursing about. The fad for light rifles which, like low automobiles, had just gone too far. This one weighed 6 pounds, 6 ounces and knocked the fire out of me. It was humiliating. I walloped at the Grant seven times, undoubtedly flinching worse each time, while the buck stared at me, sometimes trotting off a little distance between noises and looking back in amused curiosity. Seven times was enough, and I handed Don Pablo back his pretty little rifle. The others rubbed my humiliation in, vowing that the rifle couldn't kick. I must have been holding it in some strange way, they said.

"But try this Winchester Model 70, with Weaver 2½X scope next time," Don Pablo invited, handing me another of his assortment.

I hefted the rifle, a bit light, but reasonable. I looked through a telescope sight for the first time in my life. My spirits rose again. The rifle felt right. The sight solved a problem of my age, which is farsightedness. I had begun to notice that without my glasses, I could see the game in fine detail but not the sights. With spectacles I could see the sights but not the game. The instant I looked through a scope sight, I knew it was for me.

Looking again for lion bait, we came upon a herd of impala. I got out and walked, crouching low until I was within 200 yards and behind the rock which was cover for my stalk. I don't know whether I was so completely out of breath from the awkward way of walking or from excitement. I held the crosshairs on the tiny distant target of the buck's chest and squeezed. I missed the middle of the chest by maybe two inches, a slight error which more than compensated for itself by putting the bullet right through the animal's heart. However, impala are human bait. This one would be for camp meat. I had still to shoot something for lion bait.

A herd of zebra was the next game we came upon. I had promised to bring my wife back a zebra skin, which is so decorative it seemed to her worth its weight in moth balls. It was the only potential trophy of which she did not take a dim view. So it seemed doubly useful to wallop a zebra. These ran around one side of a low hill, and Derek shrewdly drove behind the slope, putting me out where I could stalk across the top and shoot down the other side. The zebras winded me, but merely ran down the hill and back around it, until the scent was gone—and the wind in my favor. They stayed there until I was in a position for a 300-yard shot; then they started to run. I chose one, led over his head a bit, and with confidence in the newly-discovered, scoped shooting iron, thumped him in what would be his sitting-down place if zebras used chairs.

Shooting at fleeing game here on the plains, we found as a rule that this shot was the most deadly of all. This particular zebra was caught in the base of the spine, paralyzing his rear legs so that he had to wait while I walked up and finished him off with a shot behind the ears. Other times we observed that 180-grain .30-06 bullets from that end would rake clear through plain game and kill by the ruin of chest organs.

We skinned off the trophy hide and then dragged the bait, to increase the probability of a lion's chancing across its trail. First we dragged it in a circle, so that if a lion should track it the wrong way, the circle would turntable him to the right direction. We dragged it from the plain into brush, for lions like shade and cover. We tied it to a tree with heavy rope, so that the lion could not take it away where we could not find him. The men—or, as they are called in Africa, the "boys"—piled the carcass over with thorn brush to keep off the vultures.

Next morning we loaded up, Don Pablo, Howard Cree, white hunters Derek Dunn and Bruno Cronc, and I. Even though I was not going to shoot, I still had the same delighted expectancy I used to have when setting trotlines. When I would go in the dawn to see what had come to the bait in the night.

First we noted a very good sign. Some jackals scattered in front of the car. Jackals and lions are friends. A lion will share a kill with jackals but won't permit a hyena anywhere near. Experienced hunters say that when jackals find a carcass, they reciprocate by going and getting their friend the lion. We drove closer, and there, calmly regarding us from under a bush was a great maned head. The sight stopped all whispered conversation. It even stopped my breath.

Pablo got out with his Winchester Model 70, caliber .375, and quickly got the required 200 yards away from the Land Rover. Derek followed. I watched their brave assault with horrified admiration. Suppose something went wrong? A lion can run 100 yards in four seconds. Suppose he should make for them and there be a misfire?

"Not a chance in a thousand," you might think—and it happened that Don Pablo drew the odd chance.

