

PH Spotlight

BUZZ CHARLTON

Team Effort in Hunting
and Anti-Poaching

Buzz started his hunting apprenticeship straight out of school in Matetsi under Lou Hallimore and then moved across the following year to the Dande Safari area under Dengesai Makoni, the first black PH. It was the Dande that Buzz fell in love with and despite having hunted nearly every hunting concession in Zimbabwe, Buzz and his partner Myles McCallum were to secure the Dande as their own concession and have been hunting it for the last 10 years under their company, Charlton McCallum Safaris.

Over the years, Buzz gravitated towards elephants and has for the last 10 years focused on three main elephant hunts: tuskless elephants, trophy elephant bulls in the Zambezi Valley and, his favourite hunt, the huge trophy bulls in the North West region of Zimbabwe. Charlton has produced four elephant hunting DVDs, and is completing a book on his hunting experiences.

However, Charlton believes that his and his partners' greatest accomplishment has been setting up and running of a self-funded anti-poaching operation called DAPU. He believes that it is every operator's obligation to run an effective anti-poaching unit hand-in-hand with their hunting operation.

Who and how many people make up your best hunting team?

I have two brilliant trackers, Criton and Nyati. Both have tracked and accompanied me on well over 100 elephant hunts not to mention buffalo etc. They are unmatched in their field. Both trackers have GPS and radios, and I will often split them up on different tracks and in this way we maximise the number of elephants we see on a hunt.

My faithful driver Eddy is the most cheerful guy you will ever meet—he never sits still. While we are tracking he will be driving the roads and will often have located us the next set of tracks to



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follow by the time we have got to the road. Efficiency is what leads to successful hunts and two trackers and a driver are essential to accomplish this.

What do you wish a first-time dangerous game client knew before arriving?

A first-time dangerous game hunter must appreciate that we will be doing a fair bit of driving, and a whole lot of walking to work out where his intended trophies are at that particular time of year. It is not a matter of just visiting a few pumped water points.

How often do things go about as planned?

Planning can be divided into two distinct groups. First, pre hunt planning which includes areas, logistics, expectations, etc. This part is vitally important to a successful and fun safari, and this should go exactly according to plan. Second would be day-to-day planning during the actual hunts. A good PH will have several plans under his sleeve, and it is essential that he and his client are flexible.

What makes a good client into a great client?

A great client is a client that puts the experience above the trophy and does not put the PH and his team under undue pressure. A sense of humor is essential! Combine the above and the trophies will come.

What was the worst thing to happen on safari?

I have had three serious incidents with elephants. My very first elephant hunt I was knocked off a cliff by an irate elephant cow, breaking a few ribs and my coccyx. Many years later, Criton my tracker got stood on by a big elephant bull, shattering his pelvis. However my worst incident was with Luc, my client's observer.

Luc was filming his cousin who was on a tuskless elephant hunt. After completing the hunt, we were to set off to Mozambique to hunt a croc and hippo with Luc. On the unfortunate day, a cow charged us at close quarters. I failed to brain her and only just jumped out the way in time. She focused on Luc who said he realized he was in trouble when his view finder turned completely gray.

The elephant knocked Luc down and was trying to drive one of her slender tusks through his chest. Luckily for Luc, her tusk impaled his woven fabric camera strap that was round his chest. As she exerted pressure, the strap slipped and her tusk went with it pegging into the ground and breaking. I managed to shoot her off Luc however not before she had broken several of his ribs and chewed on Luc's thumb as he had accidentally jammed his hand in her mouth. I am happy to say Luc discharged himself in order to shoot a huge croc and hippo and has fully recovered.

What is your favorite hunt?

Without a doubt, it is elephant hunting -- the purest form of hunting there is. Done ethically, the style of hunting has not changed since hunters took on this mighty beast. It is without question the most dangerous game hunt there is. It involves excellent trackers. It involves physical exertion in long-tracking sessions that test ones physical and emotional stamina. Above all, it gives you the pleasure of experiencing "a day in an elephant's life."

Who are your mentors and heroes?

I was fortunate enough to do my apperentiship under the very first qualified black PH by the name of Degisai Makoni. "Mak" as he was affectionately known had made his way up from being a local Skinner to tracker and then PH. In his last years, he had the greatest number of return clients for Zambezi Hunters, the company we worked for at the time and was in high demand.

How did you get involved with anti-poaching efforts?

I am an avid reader, and one book that a profound impression on me was Ian Nyschens' *Months of the Sun*, in which he often predicted the end of wildlife and wildlife areas. Several years ago, we had a huge spike in elephant poaching and, with Ian's predictions in my ears, my partner Myles McCallum and I decided to start our own anti-poaching initiative. As a result, we employed seven scouts and called it Dande Anti-Poaching Unit, or DAPU for short. Over the years, combined with great success DAPU has grown to 22 game scouts.



Nyati



Eddy



Criton

DAPU is 50 percent funded by generous clients as well as DSC who have generously donated a vehicle. The other 50 percent is funded by ourselves and while it has been a financial strain, the results have been incredible. documented and open for public scrutiny.

Do you have a favorite DG gun?

For 20 years, I carried a 416 Rigby Ruger which I loved. However as my career developed, I found myself only hunting elephant bulls and tuskless cows in thick jess and I had many close calls. Serious incidents that I have encountered could have been avoided with a quick second shot.

As a result, I have since bought a 500 Heym. Over the last few years I have had to shoot a few elephants quickly. In these situations, every shot was not the perfect brain shot. The 500 is big enough to knock down a big-bodied bull and give me enough time to sort out the situation.

If you knew you had just 10 days left on the planet, what would you do with that time?

If it was really only 10 days, it would have to be with my wife and two little daughters. I would take them camping to Mana Pools as I have done often. We all love it and I hope that I will be able to instill the love of wildlife and wild places in my girls and that as they grow up they will be fortunate enough to be able to spend time like I have in these amazing places Zimbabwe has to offer. 🐘

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Charlton and an elephant taken very close to this tree.