

NAVIGATING DANGEROUS WATERS

Hippo hunting in Namibia's Caprivi Strip

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Hunting hippos in their natural habitat presents a unique challenge that intertwines excitement, patience and precision, resulting in an unforgettable dangerous-game hunting adventure. The thrill of tracking these massive creatures as they navigate their watery domain requires not only a deep understanding of their behaviour but also a mastery of the skills necessary for a successful hunt.

I was tracking down a hippo in Namibia's Caprivi Strip (these days also called the Zambezi Region) in the middle of October, the dry season, with temperatures reaching 42 °C. During the wet season, hunting hippos here is even more challenging as it's all one massive body of water, and there is a very real possibility of losing your hippo if your shot is not 100% on target the first time. In the dry season, however, hunting conditions are a little more forgiving because there are smaller water bodies that are cut off from the main Chobe River, making it far less likely to lose your trophy hippo.

After exploring the concession for a day, we found a male and a female hippo, as well as a couple of crocodiles in one of these smaller areas of water. It was about 1 km long and forked at one end, leading to two other smaller dams. At this time of year, the Caprivi is extremely dry and flat, with very few trees, if any. Therefore, sitting in the shade of a tree is but a dream.

We set up, with me lying down in the full sun, focused on the water. I had to remember not to zoom in too much because I didn't know where my trophy hippo would pop up. I kept my other eye open to make sure I could catch him when he surfaced. While this may sound relatively easy, bear in mind that the target is the size of a golf ball that bobs up and down in the water, but never twice in the same spot! To

make matters worse, the female also surfaces every now and again to check out her surroundings. She was not the target, but when you only see eyes, ears and a bit of snout above the water's surface, it takes a few seconds to distinguish between the male and the female. This is where you rely on your PH's expertise, as he has the experience to tell them apart much quicker.

Our hippo pair decided to move further along, just too far for a good shot. We therefore hopped into a *makoro* (a small, dug-out canoe carved from straight-growing trees like the African sausage tree or ebony tree) to cross to a small island for a better shooting position. I must admit, it was my first time in a genuine *makoro*, and boy, it's nerve-wracking! Hippos can easily overturn them, and the hippo I was after had already chased the local fishermen in their *makoros*! So, yes, I was a little apprehensive, but we arrived without incident and set up on the bank. By now, it was a couple of hours into the hunt and the heat was starting to take its toll. Sweat was dripping into my eyes, making them burn, and every piece of exposed, sunblock-plastered skin was getting seriously burnt as the sweat had removed the sunblock hours ago... Hippo hunting in the dry season is definitely not for sissies – it may have the advantage of increased visibility, but boy, you pay for it in other ways!

If you are interested in booking a non-exportable hippo hunt or any other hunt with us, please visit www.gamehuntingsafaris.com or email tamlyn@gamehuntingsafaris.com or info@gamehuntingsafaris.com.



As Murphy would have it, the hippos were getting rather shy, so their “bobbing time” had decreased to only a second or two, which really wasn’t enough time for me to get a good shot. They then moved out of range again. It was almost mid-day, and we decided to give it a break to allow the hippos a chance to relax while we grab a quick lunch, rehydrate and come back refreshed.

Lunch was awesome! The outfitter we booked and hunted with before, Thormahlen and Cochran Safaris (africatrophyhunting.co.za), really knows how to treat clients and always goes above and beyond to do so. The luxury tented accommodation, three-course meals, friendly, attentive staff and experienced PHs and trackers made the experience truly memorable.

We returned with renewed energy to where we had last spotted the hippos. Once we had located them, we waited until they were submerged before setting up to prevent them from spotting us and becoming tense again. It was a little cooler and I felt more focused. I was ready! After all, it was our wedding anniversary, so it would be fitting to have a successful hunt on this special day.

Lying there, I waited for my hippo to surface, just to see the female popping up again... aargh! Easing my finger off the trigger, I waited... The male surfaced, but only briefly. However, it gave me a good idea of where he was, and I

changed position slightly. At last, he resurfaced. I had him in the scope and could see that precise spot where the bullet needed to go. Ever so gently, I squeezed the trigger... The hippo immediately disappeared with a huge splash! My PHs and I were convinced it was a hit, but not the game scout – not what I wanted to hear!

Looking at the water, however, there wasn’t any disturbance, no bubbles, and the female stayed put (she would usually follow the male if he decided to move). Now came the agonising part of hippo hunting: we had to wait for the gasses in the stomach to expand so that the body could float to the surface. Unfortunately, this is not a quick process – at least it doesn’t feel that way when you are the one waiting! It generally takes about two to three hours for the hippo to float... and float he did! I was extremely pleased (and relieved). What an incredible anniversary present! It was interesting how the local people started appearing out of nowhere to help haul the hippo carcass out of the water and gut the animal, hoping to get some of the stomach lining or intestines to take home.

Hunting a non-exportable species is certainly the most cost-effective; the animal is hunted for the benefit of the local community, and you don’t have the headache of waiting for quarantine or taxidermy costs. Just make sure you take tons of good photos of your hippo hunting adventure as we did! It certainly is worth it! 🦒