As he got out of the car, he worked the bolt to get a chamber cartridge. When he reached the place deemed far enough from the hunting vehicle, he was no more than 20 yards from the lion. Simba might, it seemed to me, dislike anybody approaching his breakfast. All the while the lion just watched, with a noncommittal but interested expression which one would guess to be basically unfriendly.

Don Pablo drew a bead. He could not miss, that close. It would be a brain shot, and the lion would just drop dead. Really—how easy lion hunting seemed! He squeezed the trigger. There was nothing but a click. The lion stood up, holding in his jaws an immense chunk of zebra which would have weighed 50 pounds.

Don Pablo worked the bolt again, and the floor plate fell open, cascading the cartridges upon the ground. With dismay he turned and made two steps toward the car. He had a grim and bearded look of "What the hell is this? What do I do now?"

The lion also looked grim, undecided whether to charge, carry his quarter of zebra off, or drop it and go faster.

Don Pablo's mishap with his rifle was mystifying. Derek, saying nothing—for the human voice enrages big animals and provokes charges—stood there with a look of bewilderment. It took a major effort on my part not to start yelling to them to run for the car. The white hunters' opinions of the situation, with their vast experience with unpredictable animals, was manifest. The lion might easily take the alternative of deciding to fight over his food. Derek held his big English double at ready, and Bruno quickly got out of the hunting car with his.

Don Pablo picked up the cartridges, snapped the floor plate in place firmly and reloaded. Meanwhile the lion made its decision; it dropped the chunk of zebra and left the brush on the run. It loped across several hundred yards of plain toward a brushy escarpment. While Don Pablo reloaded, the range kept becoming longer.

"Wallop him. It's a long shot, you know," Derek said, in a nonchalant voice calculated to soothe the excited hunter, but his attitude was not nonchalant. Finally Don Pablo was ready and had the rifle up again.

To us watching from the safari car, his actions were still further mystifying. He raised the rifle, took it down and studied it, and raised it again. What had happened this time was that the iron sight, which was hinged at the base to lie down in case the hunter wanted to put on a telescope sight, had fallen down when he went to shoot. We could not hear what he was saying, but we could practically see the air turning blue all around him. Then it occurred to him to hold the sight up with the finger of the hand on the fore-end.

At last he fired. The lion fell, for an instant thrashing on the ground—then it was up and performing amazing antics. It was springing into the air and whirling and slapping an imaginary foe with its terrible paws, reaching back with its great mouth and snapping. It seemed as though the lion were trying to free

itself from something it felt had it by the back. A soft-nose .375 bullet had caught him there, all right. It would be sudden death to be anywhere close to that pained and enraged lion.

Then the lion streaked for the escarpment and the thick cover of its slopes and top. Don Pablo kept trying to hit it again on the run. The white hunters, foreseeing the truly dangerous prospect of going into that bush after a lion in that mood, began trying to bring down the beast at long range before it got to cover. There were dust puffs ahead of the lion, behind him, under his feet, just over his back. But the fusillade produced no hits, and the dreadful task would have to be carried out. We set forth.

Derek made me carry a shotgun, loaded with No. 6 shot for wild guineas. "Why a shotgun?" I asked.

"Self-protection, you know. At close range there is nothing more deadly than a shotgun."

I blanched as I became aware of how close we were going to be to that lion. But, as in war, when your companions go ahead, you follow.

Howard grabbed up the little kicking .30-06 for himself.

"The best way to kill that lion," I told him, "would be to get him to shoot at you with that .30-06. The recoil would do the job."

We went across the plain and up the escarpment in the most open place we could find, for the lion could be waiting behind any bush. Howard's excited reaction was to deploy and rout the lion out of hiding. Derek gave him a polite bawling out by indirection. The idea was to stick close together, under mutual protection, and advance right on the heels of the tracker.

The top of the hill had scattered bush, with a dense fringe all around, like a bald man's head. The tracker went in front, with a calm, work-a-day manner, studying the ground and unerringly following a trail perfectly invisible to anybody but native African trackers. During our safari I had tried hard to get a conception of how they do it. I would get down on my hands and knees and study the ground, and not be able to see a thing. This boy just walked along looking at the ground, trailing more efficiently than a hound, for he took no false directions.

