

Outdoors

Hunting world's largest antelope

It's a little sad that almost everything written about African hunting features the great dangerous game, the "Big Five" (ie: lion, leopard, elephant, Cape buffalo, and rhinoceros). I say "sad" because there are so many other fascinating species of game in Africa that present a very real sporting challenge to a hunter. That they are not inclined to kill people in no way detracts from that challenge.

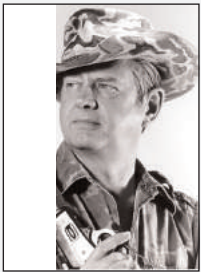
One of them is the eland, the largest antelope in the world. There are actually two species of eland in Africa. The more common one is the Livingstone's, or Cape, eland, found in parts of Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana, and as far west as Namibia. The other species, the giant eland, averages bigger than the Livingstone's, but males of either breed can attain weights of 2,000 pounds or more. The giant eland ranges over parts of Senegal and Nigeria to Sudan. These animals are larger than Cape buffalo, regardless of the lurid descriptions of the latter as "a ton of black death."

Despite their huge size, elands are amazing athletes; I've seen a big bull jump completely over females and over sizeable bushes when startled.

They are also among Africa's spookiest herd animals. Many a stalk of mixed-species herds has been spoiled by alert and wary elands stampeding and taking target animals with them. On an unusual safari in northeastern Botswana on which my party penetrated areas believed not hunted by white men for 100 years, one of the signs by which we judged was eland herds which stood and watched the hunting car drive past at no more than 50 yards.

Eland meat is considered by many to be the best wild meat in Africa, which is saying quite a lot. That may be true, but from my only experience with it (from a very old bull; see photo) I'd rank it below kudu, gemsbok, reedbuck, warthog and others. The eland is, however, the native African antelope on which most experiments in

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John Wootters

domestication have centered. A large animal of bovine disposition that can convert coarse forage to tender and delicious protein is obviously valuable on a generally protein-starved continent.

Eland cows are said to give excellent milk, but I can just imagine trying to put an automatic milking machine on an eland cow's udder! I know of no commercially successful eland-ranching ventures. I understand that they are easily tamed, but fencing in a 2,000-pound animal that can clear a eight-foot barrier from a standing start must be a challenge, to say the least.

The massive eland is the only animal other than the dangerous "Big Five" for which game laws in certain countries require a .375 or larger caliber as the minimum legal rifle. (My rifle in the photograph is a .375 H&H Magnum.)

A big male eland is so large that hunters accustomed to whitetail deer can find it difficult to visualize the positions of vital organs accurately and misplace their bullets. A wounded bull can go for miles. I know; I once walked for five hours in 95-degree heat, carrying a 10-pound rifle, on the trail of a lightly-wounded eland. We never got him because he continually moved downwind so that his nose always kept him informed of our movements. Just because they're big and not aggressive doesn't mean they're dumb!

The eland is one of the elite group of nine African "spiral-horned" antelopes, possession of a complete collection of which confers the same sort of prestige as a Grand Slam of North American wild sheep.

Other members of the spi-



Photos by John Wootters

A few Hill Country game ranches have some eland specimens. The author photographed this handsome young bull in West Kerr County, on the Y-O Ranch. Note the sharply pointed horns.



Wootters took this eland in Mozambique in 1972. As a prime young animal many years earlier, his horns could have been as long as 36 inches, but an eland's horns, like elephants' tusks, are used to break down the plants on which the antelope feed, as well as in dominance fights with rival males. This bull's horns, massively heavy but blunted and worn down to 26 inches, reveal his great age.

ral-horns include the lordly kudu, the swamp-dwelling situtunga, the stunning nyala, and the thicket-loving bushbuck. These, with the eland, represent the extent of my personal experience with the spiral-horns ... and are the closest I'll ever come to a complete collection.

I've never been a trophy collector — a hunter who must obtain all available species. Every new species I've ever hunted was taken because of its own unique appeal. In most cases I have not and never would shoot a second specimen. Examples are — among many others — lion, leopard, elephant, grizzly,

sable, waterbuck, and, of course, eland.

As proud of each of them as I am, it seems a little selfish for a hunter to want more than one.

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Petersen's Hunting magazine and author of the monthly column "Buck Sense" and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, "Hunting Trophy Deer." He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for Shooting Times, Rifle, Handloader, Guns & Ammo and Petersen's Hunting magazines.