



**SHOOTING  
YOURSELF  
IN THE FOOT!**



Having guided clients for the past 42 years as a professional hunter, I have had my share of close shaves with danger. The one that stands out in my mind the most, was a leopard attack. The client and I were both torn up pretty badly, and between us we needed 150 stitches and four days in hospital. We were both very lucky to survive the ordeal. (My account of this incident appeared in the January / February / March 2019 edition of Africa's Sportsman Magazine.)

When you live and work in the bush, day after day and all year round, you sometimes get involved in dangerous situations – and not necessarily when you are out hunting with a client. The leopard incident was the first of my close shaves I had after joining Jan Oelofse Safaris. 1975 was our first year in the hunting business. Being the first year, we weren't very busy but were occupied with a great many other things, such as developing the hunting camp, stocking the hunting area with game and doing a lot of game capture.

Jan was world famous in conservation circles for the method he developed for catching animals *en masse*. It revolutionised game capture and was probably responsible for the huge surge in game ranching in southern Africa from the mid 70s onwards. The method was named after Jan because it was so successful.

It worked like this: a capture site was built in the shape of a funnel, with steel cables and long, high plastic sheeting forming the sides of the funnel. At the mouth of the funnel were large curtains that could be opened. As the width of the funnel decreased towards the loading ramp, there were more curtains inside the capture area. A helicopter would herd the animals into the funnel, and as they went through the first opening, the capture team would close the curtains behind them. The further they moved down the funnel, the more curtains would close behind them, so the animals couldn't turn back and escape. Finally, they were funnelled down onto the loading ramp to the trucks, where they were loaded.

Large numbers of animals could be caught this way without having to lay a finger on them. It was an ingenious idea and it revolutionised the whole game-ranching industry in southern Africa. Jan was a very charismatic character. He always carried a .45 Colt revolver in the bush. When flying with the helicopter during a game capture he used the Colt quite often, particularly when the animals would hesitate while being herded into the capture area: he would fire shots behind them into the ground to keep them moving.

The Colt was a beautiful revolver with ivory handles, which was given to him by John Wayne when they were filming the movie *Hatari* in Tanzania. And he was very proud of it! When I joined him, I had no firearms, so Jan very kindly bought me a single-action revolver, a Sauer and Son .357 Magnum so I could also have a sidearm if needed. They often come in handy in unexpected situations.

By Steve Tors

On one occasion we had a capture operation involving a small number of gemsbuck, so we opted for the net capture kraal instead of the big plastic bomas. The net was much quicker to put up and didn't need as much time, taking only half a morning as opposed to as much as two days when putting up the big plastic capture kraals. We put up steel cables in a half-moon shape and tied a capture net to this. It had one curtain opening that was also made of net that you could close it as soon as the animals were inside.

We were waiting for the chopper to come in. The next moment the gemsbuck came running into the kraal and we closed the curtain. Five or six gemsbuck were running around frantically, charging into and getting stuck or bouncing off the net. I was focused on one big bull that was stuck in the net and I thought I could grab him. Doing this could be extremely dangerous because a big gemsbuck bull stuck in the net doesn't just stand there like a sheep and go 'baaa'. It goes ballistic! The thing to do is to approach such an animal very carefully from behind so he can't see you, and then grab him by the horns. Once you've done that, don't let go otherwise you will be full of holes from the needle-sharp tips of the three-foot-long horns.

As I made my play for this gemsbuck and grabbed him, he went out of control and I had to use all my strength just to hold onto him. We were battling in the nets. The men working with me were mostly first-timers and were understandably very apprehensive. When they saw that I had him, however, they came forward to help but by that time the gemsbuck and I were tangled up in the net. I was carrying my revolver, which had a leather thong over the hammer as a safety precaution. As the gemsbuck and I struggled in the net, the hammer got caught in the net and with our combined weight the thong broke and the revolver became fully cocked. I had no idea this was happening until the revolver fell out of my holster and onto the ground.

The rest of the team came to help and we untangled the gemsbuck and pulled him out of the net. From there the men walked him to the loading ramp and loaded him onto the truck. It was totally chaotic around me because more gemsbuck were into the nets. I was looking around for the next one to catch when a member of my capture team saw the revolver on the ground, picked it up and handed it to me. I didn't even look at it. I just shoved it into the holster as I was focused on the gemsbuck. In the process I must have had my finger on the trigger because suddenly there was a loud bang as the gun went off! I had no idea why it went off and, startled, I looked at the ground right beside me to see where the bullet had struck.

At that moment Jan, who had just landed with the helicopter to assist us with the capture, came running up to me as he had heard the shot. "Steve, Steve, why did you shoot?" he cried. "What happened?" I looked around and said I had no idea why the gun had gone off. I was still looking for the bullet hole in the ground. And then Jan

shouted: "You shot yourself!" He had seen the blood running onto to my boot. I was wearing long pants and had no idea I had been shot. The shock must have covered the pain because I felt nothing.

The 158 gr hollow-point bullet went into the top of my calf, traversed the whole calf and came out at the bottom next to my shin. It took 10 to 15 minutes before the throbbing even started. This was on a Friday the 13th and it must have been a very lucky day for me! At the hospital the doctor said that if the bullet had hit my leg bone, I would have lost my lower leg. Alternatively, if it had hit an artery, I could have bled to death out there.

Needless to say, I never wore that revolver capturing gemsbuck in the nets again! When you tell somebody that you have shot yourself, they usually think you are some kind of a cowboy who tried to do a quick-draw trick – but this was a little bit different! **ASM**