He tracked the lion around the brow of the hill, Derek following him, Paul following Derek, the rest of us sticking close. Before every dense place where the lion could be hiding we stopped and studied carefully. Sometimes Derek would throw a rock into the place.

The hill had two humps, like the back of a Bactrian camel, with a clear place between. It was deemed that the lion might flush out of the brush on the rise we were on and make for the cover of the other hump. Derek told Bruno to take a stand where we were and watch. Howard and I remained with Bruno, and the others went on, working into thicker and thicker brush. The suspense was as unpleasant as a high fever.

Bruno stood on a rock. I got a good footing, ready to shoot pictures and ready to defend myself with the shotgun.

Then we heard the lion roar, quite close; it kept roaring at every jump—coming closer. The lion felt surrounded and was charging at us!

The way he was coming, he would break out of the dense brush not 10 feet from us and would be above us. There would have to be some awfully quick and careful shooting. Bruno put his rifle to his shoulder and stood waiting.

The roars were terrifying. Fresh in my mind was an incident Derek had previously related to me. He had told of the death of a neighbor of his, a farmer, who had been killed by a lion. He was an elderly man and had an inadequate rifle. The man, his son-in-law and a native were trying to kill the lion in a wheat field. The man got a glimpse of the animal and wounded it. Then it charged them, but they could not see it over the tall wheat to meet the charge with a bullet. It leapt upon the old man, sinking its lower fangs into his chin and its upper fangs into the top of his head. The son-in-law ran. The boy jumped on the lion's back, trying to pull it off its victim. This emboldened the son-in-law, who ran back and killed the lion. The old man lived in a coma for five days, then died.

Here was the same situation—a lion charging unseen through dense bush. Not more than 20 feet away, it seemed he sensed an opening where before he had sensed encirclement. He changed direction . . . and emerged a moment later into the opening a little distance from us. He was fleeing instead of charging. He streaked across the open place.

The others had had a close call also. They had tracked to within a few feet of the lion's resting place. The lion had roared, and had turned toward Bruno, Howard and me. Derek said later that if the lion had charged in the moment that they came up on it, one of them would have had it. For they were crawling under brush and nobody was able to shoot. He said, "I was on hands and knees, and had my head tangled up in a bloody wait-a-bit thorn bush. I backed out of that bush fast!"

The lion was so fast that when it emerged into the open place, it had gone 50 yards before anybody could get off a shot. Bruno and Howard fired simultaneously. Howard could get off only one shot, because the little kicking .30-06 had a way of making a man lose his sense of direction, causing him to recover with a which-way-was-I-facing sensation. Bruno got off two quick shots with his big double, but he had a recoil problem also. He was shooting with his feet together on top of the rock, and the recoil sent him in a prat fall back into a wait-a-bit thorn bush. I let go with the shotgun and then, when I had time to think, burst out laughing. I was laughing at Howard's previous stubborn denials that the six-pound, six-ounce rifle kicked, and it had just whirled him half around. I was laughing at Bruno's prat fall. And I was laughing at myself for the preposterousness of firing at a lion at 75 yards with No. 6 shot. But I was really laughing in relief that the lion was fleeing instead of being on top of us.

Bruno and Howard both vowed they had hit the lion. But I hadn't seen it flinch. Bruno said he had heard the bullet impact. Experienced hunters do hear this, for certain, but I have never yet learned to distinguish this sound from the noise of the rifle. Paul and Derek emerged from the bush, followed by the tracker, who stuck to the tracks as stubbornly as a beagle after a rabbit.

Upon Bruno's and Howard's assertions of hits, Derek ordered that we sit down for half an hour to wait for the lion to weaken. We sat down and smoked, and had enough self-control to hold out maybe ten minutes. Then we started again. Again Derek and Paul went close behind the tracker, and again Howard, Bruno and I stayed in the open, flanking the progress of the tracking in case the lion should emerge again.

We took a stand under two baobab trees. One of the trees had on its enormous trunk those wooden spikes which natives have fixed into most of the baobab trees of Africa. They sleep up these trees when caught out at night. I looked at the spikes longingly, for I would have felt much better up in the tree. The tracker led the way along the brow of the escarpment, wheeling around an area making our stand the hub. When they were past we changed position, guarding the open ground, then went to an ant hill further along. Howard got up on top of the ant hill. Bruno stood beside it. I must admit that I stood behind it. The others tracked on around, past us, into thicker and thicker brush, mostly thorns. Presently, a short distance away, we heard a shot. The lion roared.

"He roared," said Howard, in awe.

Bruno twice asked if we had for sure heard the lion roar right after the shot. Apparently he was a bit deaf, as many white hunters are from the noise of big rifles. A little later the lion was not roaring, but Bruno said:

"There! He roared again."

"No," said Howard, whose position on the ant hill had his belly at the level of Bruno's ear. "That was just my guts growling."

We waited.

Then there were two more shots.

"He's dead," cried Bruno. "I heard the bullet impact."

Howard took his demures out of his pocket and clapped them into his mouth. "Had 'em in my pocket so they wouldn't chatter," he explained.

We waited for a boy to come back for us, for if the lion were not dead, we would be walking right toward him. Such a meeting could be fatal.

The boy came. We followed down into the dense brush.

Don Pablo and the others were waiting, relieved but exultant.

"What happened?" we demanded, impatient to know the details.

"The king is dead!" they shouted. The lion lay in sad repose at their feet.

They had gone into the very thickest brush, crawling—even bellying along. They had veritably gone into the lion's innermost thicket den on the steep and rocky slope. Slowly they had inched ahead, peering but unable to see, some-

times seeing no further ahead than one could reach to part the curtain of vegetation. Then Pablo had seen a tan spot some 15 feet ahead, and pointed. Derek studied the obscured tanness and finally nodded agreement. Paul fired. The tan spot erupted. It was a small ant hill.

The mistake, however, was a most beneficent one. The noise of the rifle, which the lion knew was associated with his pain, caused him to answer his enemies with a grunting, roaring growl. That was the roar Howard and I had heard from our ant hill. Thus the lion gave its position away.

After the shot and the lion's roar, Paul and Derek knew they were below him and if they had advanced a step or two further they would have been right under him, and down on their bellies. Maybe they should have stopped before crowding so close to a wounded lion—as it was, they studied the place where the growl had sounded. Finally they saw a bit of tan hidden in the density and gloom. Derek decided to fire. He said, "I couldn't make out what part of him I was shooting at, but I decided to shoot, just to wake him up."

The shot was, by luck, a good one, for the lion moved but did not charge or leave. Then Derek made out the maned head, and put a bullet into it. That was the end.

We held a post-mortem. Don Pablo's first bullet had gone into the lion's back, at its shoulders. Either Bruno or Howard's shot had hit it in the rump as it ran across the clearing after changing its mind about charging us. Derek's two shots at the end had both gone into the head, though he had not known at the first shot where he was aiming.

There was a festering, maggot-covered wound in the lion's head. Someone had shot him not long before, although he had about recovered. He was thus bound to have been a vicious lion, and we were grateful that luck had been with us. He was a very big animal, at least 450 pounds, and Don Pablo had another trophy for his collection.

Bruno went to the camp in the hunting car and returned with two hunting cars full of native help to get the lion down off the hill and back to camp. As the car with the lion proceeded to camp, the native boys sang a chant that was not nearly as tuneless as I had imagined the African chants would be. The song was strong on harmony, though a bit weak on tune. Hearing it, one could recognize the source of the special quality which is the African heritage in American Negro music.

They picked Don Pablo up and carried him on their shoulders, while they danced around the camp chanting the weird melody. The celebrating blacks christened Don Pablo "*Suawa simba*." This ceremony represents the spontaneous joy of native Africans that an ancient enemy has been killed. The "spontaneous" celebration, which is by order of their employers, is routine to safari employees—nonetheless their laughter is genuine. It amuses them that men will come from across the world to risk their lives hunting lions.—Thomas Hardin

